

Subtle Manipulation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Medea Across Time and Genre in Greek and Roman Literature

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Abstract:

This thesis focuses on the character of Medea, analyzing her ability to adapt her rhetoric across genre and time period. Specifically, I will look at Medea's speech through three lenses—dialogue, epistle, and monologue—each represented by one of three authors: Euripides, Ovid, and Seneca. By exploring how the constraints of genre influence the way in which Medea speaks and the ways in which she can interact with her intended audience, and invariably how that interaction shapes our own understanding of her character, this thesis explores how Medea manipulates her story so that she appears in a more favorable light to her intended audience in spite of her bloody history.

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Introduction

Mother, sister, daughter, wife, foreigner, sorceress, murderer, master of rhetoric: how do we understand such a complex figure as Medea, to whom each of these terms simultaneously applies? How should those who encounter Medea as a readers or as members of a theater audience, reconcile the fact that one of the most talented sorceresses and cold-blooded murderers in literature could also be a loving wife and mother? Is it possible to view Medea as anything other than a calculating murderer once that precedent has been established? In this thesis I aim to answer each of these questions by analyzing how Medea transforms as a literary figure across several centuries of Greek and Roman literature. While the character of Medea has been nearly exhaustively treated by many scholars, I hope to approach Medea through a slightly different angle, by focusing specifically on her rhetoric across genre and time period. Specifically, I will look at Medea's speech through three lenses—dialogue, epistle, and monologue—each represented by one of three authors: Euripides, Ovid, and Seneca. Each mode of speech presents its own advantages as well as its many challenges. Through dialogue, Medea has the benefit of interacting with interlocutors, others who offer the illusion of real-time reaction to Medea's speeches and invariably help shape our own understanding as members of an external audience for Medea's actions. The epistle, however, lacks by nature a present interlocutor, and therefore relies solely on the words of the letter writer. By channeling her thoughts through a letter, Medea invites the reader into her own world as she crafts a single-sided dialogue to an absent recipient. Finally I examine Medea's ability to speak in monologue as she presents herself, not only

isolated from friends and family, but also isolated on stage. By exploring how the constraints of genre influence the way in which Medea speaks and the ways in which she can interact with her intended audience, and invariably how that interaction shapes our own understanding of her character, this thesis explores how Medea manipulates her story so that she appears in a more favorable light to her intended audience in spite of her bloody history.

The first chapter looks at what is often considered the “source text” for Medea: Euripides’ tragedy *Medea*. Written in 431 BC Athens, Euripides’ *Medea* tells the story of the later part of Medea’s life, the chapter of her story that occurs after the bloody murder of her brother, the betrayal of her father, and the murder of Jason’s uncle, Pelias. Euripides’ tragedy culminates with what will become her most defining act: the murder of her two sons. Yet, Euripides does not present to the audience a simple story of a violent murderer. Rather, he offers the audience a story of a foreign princess who, after leaving behind her homeland and family, finds herself divorced and once again exiled and without a home. Indeed, if we understand the Chorus as a reflection of how the external audience should perceive Medea, the initially unsympathetic Chorus suggests the external audience is equally unsympathetic. Here I address how Medea draws attention to contemporary female stereotypes through her carefully crafted speeches with the result that she is able to sway the Chorus’ allegiance to her cause. With each confrontation on stage, Medea’s attention to word choice and understanding of these stereotypes demonstrates her adaptable nature and ability to manipulate her perception both in the eyes of the internal and the external audience. When the external audience is finally confronted with Medea’s murder of her sons, they view her not as a barbaric monster, but rather as a human woman who has been left no alternative.

The second chapter analyzes the character of Medea not through Greek tragedy, but through Roman elegy. Ovid's *Heroides*, written at the end of the 1st century BC, is a collection of fictional letters written from the perspective of Greek mythological heroines to their famous lovers. Though each letter is penned by a different persona from various myths, each woman nevertheless shares the experience of having been abandoned by her lover. My analysis focuses on the 12th letter, Medea to Jason, in relation to the letters around it as well as its relation to Euripides' *Medea*. With this change in genre, Medea as speaker must adapt. Because of its epistolary nature, her interactions with others are limited to her own reflections of her past. Yet Ovid's Medea nevertheless finds a way to interact with the letters surrounding hers, responding to the other women in the collection. In addition to Medea's own words, I look at the way in which Ovid has organized the letters surrounding Medea's, focusing first on *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle to Jason, and the way in which Hypsipyle establishes an expectation for the reader to encounter a demonic Medea. The analysis then develops around *Heroides* 7, 11, and 13: Dido to Aeneas, Canace to Marcareus, and Laodamia to Protesilaus. By transforming Medea from barbarian murder into an abandoned heroine, Ovid reestablishes Medea as a relatable figure who is once again deserving of pity.

The final chapter returns to the genre of tragedy, focusing instead on Roman drama. Seneca's *Medea*, written in the middle of the 1st century AD, offers us a Medea who is so entirely removed from her humanity that she becomes something truly other. While Euripides and Ovid both seemed concerned with garnering sympathy for their Medeas and highlighting their character's humanity, Seneca produces a Medea who revels in her infamy. Indeed, Seneca's Medea is the culmination of each preceding Medea. Although the Senecan Medea speaks on

stage, she remains isolated from the other actors for much of the play and therefore delivers many of her speeches in monologue rather than dialogue. While the ways in which Medea interacts with her previous incarnations is vast, such as her innovations to her canonical infanticide and relationship with Jason, I focus only on her speeches given in monologue and the ways in which these speeches communicate and exhibit an intertextual relationship with Ovid's *Heroides* and Euripides' *Medea*.

Stereotypical Manipulation: The Exploitation of Female Stereotype in Euripides' *Medea*

As Euripides' *Medea* finds herself abandoned by her husband, on the brink of yet another exile, and without friends or family to whom she can turn, she is driven into action to fulfill her dark plan of regicide and infanticide so that she might restore her injured reputation and exact revenge upon the husband who has dishonored her. Given her past reputation for extreme violence (οὐδ' ἂν κτανεῖν πείσασα Πελιάδας κόρας | πατέρα, 9-10; βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν, 38; ἐγὼ δα τήνδε, δειμαίνω τέ νιν, 39; ὦ πάτερ, ὦ πόλις, ὣν ἀπενάσθην | αἰσχρῶς τὸν ἐμὸν κτείνασα κάσιν, 166-67)¹ and the impending threat of the murder of her children (στυγεῖ δὲ ἡ παῖδας οὐδ' ὀρῶσ' εὐφραίνεται. | δέδοικα δ' αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλευύση νέον, 35-36)², *Medea* faces criticism not only from the internal audience, but also from the external audience, who undoubtedly would react negatively to the thought of a barbarian woman inflicting a brutal murder upon a member of the Greek demos. Though a thick trail of blood both follows and precedes *Medea* in each episode within Euripides' play, she nevertheless manages to justify her deplorable actions and to persuade the Chorus and Jason to act on her behalf. Through this manipulation of the internal audience, *Medea* in turn is able to influence the external audience's perception of her. This chapter will analyze *Medea*'s exploitation of female stereotypes, demonstrating her masterful

¹ She would not have persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father, 9-10; for she has a violent mind, 38; I know here and I'm afraid of her, 39; Oh father, oh city, which I left shamefully when I killed my brother, 166-67.

