CHAPTER 3

A Stranger in a Strange Land: Medea in Roman Republican Tragedy[1]

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The first performance of a Roman version of a Greek tragedy in 240 BC was a momentous event. It was not the beginning of Roman appropriation of Greek culture — Rome had had contact and complex interaction with Greek communities in Magna Graecia and elsewhere from earliest times — but it was an important landmark in the relationship between Greece and Rome.[2] When a tragedy by Livius Andronicus was performed to celebrate victory over Carthage in the First Punic War, a central cultural practice of an alien culture was adopted, adapted, appropriated and transformed to serve as a central cultural practice of Rome. It is significant that the first tragedy celebrated a victory (albeit over Carthage), since the appropriation of Greek tragedy was an act of cultural conquest, as Roman actors marched into and occupied the stage of Attic drama.

Yet the event was more complex than that description suggests. In Horace's phrase, captured Greece captured its savage master.[3] The writing of Roman tragedy in the Greek style was simultaneously an act of self-confident literary invasion and of cultural submission to the thrall of a more established theatrical tradition. In terms of literary history, this complex interrelationship marks the beginning of Latin literature, in conjunction with Livius's Latin, Saturnian version of the *Odyssey*. In terms of culture, the flourishing of Roman drama coincided with the massive expansion of Roman territory and the accompanying challenge to its sense of identity. Dramas were performed at public festivals, *ludi scaenici*, organized by state officials, the *aediles*, and sponsored by influential elites. They were vehicles for establishing and promulgating elite Roman values, for constructing and re-asserting Roman identity.[4] How could they do this when the majority of their characters were Greeks? How did the figure of Medea, alien even to the Greeks, fit into this scheme?

This is also an issue with that other Roman appropriation of Greek drama, the *comoediae palliatae* which Plautus, Terence and others translated, adapted, re-imagined from the Greek New Comedies of Menander and others. These are frequently set in Athens, but an Athens which bears a striking resemblance to Rome in its topography and in the language and behaviour of its inhabitants. Moreover, their nominally Greek characters occasionally refer to Greeks and Greek behaviour in contrast to their own.[5] Tragedy is less playful with the dramatic illusion and hence

in foregrounding such tensions of ethnic identity, but fault-lines do occasionally appear. A character in Pacuvius's *Chryses* glosses the word for sky which 'the Greeks' use with the Latin word which 'our people' use. Cicero, citing the fragment, draws attention to the absurdity of this violation of the dramatic illusion. Although the character is audibly speaking Latin, we are meant to think that he is speaking Greek.[6] However, rather than being a slip, this wrinkle in the dramatic surface of the Graeco-Roman tragedy foregrounds the problematic nature of identity in this and all Roman tragedies. Is the speaker Greek or Roman? Is the audience meant to identify with the Greek heroes as, presumably, the audiences of the Greek originals did, or feel a sense of distance from them as a Greek Other set in opposition to their Roman Self? We must not oversimplify the picture, since an Attic audience would not identify fully with characters whose Otherness as Thebans or Spartans would be as, if not more, significant than their status as fellow-Greeks.[7] However, the cultural and ethnic gap is undeniably greater between Greek and Roman and, as we have seen, underlined by the linguistic gap between Greek and Latin.

Greater, but not insuperable, and our tragedians and their audiences make frequent journeys across it. Jason will at one moment be, as Thomas Baier puts it, 'not a Greek adventurer but a Roman general',[8] at another a duplicitous Greek like those the Roman army were then fighting in the Second Macedonian War. Perhaps the audience could have accepted both unproblematically by a process of what Paul Veyne has called 'brain-balkanization',[9] or perhaps the tension and even overlap between the two categories would have been troubling. If one can be *both* a Roman general *and* a duplicitous Greek, then are the categories as discrete and separate as one might have hoped?

All of which brings us to Medea. Medea is the stranger par excellence. Foreigner, barbarian, witch, infanticide, demi-goddess, she stands on the other side of any boundary drawn around what is normative. Above all, she is a foreigner, a stranger in a strange land. That land, for at least the first five hundred years of her mythical career, was Greece. She was a Colchian in Thessaly, Corinth and Athens, in *epinikia* (odes celebrating athletic victories) sung in Cyrene, tragedies performed in Athens and epics read in the library of Alexandria.[10] With her debut on the Roman stage, she is a stranger in a land which is strange not only to her but to her genre and its milieu. As Gregor Vogt-Spira says of Ennius's Medea, 'one should consider [...] that Medea is a foreigner for the Greeks; in this she therefore stands parallel to the Romans: she reflects Otherness under the conditions of Otherness'.[11] If the Greek Jason is a problematic figure for Romans watching a Graeco-Roman tragedy, how much more so is Medea! Does the double-Otherness cancel itself out and, on the principle that my enemy's enemy is my friend, does my Other's Other become my Self? Or does the equation work in a different way and Medea's Otherness is doubled? Of course, Rome in the last three centuries BC had contact with peoples further east than the Aegean and Medea's own Black Sea ethnicity must be considered alongside her other identities.[12] The picture is an extremely complex one, as Medea, ever impossible to categorize, plays the roles of Greek, Roman and barbarian; wife, mother, daughter and sister; murderess, victim and saviour; simultaneously constructing and unsettling the sense of Roman identity of which she is both the antitype and a necessary part.