² Indeed she hates the children and she does not rejoice in seeing them. And I'm afraid that she is plotting something evil, 35-36.

understanding of societal expectations for women, specifically in her exchange with the Chorus (214-266) and with Jason (866ff). This chapter will also look at Medea's monologues (764-810, 1019-1064), in which she must direct her persuasive attempts internally in order to carry out her plan for infanticide as she struggles between the influence of her masculine, heroic nature and her feminine, maternal nature. In each of these scenes, Medea controls her perception in the eyes of the internal audience through her rhetorical persuasion, drawing attention to conventional stereotypes of women either to incite characters to action, namely Jason and herself, or in the case of the Chorus, to inaction.

When the external audience meets Medea at the beginning of the play, they discover from the Nurse Medea's dire situation. The audience hears that she rejects food (24), wastes away in tears (25), keeps her eyes fixed on the ground, avoiding eye contact (27), and mourns the loss of her country, father, and husband (31-33). Each of these descriptions by the nurse serves to showcase not only Medea's inner turmoil, but also to display emotions that are characteristic of a proper Greek woman.³ Though Euripides' *Hippolytus* was produced three years after his *Medea* in 428 BCE, it would be useful to compare this initial portrayal of Medea to the rather sympathetic portrayal of Phaedra as the portrayals of the symptoms of the two characters are nearly identical and both character introductions occur near the opening of the play. The Chorus of *Hippolytus* introduces to the audience a Phaedra who is wasting away in sickness (*Hipp.* 131), reclusive (*Hipp.* 131-32), hiding her face from view (*Hipp.* 132-33), and rejecting food for the

³ See Mastronarde (2002): 168-69 for more on occurrences in literature where lack of appetite and avoidance of eye contact indicate "modesty, shame, dejection, and grief."

past three days (*Hipp.* 135-37).⁴ By drawing attention to Phaedra’s veiled head, the Chorus demonstrates Phaedra’s concern for her preservation of her modesty, a trait that would endear Phaedra to an audience of Athenian men. Furthermore, Phaedra’s behavior is clearly described as atypical by the Chorus (τριτάταν δέ νιν κλύω...ἀμέραν, *Hipp.*, 135-37), and given Aphrodite’s initial portrayal of Phaedra as “honorable” (εὐκελής, *Hipp.*, 46), Phaedra’s introduction by the Chorus is intended to garner sympathy from the audience. Phaedra’s recent behavior is indicative of a stark contrast from her typical state. When questioned about the impetus behind Phaedra’s uncharacteristic behavior, the Chorus provides several possibilities to the audience, including an unfaithful husband (ἢ πόσιν...ποιμαίνει τις ἐν οἴκοις κρυ|πτὰ κοίτα λεχέων σῶν, *Hipp.*, 151-54) and concerns about childbirth (ἀμηχανία...ὠδίνων, *Hipp.*, 161-62), all of which are stereotypical concerns of women. This same contrast in Phaedra’s behavior is seen in the Nurse’s speech when describing Medea. The Nurse indicates in her monologue that the marriage between Jason and Medea has, until recently, been harmonious, presenting to the audience a Medea who has behaved in accordance with traditional Greek values:

αὐτή τε πάντα ξυμέρουσ’ Ἰάσωνι·
 ἥπερ μεγίστη γίγνεται σωτηρία,
 ὅταν γυνὴ πρὸς ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατῇ.
 νῦν δ’ ἐχθρὰ πάντα, καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα.
 προδοῦς γὰρ αὐτοῦ τέκνα δεσπότην τ’ ἐμήν
 γάμοις Ἰάσων βασιλικοῖς ἐννάζεται (13-18)

She endured everything with Jason. Such is the greatest safety, whenever a woman does not stand apart from her husband. *But now* everything is hostile and what was most dear is diseased. For having betrayed his own children and my mistress, Jason lies in a royal marriage.

The audience is led to believe that, before Jason’s betrayal, Medea successfully fulfilled the role of a wife, and in doing so, ensured that her life existed in σωτηρία. Unlike Phaedra, whose

⁴ τειρομένην νοσερᾶ κοίτα δέμας ἐντὸς ἔχειν | οἴκων, λεπτὰ δὲ φάρη ξάν|θαν κεφαλὰν σκιάζειν: | τριτάταν δέ νιν κλύω | τάνδ’ ἀβρωσία | στόματος ἀμέραν | Δάματρος ἀ|κτᾶς δέμας ἀγνὸν ἴσχειν, κρυ|πτῶ πένθει θανάτου θέλου|σαν κέλσαι ποτὶ τέρμα δύστανον, *Hipp.* 131-35.

husband has been absent throughout the play, Medea's and Jason's communion has been until this moment constant and has provided no room for reproach.⁵ However, through the presence of $\nu\tilde{\nu}\delta'$, the Nurse highlights the contrast between Medea's behavior prior to Jason's betrayal and following the betrayal, describing the transition from $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ to $\acute{\epsilon}\chi\theta\rho\acute{\alpha}$. It is because of this transition that Medea behaves in the uncharacteristic manner in which she is later described in lines 24-33.

Through her extreme behavior, Medea has fulfilled our expectation of a typical, troubled female character in tragedy. In his article, "The Critique of the Female Stereotype in Greek Tragedy," Moss explains that the stereotypical tragic woman is prone to emotional instability. The traditional woman in myth is undisciplined, child-like, and typically spends her time on "superficial or irrelevant matters," a far cry from the Medea we see following her addresses to the chorus of Corinthian women in line 214.⁶ Buxton notes this shift in Medea's disposition as a result of a "formal shift from sung and spoken language," suggesting that Medea's attitude shifts with the meter of her speech.⁷ While I do not disagree with Buxton on the nuances of tragic meter, I would suggest that there is another issue underlying Medea's shift in her emotional state framing her first exchange with the Chorus. This hyper-feminine, stereotypical portrayal of Medea in the beginning of the play is crucial to the formation of the audience's initial impression

⁵ Consider Clytemnestra's ominous council on what creates a happy marriage in the *Agamemnon*: $\tau\acute{o}\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \gamma\upsilon\upsilon\alpha\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha\ \pi\rho\acute{\omega}\tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\sigma\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\acute{\iota}\chi\alpha\ |\ \acute{\eta}\sigma\theta\alpha\iota\ \delta\acute{o}\mu\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\rho\eta\mu\omicron\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\pi\alpha\gamma\lambda\omicron\nu\ \kappa\alpha\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ (firstly it is a terrible evil when a woman is apart from her husband, alone in the home 861-62).

⁶ Moss (1988): 516-517. Note here as well the impassioned response of the Tutor to his mistress' cries and the Chorus' reaction to Medea when they hear of her complaints and suicidal wishes. Rather than sympathizing with Medea, they note that her reaction is excessive, "And if your husband honors another bed, do not be angry at him for this" ($\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}\ \sigma\acute{o}\varsigma\ \pi\acute{o}\sigma\iota\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\chi\eta\ \sigma\epsilon\beta\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota,\ |\ \kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\omega\iota\ \tau\acute{o}\delta\epsilon\ \mu\acute{\eta}\ \chi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\sigma\sigma\omicron\upsilon,$ 155-56)

⁷ Buxton (1982):156.

of Medea, especially when considering her excessive violence at the end of the play. Consider Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, who is first introduced to the audience as a woman whose heart is ἀνδρόβουλον (plans like a man, *Agam.* 11).⁸ The audience's immediate impression of Clytemnestra is that of a woman who has transgressed traditional feminine boundaries and who defends her position through violence. Due to Clytemnestra's immediate portrayal as a masculinized woman and the subsequent aggressive, polemical attitude she displays towards the Chorus and her husband, the audience never responds to her character with sympathy. Though her anger against Agamemnon is certainly justifiable, for she frequently cites the murder of her daughter as the motivation for her hatred (*Agam.* 1417, 1432, 1504, 1525-26), we never see Clytemnestra outside of this one-dimensional role of a scorned woman whose overwhelming need for violence and revenge consumes her. With this introduction of Medea as the traditional and emotionally distraught female character, though the audience understands that, like Clytemnestra, Medea will end the play in violence, Euripides ensures that the audience does not immediately see Medea as another Clytemnestra. Instead, the audience sees a character worthy of *pathos*.

When the Chorus approaches Medea in line 148, their intent is to recall Medea to reason, not to commiserate with her about her current troubles (εἰ δὲ σὸς πόσις | καινὰ λέχη σεβί- | ζει, κείνω τόδε μὴ χαράσσοι; “but if your husband honors a new bed, this is not a reason to be angry with him,” 155-57).⁹ Visvardi, analyzing a similar reaction by the Chorus to Admetus after the death of his wife, argues that the apathetic response by the chorus in *Alcestis* (438BC) serves to

⁸ For more on the heroic comparisons between Clytemnestra, Medea, and male heroes, see Knox (1979), Moss (1988): 526, and Foley (2001): 261.

⁹ See note 6 regarding the emotionless response of the Chorus.

diminish the audiences' sympathy from the main character rather than to enhance it.¹⁰ Similar to the timing of the Chorus' response in *Medea*, the Chorus' response in *Alcestis* occurs immediately following the excessive display of grief by Admetus for his lost wife (τί νέον τόδε; πολλοὺς ἤδη | παρέλυσεν θάνατος δάμαρτος; How is this new? Death has already taken the wives of many men, *Alc.* 931-32). Like Medea's, Admetus' experience is nothing new, and therefore, at least in the eyes of the internal audience, is less deserving of pity. Theseus in *Heracles* behaves similarly, suggesting to Heracles that his grief following the slaughter of his wife and children is excessive, stating that there is neither a mortal nor a god who is untouched by misfortune (οὐδεὶς δὲ θνητῶν ταῖς τύχαις ἀκήρατος, | οὐ θεῶν, ἀοιδῶν εἶπερ οὐ ψεθδεῖς λόγοι, *Her.* 1314-15). Though Euripides' *Heracles* postdates his *Medea* by 15 years, these similar reactions to grief seem to indicate a pattern throughout Euripidean tragedy, namely that suffering is universal and therefore does not warrant pity. Medea, however, is quick to respond to this trope, refusing to allow her Chorus to see her as yet another woman with an unfaithful husband and therefore undeserving of their pity. Though *Medea's* Chorus enters the episode with the intent of drawing Medea to their reasoning, Medea quickly reverses the situation and persuades them to understand her point of view.¹¹

γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν·
 ἄς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῆι
 πόσιν πρίασθαι δεσπότην τε σώματος
 λαβεῖν· κακοῦ γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔτ' ἄλγιον κακόν.
 κὰν τῶιδ' ἀγὼν μέγιστος, ἢ κακὸν λαβεῖν
 ἢ χρηστόν· οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγαι
 γυναιξίν οὐδ' οἶόν τ' ἀνήνασθαι πόσιν.
 ἐς καινὰ δ' ἦθη καὶ νόμους ἀφιγμένην
 δεῖ μάντιν εἶναι, μὴ μαθοῦσαν οἴκοθεν,

¹⁰ Visvardi (2017): 73.

¹¹ Boedeker (1991) notes “to her own effectiveness as a speaker, Medea herself is remarkably unresponsive to the speech of others,” 101.

οἴωι μάλιστα χρήσεται ξυνευνέτη.
 κἄν μὲν τάδ' ἡμῖν ἐκπονουμέναισιν εὖ
 πόσις ξυνοικῆι μὴ βίαι φέρων ζυγόν,
 ζηλωτὸς αἰών· εἰ δὲ μὴ, θανεῖν χρεών.
 ἀνὴρ δ', ὅταν τοῖς ἔνδον ἄχθηται ξυνών,
 ἔξω μολῶν ἔπαυσε καρδίαν ἄσης
 [ἢ πρὸς φίλον τιν' ἢ πρὸς ἥλικα τραπεῖς]·
 ἡμῖν δ' ἀνάγκη πρὸς μίαν ψυχὴν βλέπειν.
 λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον
 ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκου, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί,
 κακῶς φρονοῦντες· ὡς τρις ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα
 στήναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ. (231-251)

We women are the most wretched race. First, with an excess of money, it is necessary to buy a husband and to take a master for their bodies. For there is an even more painful evil than that evil. And in this act there is a great challenge either to take a bad one or a good one. For women, divorce does not have a good reputation nor is it possible to refuse a husband. It is necessary for her, after coming into new customs and laws, to be a seer, unless she has learned at home how precisely to manage her husband. And if we have worked these things out well, our husband lives with us bearing the yoke without violence, life is enviable. But if not, it is better to die. The husband, whenever he, living at home, objects to those inside, stops the heart from pain, walking outside, either delighting in some friend or someone his own age. But for us there is need to look towards one soul alone. They say that we live a life at home free from danger, while they fight with a spear. They think incorrectly. How I would wish rather to stand three times before a shield than to bear a child once.