Before turning to the Republican tragedies in which Medea featured, a word on the state of the evidence. In contrast to the wealth of Roman comedies which the manuscript tradition has bequeathed to us, our penury in Roman tragedy is extreme and we must rely on fragments preserved by later grammarians and others, such as Cicero. Caution must be exercised in the use of these fragments — and not only because they encourage speculative reconstruction of the missing portions. Those preserved by grammarians illustrate rare words, so that our impression of the vivid, colourful style of the Republican tragedians may be exaggerated. Likewise, those preserved in Cicero's treatises on divination and the fear of death make us disproportionately well stocked with descriptions of entrails and mutilated corpses. Cicero can also direct our reception of fragments in a way which, while extremely informative about the reception, use and abuse of tragedy and tragic quotation in the mid-first century BC,[13] might be misleading as a means of reconstructing the original reception of tragedy a century earlier.

We know of three plays from the heyday of Roman tragedy which featured Medea. None are listed among the tragedies of Livius Andronicus or his first successor, Naevius, and so the first of which we are aware is the *Medea exul* by Ennius, whose fragments show that it bore a close resemblance to Euripides' *Medea*. Ennius's nephew, Pacuvius, wrote a *Medus*, the involved plot of which deals with Medea's return to Colchis, reconciliation with her father, reunion with her son and deposition of her usurping uncle. Finally, Accius's *Medea siue Argonautae* depicts the murder of her brother Apsyrtus as she and Jason are fleeing from Colchis.

The retrospective construction of literary history is a dangerous practice, the more so for being so very tempting. Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius form a neat triad of canonical Roman tragedians tidily mapping onto their Attic equivalents. The biographical connections between the three tempt us further to use speculative extra-textual material to help shape the exiguous remains of their tragedies: Pacuvius, the nephew of Ennius and hence nervously, resentfully, in his distinguished uncle's shadow, avoiding points of direct contact by learnedly finding obscure plots for his plays; Accius, the brash new kid on the block, self-confidently visiting the elderly Pacuvius in Tarentum.[14] Such narratives should not be naively accepted but, given the competitive world of Roman drama, where patrons and audiences had to be won and kept, neither should they be lightly dismissed. One biographical factor which we should almost certainly keep in mind is that all three of these 'Roman' tragedians were from outside Rome: Ennius from Rudiae in Messapia, famously had three hearts because he spoke three languages, Latin, Greek and Oscan; Pacuvius was from Brundisium; while Accius was a freedman's son from Pisaurum in Umbria. Plays which dealt with Otherness and Roman identity were written by men whose own identity was not unambiguously Roman.

Likewise with their works the temptation is to see our three tragedies as a trilogy and, indeed, regardless of authorial intention, they do form a splendid *de facto* trilogy.[15] We begin with the canonical *Medea exul* by the grand old man of Roman drama, Ennius, which was always already belated, reflecting, repeating, reinventing Euripides. Pacuvius treats the end of the Medea myth, beyond the well-trodden paths of Corinth and Athens, back full-circle to Colchis and a superficially untragic, 'un-Medean' tale of reconciliation and restoration. From the end of the saga to

its beginning, Accius whisks us away once more from the comfort of Medea's Colchian home but this time with the young Medea and Jason fleeing Aeëtes' pursuit, landing in Scythia and escaping by treacherously murdering her brother Apsyrtus. If Pacuvius's reaction to Ennius served partly to rehabilitate Medea, Accius's play perhaps provides a further corrective, taking us back to the beginning and providing us with, as Petra Schierl puts it, the origin of the traditional picture of Medea.[16] We shall see, therefore, the establishment of a self-conscious Roman tradition of the myth of Medea, one which interrelates with its Greek predecessors and establishes the basis for its later Roman mutations and permutations.

An Original Imitation: Ennius' *Medea exul*

Ennius's *Medea exul* is described by Cicero as being a Latin play translated word for word from the Greek.[17] This is an exaggeration but the surviving fragments are, for the most part, close enough to equivalents in Euripides' play for us to call it a 'version' of his *Medea*. It is worth considering what the staging of such a close imitation might mean in cultural terms. Context is everything and meaning is generated at the point of reception. Even if we were faced with that chimaera, the literal translation, the same sentiments could not mean the same thing to an audience of Athenian citizens at the Great Dionysia in 431 BC as to a crowd of Roman plebs, *equites* and senators at the *ludi scaenici* in the early second century BC. We might compare Borges's Pierre Menard, whose word-for-word reproduction of *Don Quixote* had an entirely different meaning from Cervantes's 'version', purely by virtue of being written in the twentieth rather than the seventeenth century.[18] When Ennius's Medea describes her preference for warfare over childbirth, the similarity to her Euripidean counterpart's words is striking:

> *nam ter sub armis malim uitam cernere,*
> *quam semel modo parere.*
>
> [For I should prefer to risk my life three times under arms
> than just once to give birth!]
> Ennius, *Medea exul* fr. 222–23R^3=269–70W

> ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα
> στῆναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.
>
> [How I would wish to stand three times behind a shield
> rather than to give birth once!]
> Euripides, *Medea* 250–01

These sentiments are capable of universal application, as shown by Suffragettes reading Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides at their meetings.[19] However, they still mean one thing to an Athenian at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, comparing the life of his secluded wife with his experience in the phalanx behind a shield — note its replacement with more general 'arms' by Ennius — wondering what would happen if a foreign women were to spout such subversive ideas to ordinary Greek women like his wife and these Corinthians on stage; while they mean another to a Roman citizen, perhaps a farmer as well as a soldier, with experience of the recent devastation of Italy by Hannibal, but whose current

thoughts of warfare might be exciting ones of profitable conquest across the Adriatic and whose wife would lead a far less restricted life than her Athenian counterpart. Such speculation inevitably takes us into the realms of the unknown and the unknowable, and we cannot even posit anything like a unified response from a single audience,[20] but the principle remains: even if Ennius's *Medea exul* were a yet closer version or even translation of Euripides, it would still be a striking and significant document of how Medea and her meaning can be transformed by her very re-composition and re-performance in a different context.

This much is uncontroversial in terms of reception theory, though we should remember that early Roman epic and drama mark the invention of such reception and translation. However, *Medea exul* contains other, more overt instances of cultural transformation, starting, appropriately, at the beginning. Once more, the parallels with Euripides are striking, but this makes the divergences all the more noticeable and notable:

> utinamne in nemore Pelio securibus
> caesa accedisset **abiegna** ad terram trabes,
> neue inde nauis inchoandi exordium
> coepisset, quae nunc nominatur nomine
> Argo, quia Argiui in ea delecti uiri
> **uecti** petebant pellem inauratam arietis
> Colchis **imperio** regis Peliae **per dolum**.
> nam numquam era errans mea domo efferret pedem
> Medea animo aegro amore saeuo saucia.

[How I wish that **fir** timbers had never fallen to the earth, cut by axes, in the wood on Pelion, or that no start had begun from there of beginning the ship which is now called by the name of Argo, since **borne** in it the chosen men of Argos sought the Golden Fleece of the ram from the people of Colchis, **by order** of King Pelias, **through deceit**. For never would my mistress wandering have carried her foot from her house, with sick heart, by cruel love wounded.]

fr. 205–13R^3=253–61W

The 'correction' of Euripides' famous *hysteron proteron*, so that Ennius's Nurse's *first* wish is that the trees had not fallen and *then* that the ship built from them had not sailed to Colchis,[21] is an arresting assertion of independence and one which suggestively plays with elite members of the audience's potential familiarity with Euripides. There are subtle touches of Romanization, so that the timbers are no longer made of pine but of fir, the wood of choice for Roman warships. The ships of Rome were not propelled by the citizen-oarsmen whose place in the Athenian trireme was one of such honour and importance, so the Argonauts are no longer provided with oars from Pelian wood, but are carried, *uecti*, as Roman legions would be.[22]

On one level, this is a question of tailoring one's material to one's audience, describing a mythological story in terms which they can comprehend and with which they can identify; yet this move is not as obvious as it might seem. Ennius is describing events a long time ago in a land far away and, moreover, events originally depicted in an alien cultural form. A little exoticism and defamiliarization might not be inappropriate. To identify with the Argonauts is to cross the cultural gap,

to equate Greek with Roman. The voyage of the Argonauts begins to resemble a Roman military expedition to expand the empire, undertaken under the *imperium* of a commander. What, then, is our Roman audience to make of Ennius's other most notable addition: *per dolum*. Deceit, tricks, stratagems were the antithesis of everything Rome prided itself on standing for. They were the mark of Rome's enemies, particularly, in the aftermath of the Second Punic War, the Carthaginians, whose *perfidia* was ethnically determined. It was also a quality which the Romans imputed to the Greeks. On this level, we need not be surprised: Roman tragedy transforms the Greek original so that it attacks the people who were the original audience's Self but are now the Other.[23] However, as we have just seen, numerous cultural signals in the prologue encourage us to think of the Argonauts as equivalent to a Roman military expedition. The close interweaving of identification and distancing pushes the possibilities of 'brain-balkanization' to the limit. One might argue that much of the ambiguity is already present in Euripides, where the barbarian Medea, initially at least, behaves much more in accordance with the accepted code of Greek heroic behaviour than Jason. However, the situation is much more complex in *Medea exul*, where the audience sequentially and perhaps simultaneously both identifies with and condemns both Jason and Medea, where they construct their Roman identity through both analogy and contrast with Greek and barbarian.