While Medea clearly does not occupy the same social standing as the Chorus, she nevertheless addresses them on the common ground that they are all women (γυναικῆς ἔσμεν). Boedeker and Buxton offer different motivations for the use of persuasion in this speech. Boedeker suggests that persuasion, and by extension, deception, is the tool for the weak, and given Medea's marginalized status as both a barbarian and a woman, persuasion is the only method available to her.¹² Buxton, however, counters this idea, suggesting that there is no reason for Medea to deceive the Chorus because they, unlike Creon and Jason, are not her superiors.¹³ Buxton continues his argument, stating that the Chorus is already sympathetic to Medea's current situation. I favor Boedeker's argument on the grounds that Medea's speech to the Chorus is not

¹² Boedeker (1991): 101. Barlow (1989) also maintains that Medea is dishonest until the end of the play, 167.

¹³ Buxton (1982): 158.

entirely truthful, and her deception is ultimately necessary. Though Medea and the Chorus are not separated by gender, Medea is nevertheless placed in a position inferior to them in respect to her citizen status (ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κάμ' ἦκει, but the same does not apply to you and to me, 252). As indicated by the end of the speech (βουλήσομαι...σιγᾶν, 259-262), Medea's plan very clearly hinges upon the Chorus' agreement to remain silent. Medea understands that the stereotypical woman is prone to gossip, and therefore she must take precautionary measures.¹⁴ Because Medea requires a favor from the Chorus, Medea must indirectly act as a suppliant, which as a result places the Chorus in a superior position. Persuasion and deception therefore become necessary in order to enact her initial plan to exact revenge upon Jason, Creon, and the princess (260-63).

Building on the common foundation of gender, Medea then speaks to the universal roles that are forced upon women. As Pucci and Foley both note, however, the universal truths that Medea cites apply only partly to Medea herself.¹⁵ Unlike the Corinthian women, Medea's marriage was not forced upon her, nor did her father exchange a dowry for her wedding. She speaks to the necessity of supernatural powers in order to divine the proper way of handling a husband (239). The irony of this statement, of course, lies in Medea's long mythological history of possessing extraordinary supernatural power. In light of these discrepancies, Swift asks if we the audience are supposed to be captivated by her speech or whether we are led to question its validity.¹⁶ To this I would argue that the external audience's understanding of the ambiguity of

¹⁴ Moss (1988): 516 speaks on the relationship between women and gossip.

¹⁵ Foley (2001): 259. Pucci (1980): 64-69. On the lack of applicability to Medea of her generalizations about women, Buxton (1982): 158 argues that this is simply Medea "doing the best she can as counsel in her own defense."

¹⁶ Swift (2017): 86.

Medea's speech is simply unimportant. At no point throughout the play does Medea attempt to disguise from the external audience the fact that she blurs the lines between truth and fiction. As Swift herself notes, Medea repeatedly and blatantly flaunts her mastery of rhetoric to the external audience, citing Medea's revelation to the external audience following her encounter with Creon (*δοκεῖς γὰρ ἄν με τόνδε θωπεῦσαι ποτε, | εἰ μή τι κερδαίνουσιν ἢ τεχνωμένην*; for do you think I would have ever flattered that man, unless I were profiting or devising something? 368-69).¹⁷ Medea again immediately reveals her deception to the audience following Aegeus' departure (*νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν, φίλοι, γενησόμεσθα κεις ὁδὸν βεβήκαμεν*, now we shall be triumphant over my enemies, friends, and I have come upon the method, 765-66). That the external audience understands her deception of the characters on stage is immaterial to Medea. The external audience's knowledge of Medea's murderous plans does not seem to factor into their sympathetic characterization of Medea. In spite of this understanding in the eyes of the external audience, the external audience must view Medea's actions through the perception of a sympathetic internal audience, with the result that the opinions of the external audience are invariably shaped by those of the characters on stage.

Nevertheless, Medea recognizes that, although these gnomic claims presented to the Chorus are not entirely applicable to herself, the Chorus will sympathize with these nearly universal statements. Rabinowitz takes the readiness of the Chorus' agreement to Medea's speech as a testament to its truth, which certainly seems to be the case.¹⁸ It is because Medea seamlessly blends together truth and half-truth that the external audience has difficulty extracting

¹⁷ Swift (2017): 83.

¹⁸ Rabinowitz (1993):129.

the elements that belong solely to Greek women and those that include Medea. As Lawrence argues, Medea describes “the social disabilities of women [that are] so readily recognizable to an [Athenian] audience,” which would invariably compel the Athenian audience to view Medea’s plight as one that any Greek woman could suffer.¹⁹ I would add to Rabinowitz’s argument that the swift change in the Chorus’ allegiance also speaks to the readiness of women in myth to dissolve social and familial bonds, especially when the topic concerns marriage and sex. We see three other references to the malleable nature of women when influenced by lust in this play. Jason twice mentions how easily women are swayed (570-73, 1338), and Medea herself speaks to this when she asks Jason to persuade the princess to accept Medea’s gifts (945). Medea understands that, in order to gain the Chorus’ allegiance, she must do so by speaking of marital relations.

To make her final point, in what is arguably the most memorable sentiment in the play, Medea speaks to the popular misconception that women have an easy life at home while men lead the dangerous life of a warrior (248-251). As Pucci explains in his analysis of this speech, “men justify their mastery by adducing their life of risks and toils, but they forget the pains and the dangers to which women are exposed.”²⁰ This stereotype of women’s comparably easy life allows not only for the justification for men’s superior status, but also indicates why women should be complacent with their inferior position.²¹ By equating childbearing to fighting with a spear, Medea accomplishes two things. On the one hand, Medea speaks to the harsh reality of

¹⁹ Lawrence (1997): 50-51.

²⁰ Pucci (1980): 67.