A final example of this complex relationship between audience and characters is Medea's justification of her behaviour to the women of Corinth.

> Κορίνθιαι γυναῖκες, ἐξῆλθον δόμων
> μή μοί τι μέμψησθ'· οἶδα γὰρ πολλοὺς βροτῶν
> σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας, τοὺς μὲν ὀμμάτων ἄπο,
> τοὺς δ' ἐν θυραίοις· οἱ δ' ἀφ' ἡσύχου ποδὸς
> δύσκλειαν ἐκτήσαντο καὶ ῥαιθυμίαν.

[Corinthian women, I have come out of the house so that you should not in any way reproach me; for I know that many among mortals are shown to be haughty, some away from people's eyes, others out of doors; some have acquired a bad reputation for laziness by leading a quiet life.]

Euripides, *Medea* 214–18

> quae Corinthum arcem altam habetis matronae opulentae optimates,
> multi suam rem bene gessere et publicam patria procul,
> multi qui domi aetatem agerent propterea sunt improbati.

[You wealthy aristocratic matrons who inhabit the lofty citadel of Corinth, many are successful in their own and in public affairs far from their fatherland, many, because they spend their life at home for that very reason are without glory.]

Ennius, *Medea exul* fr. 219–21R^3=266–68W

Euripides' Medea addresses her new friends simply as 'Corinthian women' but Ennius's stresses their economic, social, marital, and — since the terms he uses are fundamentally Roman — ethnic status. They are wealthy, aristocratic, legally married and — though this is in marked tension with the emphasis on their Corinthian abode — implicitly Roman. All this contrasts with unspoken terms

which would describe Medea: destitute, outside society, effectively a concubine or even, as we may deduce from her powdered hands which Cicero describes, a *meretrix* or high-class courtesan, and, of course, a barbarian.[24] Yet the terms in which she goes on to talk paint a very different picture. Euripides' contrast was between the person who appears in public and the one who stays at home. Ennius does not misunderstand but transforms this picture into a contrast between the citizen who stays at home and the one who goes abroad and, be it in exile or on military service, achieves deeds of great value to himself and the state. Our reception of this particular fragment may be coloured by Cicero's use of it to console his exiled friend, Trebatius, but more probably Cicero has picked up on the language of Roman public life which Ennius puts into the mouth of Medea and, cutting away the symbolism, applied it as an exemplum to the situation of an actual elite Roman. Medea is depicted in terms of a Roman general or proconsul, whose activities away from the fatherland bring glory to himself and the *res publica*. One might even go so far as to see now, not the Argonauts, but Medea as the executor of an imperial expedition; her journey from Colchis no longer flight but a voyage of conquest, with victories over the kingdoms of Iolcus and Corinth before her. Ennius thus succeeded in both appropriating the Euripidean tradition and initiating a new, Roman tradition of tragic Medeas, one whose cultural complexity would match its dramatic sophistication.

A Happy Sequel? Pacuvius's *Medus*

Pacuvius, as we have seen, had a reputation in antiquity for being learned, *doctus*, especially in his use of rare and obscure myths for his tragic plots.[25] Many of his tragedies are based not only on obscure myths but also on plots that seem to be sequels to better-known plays. Thus *Chryses* is a sequel to and variation on Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, as Orestes once more is pursued by Thoas, competes with Pylades to die each for the other and is saved by recognition of a sibling. *Iliona* is a companion-piece to Euripides' *Hekabe* and Ennius's *Hecuba* in which we discover that Polymestor killed, not Polydorus, but his own son Deipylus, with whom his wife Iliona had swapped him.[26] Such plays are self-consciously inscribed with their own belatedness and secondariness, yet at the same time serve as commentaries on and, sometimes, confident corrections of more established tragedies. This is the situation in his *Medus*.

Although we do not have a Greek model for this play and, indeed, Pacuvius may not have used one, the fragments can be supplemented by the preservation of a hypothesis in the *fabulae* of the mythographer Hyginus (*Fabula* 27) to give the following plot: Medus, Medea's son by the Athenian king Aegeus, while searching for his mother, is shipwrecked and captured in Colchis, where Aeëtes' throne has been usurped by his brother Perses. Since the king had received an oracle predicting his death at the hands of Aeëtes' offspring, Medus claims to be Creon's son, Hippotes, but is still imprisoned. Meanwhile, Medea arrives in her dragon-chariot and falsely tells Perses that she is a priestess of Diana and can deliver Colchis from its current famine. When she learns that Perses is holding 'Hippotes' (as Medus claims

to be), she assumes that he has come to avenge his father and persuades Perses that the young man is Medus, sent by Medea to kill him; she asks the king to hand him over to her to be killed. When Medus is led out, a recognition takes place and Medea urges him to avenge Aeëtes by killing Perses. This he does and establishes the kingdom of Media. Though Hyginus does not mention it, the fragments show that there was a touching recognition and reconciliation scene between Medea and the imprisoned Aeëtes.