²¹ Again, compare the Chorus’ impassioned reaction to Medea’s emotional response at the beginning of the play (155-156).

the high mortality rates for childbirth, which, as Pomeroy notes, proved disastrous to women between the ages of sixteen and twenty six.²² On the other hand, Medea also speaks to the unfair reality that, not only do men receive glory for their efforts in war, men also have an unfair advantage for survival. Through the use of martial language, specifically referring to the protective nature of a shield, Medea draws attention to the fact that young Athenian men receive ample military training before engaging in battle. They receive weapons with which to defend themselves and armor with which to protect themselves from the enemies' weapons. By invoking this parallel, Medea is speaking to the Chorus, not just as fellow women, but also as fellow warriors, who engage in their "war" without the benefit of training, weapons, or armor. Yet to include Medea among the other women as she addresses the unfair advantage women have in their "war" would again be inaccurate. As "so many of the Greeks know," it was Medea who saved and aided Jason in his trials to obtain the golden fleece (ἔσωσά σ', ὡς ἴσασιν Ἑλλήνων ὄσοι, 476). It was she who single-handedly, with the aid of her magical abilities, allowed for Jason to yoke the cart of the fire-breathing bulls and to conquer the many deadly warriors who sprout from the sown field (πεμφθέντα ταύρων πυρπνόων ἐπιστάτην | ζεύγγλησι καὶ σπεροῦντα θανάσιμον γύην, 478-79). She has proven herself in battle and, moreover, she has demonstrated that even in matters concerning child-birth she has an advantage (παύσω δέ σ' ὄντ' ἄπαιδα καὶ παίδων γονὰς σπεῖραί σε θήσω. τοιάδ' οἶδα φάρμακα, 717-18). Though Medea herself is not

²² Pomeroy (1995): 85. Here Pomeroy provides a list from Hippocrates' *Aphorisms*, which chronicles a few of the dangers experienced by women in childbirth as well as a brief history of Spartan customs surrounding childbirth. Though she admits that the evidence is sparse, she also analyzes the remains of geometric tombs, which she believes indicate the disproportionate male to female death ratio, a ratio that she attributes to early death brought on by childbearing, 45-46. Swift (2017) describes how, in Sparta, men were allowed grave markers if they died during battle. Women, too, were allowed such an honor if they died in childbirth. Swift draws the conclusion that, at least to the Spartans, childbirth was indeed equivalent to warfare.

subjected to the same difficulties—a point that she makes clear in her monologue (ἀλλ’ οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κάμ’ ἔκει λόγος, 252)—nevertheless, she is counting on the Chorus to recognize this unfair stereotype imposed upon women, namely that they enjoy a life of leisure at home, protected from the dangers of the outside world, and calls upon them to aid her in her own war. Following such a powerful statement that bearing a single child is more deadly than fighting a war, the external audience cannot help but to remember that Medea has not one child, but two, both of whom were on stage only 140 lines prior to Medea’s statement. The physical presence of the children on stage serves as a reminder both to the internal and to the external audience the extent of the danger Medea has faced on her journey to Corinth, perhaps heightening the *pathos* directed towards her.

Barlow and Moss agree that, through this speech, Medea recognizes female stereotypes and then rejects them.²³ While I agree that Medea certainly recognizes these stereotypes, I do not believe that Medea rejects them. On the contrary, I would argue that Medea recognizes these stereotypes and then exploits them for her own gain, understanding that by drawing attention to the unfair demands placed upon women, Medea is able to appeal to the Chorus as allies. This exploitation becomes especially apparent to the external audience after she requests the Chorus’ silence (259-63).

γυνὴ γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα
κακὴ τ’ ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾷν
ὅταν δ’ ἐς εὐνήν ἠδικομένη κυρῆ,
οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρήν μαιφονωτέρα. (263-66)

For a woman in other ways is full of fear and a coward to look at battle and iron, but whenever she happens to be wronged in bed, there is no other mind more murderous.

²³ Barlow (1989): 160; Moss (1988): 517.

Throughout this speech, Medea understands that the key to persuading the Chorus is found through mentioning a wrong in bed (ἐς εὐνήν), which allows for Medea's successful outcome. She also recognizes that, after being wronged in bed, women are most capable of plotting violent revenge, which, as the end of the play displays, turns out to be the case. If Medea were trying to subvert or reject these stereotypes, she would not have employed them in her attempt to persuade the Chorus.

The two dialogues between Jason and Medea highlight Medea's understanding of female stereotypes and her ability to alter her behavior so that she appears to Jason and the external audience to subscribe to acceptable female behavior. The first exchange in lines 446-626 displays the results of approaching Jason aggressively. Looking again at Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, we see a clear parallel. Upon his arrival, Clytemnestra speaks to Agamemnon in such a way that he recognizes her behavior as unwomanly (οὔτοι γυναικός, 940). She approaches Agamemnon with antagonistic language, encouraging him to accept his defeat and his subordinate position to her (τοῖς δ' ὀλβίοις γε καὶ τὸ νικᾶσθαι πρέπει, even for the blessed ones it is suitable to be conquered, 941). The result of her efforts is an obstinate Agamemnon, unwilling to step on the carpet she has lain before him. It is not until Clytemnestra "accepts" her subordinate position (κρατεῖς μέντοι παρεῖς γ' ἐκὼν ἐμοί. Indeed you are strong, having willingly yielded to me, 943) that Agamemnon yields to her request and begins to walk on the carpet (ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι ταῦθ', but if this seems best to you, 944).²⁴ The same dynamic between

²⁴ Meridor (1987): 40 understands Agamemnon's motivation for compliance as a result of his wish that Clytemnestra accept Cassandra into the home. Regardless of Agamemnon's motivation, Meridor argues that his words at 944 are commonly used when "one party to an argument realizes that further resistance is useless...Hearing this phrase, the audience understands that the argument is over and expects Agamemnon to conclude by declaring his intention to do what Clytemnestra has been insisting." While I disagree with Meridor on Agamemnon's motivation, I agree that this moment of Agamemnon's submission is important in reconfiguring the dynamic between his and Clytemnestra's relationship.

Clytemnestra and Agamemnon can be seen for Medea and Jason. In this first exchange, with harsh rhetoric intended to wound, Medea attacks Jason, not only adopting the more aggressive, masculine role, but also accusing him of lacking masculinity (*ἀνανδρίαν*, 466). If Medea's intention to persuade Jason to understand her point of view and feel guilt for his actions against her, then she has certainly failed. As with Clytemnestra, Medea's husband does not look kindly upon her nor does she succeed in altering his opinions of her current situation, namely her exile with the children. It is not until the second exchange beginning at line 866 that Medea, by adopting the traditional, more submissive feminine role, is able to bring about her desired results.

Understanding that she must appear inferior in status, Medea formulates her response:

τὰς δ' ἐμὰς ὀργὰς φέρειν
 εἰκός σ', ἐπεὶ νῶϊν πόλλ' ὑπείργασται φίλα.
 ἐγὼ δ' ἐμαυτῆι διὰ λόγων ἀφικόμην
 κάλοιδ' ὀρησα· Σχετλία, τί μαίνομαι
 καὶ δυσμεναίνω τοῖσι βουλευουσιν εὔ, (870-74)

...
 ἀλλ' ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν,
 γυναῖκες· οὐκ οὖν χρῆν σ' ὁμοιοῦσθαι κακοῖς,
 οὐδ' ἀντιτείνειν νήπι' ἀντὶ νηπίων.
 παριέμεσθα καὶ φαμεν κακῶς φρονεῖν
 τότε', ἀλλ' ἄμεινον νῦν βεβούλευμαι τάδε. (889-93)

It is appropriate for you to bear my anger, since many dear things have done us a service. But I talked to myself and rebuked myself. "Wretch, why am I raging and bearing ill will towards those counseling well?"

...
 But we are what we are, I won't say evil, women. Certainly it is not necessary for you to be like us in our evil, nor to pay a fool back with foolishness. Let us yield and we will say that I have thought badly, but now I have considered these things better.

Echoing Clytemnestra's language (for both Medea and Clytemnestra use a form of the verb *παρίημι* in their attempt to persuade their husbands)²⁵, Medea recalls acceptable feminine

²⁵ *Agam.*, 943; *Med.*, 892.

behavior in her attempt to persuade Jason.²⁶ As Moss notes, women in myth are prone to emotional instability and are portrayed as changeable as the moon.²⁷ After acknowledging her foolish, feminine behavior, Medea fulfills Jason's expectation by linking herself to the long standing literary tradition that women are evil, a curse for men.²⁸ We see ripples of this tradition of women as a curse throughout tragedy. Hippolytus' tirade against the impurity and corruption of women (*Hipp.*, 616-668) or Creon's admonition to Haemon on the threats that women pose to the state (*Ant.*, 648-654) offer examples of this literary trope.

Though we as readers are unable to see Jason's response from the text as Medea monopolizes the conversation entirely, we can assume that he has responded well to her apparent change of heart. In fact, so secure is she that her tactics have been successful, Medea goes so far as to craft Jason's response for him, still without waiting for him to speak, saying, "for we have a treaty and our anger has been set aside" (σπονδαὶ γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ μεθέστηκεν χόλος, 898). Medea's new command of the dialogue has all but eclipsed Jason's participation within it, reducing Jason's role to that of passive participant. She then clasps his right hand to seal the pact, binding Jason in an oath of peace without providing him the opportunity to offer his terms of agreement. Boedeker, Foley, and McClure all address the significance of bonds between Jason and Medea

²⁶ McClure (1999): 382 notes here as well that Medea's behavior echoes Clytemnestra's, though she does not note the similarity of the verb: "Euripides portrays her as manipulating Greek conventions of feminine behavior when attempting to gain the compliance or sympathy of her interlocutors, in a manner similar to Clytemnestra." Moss (1988): 526 notes the similarities as well.

²⁷ Moss (1988): 517. I would add that Medea is portrayed as unstable as nature, specifically as the changing moon, is terribly ironic. Though not a part of Euripides' myth, but certainly later renditions of Medea's myth, such as Ovid's or Seneca's, Medea has the ability to alter nature and draw the moon from the heavens. This view of Medea is complicated by Medea's ability to control the chariot of the Sun, which is certainly a part of Euripides' version of the myth.

²⁸ McClure (1999): 391. McClure explains how this reversal of roles "join[s] herself to the blame discourse she had earlier repudiated."

involving her right hand.²⁹ By clasping the right hand, Medea is forging a bond, not as a subservient wife, and yet, not quite as his equal.³⁰ If equality were Medea's intention in this scene, she would have allowed for Jason's consent. By eclipsing Jason's speech and denying him the opportunity to contribute to the pact, Medea has elevated her status to one that is above his. The irony of this scene lies not only in the reversal of the pair's fortune but also in Medea's attention to the sanctity of oaths. Rather than Jason breaking his latest oath, it will be Medea who violates the oath.

In Jason's eyes, Medea has returned to her senses, (αἰνῶ, γύναι, τὰδ', οὐδ' ἔκεινα μέμφομαι, I approve of these things, woman, and I do not blame you on account of them, 908), and as a result, Jason reluctantly agrees to persuade his new bride to act on Medea's behalf and allow the children to stay in Corinth (941-943). While Jason believes his persuasive abilities will prove unsuccessful against Creon, he is confident that he will succeed in persuading his new bride (941-944). Medea confidently, and ambiguously, agrees with Jason's claim, stating, "Indeed, if that one is like other women" (εἴπερ γυναικῶν ἐστὶ τῶν ἄλλων μία. 945). Scholars are divided as to the correct interpretation of Medea's statement. Boedeker takes Medea's words as a testament to Jason's ability, and by extension every man's ability, to persuade women, understanding this exchange to mean that Jason will find his task easy, "if she is as easy to persuade as Medea herself once was."³¹ Buxton interprets Medea's line as testament to Jason's overconfidence, as Jason believes he will be able to persuade the princess without Medea's

²⁹ Boedeker (1991): 95; Foley (2001): 259; McClure (1999): 379.

³⁰ See Boedeker (1991): 110-11, and Flory (1978): 71 for the parallels between Medea's language in these lines and peace treaties forged between warring cities.

³¹ Boedeker (1991): 99.

assistance.³² Rabinowitz on the other hand believes that Medea is further claiming her independence by forcing Jason to accept her right to give a wedding gift.³³ Mastronarde, however, attributes this line, not to Medea, but to Jason, arguing that, in addition to balancing the stichomythia between Jason and Medea, this line speaks to Jason's understanding of the "stereotypical notion that women are more given to pity and concern for children."³⁴ While the concern for Mastronarde seems to be the balance between the speakers in this passage, I would argue that this concern does not factor for Medea, who dominates the entire passage with her lines. Between lines 925-958, assuming that we attribute line 945 to Medea rather than Jason, Jason speaks a single line between each of Medea's, indicating that Euripides is assigning Medea greater prominence throughout this dialogue.³⁵ With Medea speaking at line 945, her dominance throughout the passage is maintained and, at least verbally, she is successfully able to assert her control over Jason.

While I find Boedeker's interpretation of line 945 most convincing, I suggest that there is also a further meaning underlying Medea's words. Medea here is speaking to another female stereotype, namely that, when faced with glimmering gold, women simply do not have the ability to act on reason. Women in myth are drawn to glittering objects, often to their own detriment and the detriment of those around them, as they lose the ability for wise judgment. Perhaps one of the most famous instances of this occurs in the Homeric tradition involving the golden

³² Buxton (1982): 167.