On the surface, this plot, with its separations, misunderstandings and recognitions, avoidance of near-disaster culminating in a broadly 'happy' ending, more closely resembles that of a New Comedy than what we would conventionally consider tragic.[27] Nonetheless, it is worth observing how it also resembles the plots of late Euripides, notably his 'escape-tragedies', such as *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, which Matthew Wright has argued are just as 'tragic', in their depiction of an incomprehensible universe, as his earlier, death-strewn works.[28] However, there *is* a transformation, be it from tragic, Ennian, or even the incipient Roman tradition about Medea. Not only the plot but the heroine seems different. Instead of harming, she heals; instead of betraying her father, she is reconciled with him and restores him to his throne; instead of killing her children, she saves her son; instead of destroying the order of household and city, she reunites a family and re-establishes the legitimate civic order. Do we have here the redemption of Medea, a happy ending to her tortured career, an aggressive counter to the destructive figure depicted by Euripides, Neophron, so many others and, above all, uncle Quintus?

To an extent, yes, but we must not lose sight of the continuities which play alongside the changes. This Medea resembles her Corinthian self in several ways: visually, she arrives — with impressive theatrical effect — in the serpent-chariot in which she had flown out of Euripides' *Medea* and, perhaps, Ennius's *Medea exul*; despite the chronological interlude in Athens, in dramatic terms this is the same Medea flying straight in from Corinth with the blood of her children still on her hands. Her attempt to have 'Hippotes' (the disguised Medus) killed continues both her conscious persecution of the house of Creon and, unconsciously, her tendency towards killing her own offspring. Her *modus operandi*, whether plotting against Hippotes/Medus or Perses, is based on deceit, trickery and her clever tongue. Even in her poignant recognition scene and reconciliation with her father Aeëtes, she lays emphasis on her past career and in sophistic language claims:

> cum te expetebant omnes florentissimo
> regno, reliqui: nunc desertum ab omnibus
> summo periclo sola ut restituam paro.
>
> [When all sought you in the fullest bloom of your kingship, I left you: now, when you are deserted by all, in the greatest danger, I alone make ready to restore you.]
>
> Pacuvius *Medus* fr. 234R^3=49W

This very pointed antithesis, with its contrast between then and now, king Aeëtes and deposed prisoner, the past and present behaviour of 'all', foregrounds both the difference and the continuity in Medea. For André Arcellaschi, the dénouement brings 'the total redemption of Medea as mother and as daughter', while, at

the other extreme, Otto Ribbeck stresses the continuities and condemns them: 'There remains here the sorceress and schemer, a kind of gypsy, who secures the inheritance of a kingdom for her son by trickery and cold calculation.' Even Schierl, though far more sympathetic to the play, concludes that 'the retention of Medea's typical characteristics and the handling of the plot argue against a fundamentally new interpretation of the figure of Medea'.[29] Yet need we choose between the same old Medea and a new, positive Medea — is not the point that they are overlapping, even identical?

The play, like many of Pacuvius's, is about identity in all its forms: familial, ethnic and literary. Chryses discovers he is not an enemy of Orestes but his brother, not a barbarian but a Greek, leading to his paradoxical statement that his father — Agamemnon — rightly laid waste his fatherland — Chryse.[30] In our play, Medus plays the role of Hippotes to avoid punishment by Perses for being Medus, but is nearly killed when Medea tries to punish him for being Hippotes by pretending that he is Medus — which he actually is! Aeëtes painfully, poignantly fails to recognize his daughter, since she uses the name of father, which — with Medea's desertion and Apsyrtus's death — had ceased to be his identity.[31] Medea's own identity is in question: she masquerades as a priestess of Diana;[32] she moves from the roles of Jason's wife and Aegeus's consort to that of Medus's mother and full-circle to Aeëtes' daughter. Yet these are not simple categories: is she to be the treacherous daughter and murderous mother of her earlier tragic career or a new, improved version? The way that Pacuvius deploys Medea's traditional means but to such very different ends throws into question her whole character. Is Medea in Corinth simply a victim of circumstances, the wrong barbarian witch in the wrong place at the wrong time? How much better things turn out when she behaves in substantially the same manner in the right place at the right time. Or do they? Is it simply a matter of perspective? Both *Medea exul* and *Medus* feature Medea's bringing about the murder of a king — is Perses' death really so very different from Creon's, except that we are, presumably, sympathetic to Medus? The audience's moral perspective is thrown into question.

This question of audience sympathy raises again the issue of ethnicity. There are no Greeks in this play, except the half-Greek Medus, and, of course, no Romans either, but we have even stronger grounds than usual for suggesting identification or at least analogy between Rome and Media. The story-pattern in which a grandson avenges his deposed grandfather by killing the latter's usurping brother cannot but make a Roman audience think of Romulus and Remus's revenge on Amulius and restoration of Numitor to the throne of Alba Longa.[33] The foundation myth of Media is thus a doublet of the foundation myth of Rome. Even the doubleness of Romulus and Remus, which is murderously reduced to singularity, has a parallel in the doubling of Medus and Hippotes.[34] We cannot be certain from the fragments but, if (despite Hyginus's claim that he 'took possession of his ancestral kingdom') Medus restored Aeëtes to the throne of Colchis and himself founded Media, the parallel with the restoration of Numitor to Alba and the foundation of Rome would be even closer. A surviving fragment may also suggest an explicit concern with the political ramifications of Medus's coup.[35]

As with all tragic analogies, Roman and Attic, we must remember that this is not actually a depiction of the story of Romulus, though such Roman historical tragedies, *fabulae praetextae*, did exist, and one, Naevius's *Romulus siue Lupus*, may have dealt with precisely this story. However, even allowing for the 'distance and difference' between Colchis and Rome,[36] the *Medus* is clearly a means of exploring Rome's foundation myth and, through it, Roman identity. How does Medea fit in? As we have seen, she is an ambivalent figure in this tragedy whose often villainous actions result in positive outcomes, who lives fully by the Greek code of helping friends and harming enemies. As such, she would fit perfectly with a pragmatic view of Roman identity and its manifest destiny of conquest — the end justifies the means, even if that means is Medea. One's only concern is that, as elsewhere in her tragic career, the distinction between friend and enemy may be broken down and a force for good, for *our* good, turn to destruction.[37] Roman mythical history had its share of problematic but influential women, from the chaste Lucretia to the adulterous, parricidal, tyrannous Tullia and, most pertinently here, Tanaquil, foreigner, interpreter of omens, encourager of her husband Tarquinius Priscus to take the throne of Rome and patroness of the next king Servius Tullius.[38] Whether Pacuvius's Medea is an allusion, model, or merely parallel to Tanaquil, she operates as a means of thinking about how Rome uses the Other — woman, foreigner, witch — as a tool in its own advancement and about how problematic this is, both morally and in terms of national security.

Back to the Future: Accius' *Medea siue Argonautae*

The exiguous nature of the fragments and lack of supplementary evidence comparable to Euripides or Hyginus limits what can be said about Accius's *Medea siue Argonautae* but there is enough to make it clear that it continued both the self-conscious construction of a tradition of Roman tragic Medeas and the exploitation of Medea's alterity to explore issues of Roman identity.

Various elements flag the tragedy's self-positioning in the now-established tradition of Roman tragic Medeas: it sets her flight from Colchis against Pacuvius's depiction of her homecoming; a shepherd climbs a fir-tree, despite the play's setting on the island of Peuke, 'pine-tree', following Ennius's transformation of Euripides' prologic pine into fir;[39] Medea here, as in Pacuvius, is 'long awaited', marking the extra-dramatic renown of her long-established tragic character.[40] As with Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, which was probably (with Sophocles' *Scythians*) its principal antecedent, it expresses its belatedness by going back to an earlier stage of the story, depicting a past which is already inscribed with the future events of the earlier plays *Medea exul* and *Medus*. As later in Catullus 64, its paradoxical concern with primacy is illustrated by the emphasis on the Argo as the first ship, a civilized source of wonder to the barbarian shepherd who describes it by crude analogy with natural phenomena.[41] This is Medea before she was Medea, Medea becoming Medea, the beginning of the tradition depicted at its end. Already here in Accius we find the Ovidian technique of anticipating the mythical future in the literary past, which Alessandro Barchiesi has termed 'future reflexive', and perhaps even the

self-consciousness which will lead Seneca's Medea to trace her own development through becoming to being Medea.[42]

The other principal function of the emphasis on the Argo's primacy is further to complicate the issue of ethnicity and the contrast between civilization and barbarism. The Argo, as so often, is a symbol of civilizing power, spreading culture and order at the barbarous, chaotic periphery of the *oikoumene*.[43] This motif is foregrounded not only by the shepherd's amazement but by a scene in which either Jason or Medea explained the development of civilization to their savage hosts.[44] With the Argonauts and Scythians at each pole, Medea's position between civilization and barbarism is even more problematized and especially her role in the barbaric, fratricidal, treacherous murder of her brother Apsyrtus. Here our ignorance of how the murder was depicted prevents more than speculation. Jacqueline Dangel and Arcellaschi tend to lay blame on a strongly 'Orientalized' Medea, whose depiction reacts against her Pacuvian rehabilitation and taps into contemporary Roman discourse depicting the East as a place of cruelty and violence.[45] Schierl and especially Baier place more emphasis on the problematic culpability of the Argonauts, whose civilized barbarism may be paralleled by various ruthless, treacherous, military actions carried out by Romans in the second century.[46] One cannot imagine too harsh a critique of the methods of Roman imperialism in such a public genre and especially in the work of the politically conservative Accius.[47] However, the sympathetic treatment of the grieving Aeëtes — a Colchian, ethnically identical to the murderous Medea and the victim Apsyrtus — must also rule out a simplistic approval or even acceptance of the expediency of a treacherous and barbaric act by a force for civilization. Once more, following the tradition of Ennius and Pacuvius, Medea is used as a focus for the exploration of the tension between Self and Other, civilization and barbarism.