³³ Rabinowitz (1993): 144.

³⁴ Mastronarde (2002): 323.

³⁵ Medea (925); Jason (926); Medea (927-28); Jason (929); Medea (930-40); Jason (941); Medea (942-43); Jason (944); Medea (945-58).

apple at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Knowing that the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite will be unable to resist the appeal of gold, Eris tosses a golden apple into the midst of the goddesses. That Aphrodite and Hera both succumb to their desire for the golden object is unsurprising as both goddesses have a strong history of being subject to their emotions. Athena's inability to resist the gold, however, speaks to this perceived deficiency in the female sex. Even a goddess noted for her intellectual prowess and mastery of reason is unable to resist her gender's overwhelming influence upon her. The result of the goddesses' lack of control, of course, is a devastating 10 year war and countless deaths.

We see a similar pattern with Atalanta, the Arcadian maiden. As an Artemis archetype, Atalanta is unique among mythical women in that she exists in a liminal space between the masculine and the feminine. She participates in ephobic rituals (boar hunt and wrestling match), yet also female rites of passage (footraces).³⁶ Though her footrace is part of a feminine tradition, the race is marked with masculine aggression as she herself competes in the race and then vows to kill those whom she defeats. In spite of such powerful, masculine influences on her psychology, she nevertheless falls victim to Hippomenes' (and Aphrodite's) trick. Aphrodite understands that, though Atalanta occupies the masculine realm, Atalanta is first and foremost a woman, and as such, will be unable to resist the allure of the gold. Hippomenes tosses the apples in front of Atalanta and her fate is sealed. Add to this list Eriphyle, who is just another example in a long line of women falling for gold.³⁷ Betraying her husband for a golden necklace, Eriphyle sets aside her reason and brings death upon herself and her husband.

³⁶ For more on the liminal space that Atalanta holds between the masculine and feminine, with particular attention to the previously mentioned rites of passage, see Barringer (1996): 50ff.

³⁷ For more on female "greed motif" and its relation to the myth of Eriphyle, see Welch (2015): 25.

While women's susceptibility to male persuasion might be, in part, the reason for the princess' change of heart, I would argue that Medea is recalling this tradition of the greedy woman. In Medea's speech, she notes the delicacy of the dress (λεπτόν, 949) and the finely-wrought gold of the necklace (χρυσήλατον, 949), describing the alluring bait that she will use to cloud the princess' judgment and ensnare her. When Jason refuses the gift on the grounds that they are excessive, Medea reiterates the significance of the golden gifts, stating, "there is a saying that gold persuades even the gods. And gold is more powerful than a thousand words for mortals" (πείθειν δῶρα καὶ θεοὺς λόγος. | χρυσὸς δὲ κρείσσων μυρίων λόγων βροτοῖς, 964-65). Here Medea draws attention to the power of gold to persuade not only mortals, but also gods.

As is the case for the Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena, their temptation is not aroused by any golden apple, but an apple produced from a tree gifted to Hera by Gaia, suggesting that the apple has a divine origin. The apples used to distract Atalanta, gifts from Aphrodite, boast divine origin as well. So too is the "Hephaistian-wrought" necklace that attracts Eriphyle (ἠφαιστότευκτον ὄρμον, *Bibl.* iii 4.2), a divine creation with devastating consequences. Following in this tradition, Medea describes to the audience the divine origin of the gifts she intends to bestow upon the princess, emphasizing that the gifts come from Helios, the father of her father (κεκτημένη τε κόσμον ὄν ποθ' Ἥλιος | πατρὸς πατὴρ δίδωσιν ἐγγόνοισιν οἷς, 954-55). Medea understands that, as a woman, the princess will be unable to resist the temptation of the golden dress and diadem, especially if they should originate from a god, regardless of her predispositions towards Medea's children. Indeed this is precisely how the episode unfolds. Though the princess is angry towards Jason and the children, the Messenger explains that, "when she saw the ornament, she did not restrain herself, but she agreed with her husband in every

way” (ἡ δ’ ὡς ἐσεῖδε κόσμον, οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, |ἀλλ’ ἦνεσ’ ἀνδρὶ πάντα, 1156-57). Through Medea’s understanding of this stereotype, the princess has joined the ranks of mythical women who accept gold in exchange for their lives.

As Boedeker offers, “as a complement to her own effectiveness as a speaker, Medea herself is remarkably unresponsive to the speech of others.”³⁸ This certainly appears to be the case, for as mentioned before, the Chorus approaches Medea with the goal of drawing her to reason only to find themselves in turn persuaded by her speech to them beginning in line 213. The same holds true for her speech with Jason. Only on the surface does she concede a victory to him, while we as the audience understand her true motives for feigning submission. Now, having successfully persuaded both the Chorus and Jason through the exploitation of female stereotypes, Medea must face the only figure in the play who has the capability to persuade her.³⁹ Until this point in the play, immediately following the death of Creon and the princess, we have seen Medea waver in her decision to murder her children. This portrayal of Medea is crucial to the audience’s characterization of Medea. Consider again the characters of the *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon without conscience. Agamemnon murders his daughter, Iphigenia, with only very slight deliberation—though it could easily be argued that sacrificing his daughter comes at little to no personal cost at the time. With a simple “may all be well” (εὖ γὰρ εἴη 217), the critical Chorus explains how Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter. The result for both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra is an unsympathetic audience. After Clytemnestra murders

³⁸ Boedeker (1991): 101.

³⁹ “There is only one person who can and does pose a real obstacle to Medea’s plans, who can effectively confront her with argument—Medea herself.” Knox (1979): 299.

Agamemnon, bringing about an excessive, bloody justice, Orestes becomes the heroic figure through the act of matricide.

Euripides seems to go to great lengths to ensure that Medea does not find herself in a similar situation. Though she murders both of her children, one more child than Agamemnon, Medea is plagued by her decision to follow through with the murders, not entirely convinced that she will be able to carry out the infanticide. It is this indecision in Medea's mind that sets her apart from those in the *Agamemnon*. Having formulated her plan, she states, "I lament such a deed which must be done by me after that" (ὤμιωξα δ' οἷον ἔργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον | τοῦντεῦθεν ἡμῖν, 791). Perhaps this is a testament to Medea's female psychology, for, as Moss states, women are supposedly prone to emotional instability.⁴⁰ Clytemnestra, with her male heart, is not subject to wayward emotion. Though she is driven by her need for revenge and the love of her sacrificed daughter, Clytemnestra never waivers in her convictions for murder. Because of this change in Medea's spirit, the audience can sympathize with her in a way that they are unable to do with Clytemnestra.