The appropriation of Greek tragedy both enabled and compelled the Romans to engage in the formation of a tradition which was simultaneously a pendent to and a continuation of an already established Greek tradition. It also facilitated the exploration of issues of ethnic and cultural identity, centred on the familiar poles of Greek and barbarian but with the audience as likely to identify with the latter as the former. The figure of Medea was uniquely suited to both processes. Simultaneously the protagonist of one of the most influential Greek tragedies and quintessentially alien to Greek culture, she was both embedded within the tradition which Rome appropriated and sufficiently outside it to take root in the soil of a new culture. In the course of a century, Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius imported Medea from Greece and established a dynamic, self-conscious tradition which acknowledged and challenged not only its Greek forebears but its own earlier stages. Ennius, like a Roman Pierre Menard, recomposed Euripides' canonical tragedy for a new audience and in the process gave it and its heroine a new meaning. Pacuvius, exploiting a sequel's tension between sameness and difference, replayed but inverted the plot of *Medea exul* (and *Medea*), to produce a tragedy which simultaneously reinforced and transformed the character of Medea. Finally, Accius returned to Medea before she 'was' Medea, emulatively troping his reversion to a pre-Ennian, pre-Pacuvian depiction by dramatizing an episode from before her

arrival in Corinth, let alone her return to Colchis. Inextricably linked with this artistic undertaking was the cultural exploration for which Medea, the ultimately unclassifiable third term, neither wholly Self nor wholly Other, was the ideal focus. As Romans exploited the potential for the Greeks of tragedy to serve as both their mirrors and their antitheses, so Medea, the ultimate Other for Greeks, functioned partly as Self, partly as Other, partly as neither, enabling a complex exploration of cultural identity in the interstices between. The success of this triple-authored trilogy in both its aims may be judged by its reception and continuation in the Latin poetry and prose of the centuries which followed, as Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, Valerius Flaccus and others continued the tradition of Roman Medeas established by Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Fragments of Roman tragedy are cited from the standard edition, *Tragicorum Romanorum fragmenta tertiis curis*, ed. by Otto Ribbeck (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897)=R^3; and the most widely accessible, *Remains of Old Latin*, ed. by E. H. Warmington, 3 vols, I (Ennius) & II (Pacuvius & Accius) (Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 1935–36)=W. The standard editions of the individual tragedians are: *The Tragedies of Ennius*, ed. by H. D. Jocelyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); *Die Tragödien des Pacuvius. Ein Kommentar zu den Fragmenten mit Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung*, ed. by Petra Schierl (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); *Accius, Œuvres (fragments)*, ed. by Jacqueline Dangel (Paris: Budé, 1995). Various articles are cited from *Identität und Alterität in der frührömischen Tragödie*, ed. by Gesine Manuwald (Würzburg: Ergon, 2000); and *Accius und seine Zeit*, ed. by Stefan Faller and Gesine Manuwald (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002). All translations, from ancient texts and modern scholarship, are my own.
2. On early Roman tragedy and its cultural ramifications, see A. J. Boyle, *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3–55; Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 79–123; Denis Feeney, 'The Beginnings of a Literature in Latin', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 95 (2005), 226–40; Thomas N. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 34–68; Mario Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), rather overstates the event as marking the beginning of theatricality at Rome.
3. *Epistles* 2.1.156.
4. Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1992), pp. 183–222.
5. Plautus, *Bacchides* 743, 813, *Mostellaria* 22, 64, 960, *Poenulus* 603. On Roman comedy in its cultural context, see Matthew Leigh, *Comedy and the Rise of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. pp. 2–20 on the tension between Greek and Roman elements; David Konstan, *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1983); William S. Anderson, *Barbarian Play: Plautus' Roman Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 133–51.
6. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.91 (including Pacuvius, *Chryses* fr. 89R^3=111W). Niall W. Slater, 'Religion and Identity in Pacuvius' *Chryses*', in *Identität und Alterität*, pp. 315–23 (p. 317), suggests that the speaker might be Chryses aligning himself, as a barbarian, with the Roman audience against the Greeks, which would assume an error on Cicero's part, but add attractive further layers to the question of ethnic identification.
7. The bibliography on this topic is extensive, but the key study remains Froma I. Zeitlin, 'Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama', in *Nothing to do with Dionysos?*, ed. by. John Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 130–67.
8. Thomas Baier, 'Accius: *Medea sive Argonautae*', in *Accius und seine Zeit*, pp. 51–62 (p. 58).
9. Paul Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythes?* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), developed further in Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 14–25.

10. Pindar, *Pythian 4*; Euripides, *Medea*; Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, respectively.
11. Gregor Vogt-Spira, 'Ennius, *Medea*: Eine Fremde in Rom', in *Identität und Alterität*, pp. 265–75 (p. 273).
12. David Braund, 'Writing a Roman *Argonautica*: The Historical Dynamic', *Hermathena*, 154 (1993), 11–17.
13. Sander Goldberg, 'Cicero and the Work of Tragedy', in *Identität und Alterität*, pp. 49–59.
14. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13.2.
15. Cf. André Arcellaschi, *Médée dans le théâtre latin d'Ennius à Sénèque* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1990), pp. 102, 163.
16. Petra Schierl, 'Die Rezeption des Medea-Mythos bei Pacuvius und Accius', in *Accius und seine Zeit*, pp. 271–87 (p. 281).
17. *De finibus* 1.4.
18. Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', trans. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 62–71. On its relevance for theories of translation, see Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 85–86.
19. Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre, 1660–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 511–19.
20. On the diverse responses which can be hypothesized for members of a single Athenian audience of Euripides' *Medea*, see Christopher Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 199–200.
21. Lucia Dondoni, 'La Tragedia di Medea. Euripide e i poeti arcaici latini', *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo, Classe di Lettere, Scienze morali e storiche*, 92 (1958), 84–104 (p. 86).
22. *The Tragedies of Ennius*, ed. by Jocelyn, pp. 352–53.
23. Vogt-Spira, pp. 268–70.
24. Arcellaschi, pp. 94–95, cf. *The Tragedies of Ennius*, ed. by Jocelyn, pp. 359–61.
25. Useful introductions to Pacuvius include Elaine Fantham, 'Pacuvius', in *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome: Studies in Honour of T. P. Wiseman*, ed. by David Braund and Christopher Gill (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003), pp. 98–118; Gesine Manuwald, *Pacuvius, summus tragicus poeta. Zum dramatischen Profil seiner Tragödien* (Munich: Saur, 2003); and Italo Mariotti, *Introduzione a Pacuvio* (Urbino: S.T.E.U. [Stabilimento Tipografico Editoriale Urbinate], 1960).
26. Gesine Manuwald, 'Pacuvius, *Iliona*: Eine römische Version des Polydorus-Mythos', in *Identität und Alterität*, pp. 301–14.
27. Fantham, p. 109.
28. Matthew Wright, *Euripides' Escape Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
29. Arcellaschi, p. 145; Otto Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie im Zeitalter der Republik* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1875), p. 325; Schierl, p. 276.
30. Fr. $79R^3$=118W. Slater, p. 321.
31. 'quis tu es, mulier, quae me insueto nuncupasti nomine?' [Who are you, woman, who have called me by an unaccustomed name?] fr. $239R^3$=57W.
32. Fr. $232R^3$=247W and Hyginus 27.3.
33. Adriana Della Casa, 'Il *Medus* di Pacuvio', in *Poesia latina in frammenti. Miscellanea filogica* (Genova: Università di Genova, 1974), pp. 287–96 (p. 295); Fantham, pp. 111–12; Schierl, p. 277.
34. Arcellaschi, p. 156.
35. '...populoque ut faustum sempiterne sospitent' [...so that they may eternally save it and make it auspicious for the people] fr. $234R^3$=49W.
36. I owe the formulation 'distance and difference' to Adrian Kelly.
37. Cf. Nita Krevans, 'Medea as Foundation Heroine', in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, ed. by James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 71–82.
38. On the influence of Medea on this tradition, see Anita Johner, 'Mythe et théâtre: Le Motif de la dame au char dans la légende royale de Rome', *Ktèma*, 17 (1992), 29–37. More generally on Roman drama and history, T. P. Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998).
39. Schierl, p. 281, and p. 278, n. 21, on fr. $407R^3$=397W.

40. 'tun dia Mede's cuius aditum exspectans peruixi usque adhuc?' [Are you the divine Medea, awaiting whose arrival I have lived all this time until now?] fr. 417R^3=408W. Cf. Pacuvius, fr. 232R^3=247W.
41. Fr. 391–406R^3=381–96W.
42. Alessandro Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes* (London: Duckworth, 2001), pp. 105–27; Seneca, *Medea* 171, 910.
43. Baier, pp. 51, 57; Schierl, p. 282.
44. Fr. 411–13R^3=400–02W.
45. Jacqueline Dangel, 'La Place de l'Orient dans le théâtre d'Accius', *Revue des Études Latines*, 66 (1988), 55–75 (pp. 55, 57–60); Arcellaschi, pp. 185–90, suggesting an explicit allusion to Mithridates.
46. Schierl, pp. 282–83; Baier, pp. 57–60, citing the example of Viriathus.
47. On Accius's optimate sympathies, see Bronisław Bilinski, *Accio ed i Gracchi: contributo alla storia della plebe e della tragedia romana* (Rome: Signorelli, 1958).

Unbinding Medea

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