The audience is not alone in recognizing this soft, feminine side in Medea, for she herself sees the very characteristics that she decried in her speech to the Chorus.

οὐ γὰρ γελάσθαι τλητὸν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν, φίλοι.
ἴτω
...
μηδεῖς με φαύλην κασθενὴ νομιζέτω
μηδ' ἠσθχαίαν, ἀλλὰ θατέρου τρόπου,
βαρεῖαν ἐχθροῖς καὶ φίλοισιν εὐμενῇ
τῶν γὰρ τοιοῦτων εὐκλεέστατος βίος. (797-810)

For it is not endurable to be mocked by enemies, friends.
Let it be.

...
Let no one see me as weak and feeble

⁴⁰ Moss (1988): 517.

nor at rest, but the other way,
as violent to my enemies and kind to my friends,
for the life of those people is most glorious.

Medea's refusal to be seen as "at rest" echoes her complaint to the Chorus that women are forced to remain inside and look at one soul alone (247). Similar to her speech with the Chorus, Medea uses martial language, but rather than inciting inaction, as is the case with the Chorus, Medea is inciting herself to action. Medea recalls the injustice that men achieve glory in battle while women must remain at home, without fame, enduring childbirth, which, according to Medea, is three times as deadly as battle (249-251). In this speech, she recognizes the traditional feminine stereotypes acting against her in her own psychology and, refusing to be likened to a weak woman, is able to use masculine, heroic reasoning to subvert them.⁴¹ Just as Medea is able to address feminine stereotypes with the Chorus and use masculine ideals to subvert them, Medea employs the same tactics against herself, with equally successful results. Even so, though she refuses to be seen as feminine in this passage, and though she uses these feminine stereotypes against herself to persuade herself to masculine action, she nevertheless embraces and exploits her female status, as well as the Chorus', to strengthen their solidarity to her purpose (Say nothing of my plans, if indeed you esteem well your mistress and you are born a woman. λέξις δὲ μηδὲν τῶν ἐμοὶ δεδογμένων, εἴπερ φρονεῖς εὖ δεσπότηαις γυνή τ' ἔφυς. 822-823).

Even having convinced herself in lines 797-810, Medea's resolve to murder her children falters. Again, if we compare Medea to figures like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, we see how vital this inconsistency in Medea's psychology is to her characterization. Unlike the previously

⁴¹ For more on this idea of "help your friends and hurt your enemies" and how Medea is invoking traditional heroic ideals, see Knox (1979): 300.

discussed passage where Medea waives only once in her decision of infanticide, we see in this next passage a repeated change of heart:

δράσω τάδ' (1019)

αἰαῖ· τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται,
γυναῖκες, ὄμμα φαίδρον ὡς εἶδον τέκνων.
οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην· χαιρέτω βουλευματα
τὰ πρόσθεν· (1042-45)

καίτοι τί πάσχω; βούλομαι γέλωτ' ὀφλεῖν
ἐχθροὺς μεθεῖσα τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀζημίους;
τολμητέον τάδ'· ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐμῆς κάκης,
τὸ καὶ προσέσθαι μαλθακοὺς λόγους φρενί. (1049-52)

ᾄ ᾄ·
μὴ δῆτα, θυμέ, μὴ σὺ γ' ἐργάσῃ τάδε·
ἔασον αὐτούς, ὦ τάλαν, φεῖσαι τέκνων·
ἐκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ζῶντες εὐφρανοῦσί σε. (1056-58)

μὰ τοὺς παρ' Ἄιδῃ νερτέρους ἀλάστορας,
οὔτοι ποτ' ἔσται τοῦθ' ὅπως ἐχθροῖς ἐγὼ
παῖδας παρήσω τοὺς ἐμοὺς καθυβρίσαι.
πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη καταθεῖν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χρῆ,
ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν.
πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κούκ ἐκφεύζεται· (1059-64)

I will do these things.

But oh! Why should I do them? My heart has left me, women, when I saw the shining eyes of my children. I cannot do it. Farewell previous plans.

And yet, why should I suffer this? Do I wish to incur their laughter having sent away my enemies unpunished? I must endure these things. But what a coward to allow soft words in my mind.

Oh! Do not, heart, do not perform such things. Allow them, oh wretch, allow the children to be spared. They will delight you living with you there.

No, by the infernal spirits in Hades, this will never be that I allow my children to be mocked by my enemies. It is entirely necessary to kill them. Since there is need, I will kill those whom I bore. At all events these things will be done and she will not escape.

In Medea's first monologue (797-810), we see an anguished Medea who realizes the consequences of her actions before she commits them. The realization of her pain causes her to change her mind, only later to curb her feminine emotions with masculine reason. In this passage, however, we see a much stronger feminine influence over Medea, for her feminine side

is able to retake control over Medea’s convictions and divert her from her plan (1049), and then does so again when her masculine nature attempts to regain control (1056). Medea invokes the heroic code of helping one’s friends and harming one’s enemies in order to brush aside her maternal influences. Her maternal arguments immediately appear “soft” and counter-rational to Medea’s concern about her reputation.⁴² As Boedeker explains, however, this heroic code is strained when she plans to bring harm to those dear to her in order to harm her enemy, Jason.⁴³ Her feminine side regains control, and it is only by invoking infernal spirits that she is successful in her mastery over her feminine side. Her language turns towards the practical when she begins to speak of need (ἀνάγκη) and necessity (χρή). From this moment forward, though she gazes at her children, noting their dear hands, mouth, and eyes (1070-72), and though she feels pity for them, she has mastered, though temporarily as she notes later (1248-49), her maternal instincts with her masculine resolve.

As Medea’s resolve shifts further into the masculine sphere, her rhetoric towards herself echoes the final lines of her address to the Chorus as she appeals for their silence. Compare the two speeches:

γυνή γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα
κακή τ’ ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾶν (263-64)

For in other ways a woman is full of fear and is a coward when she looks at battle or iron,

πάντως σφ’ ἀνάγκη κατθανεῖν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χρή,
ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν, οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν.
ἀλλ’ εἴ’ ὀπλίζου, καρδία. τί μέλλομεν
τὰ δεινὰ κάναγκαῖα μὴ πράσσειν κακά; (1240-43)

It is entirely necessary to kill them. And since there is need, I will kill them, those whom I bore. But come, arm yourself, heart. Why do we delay in doing these terrible and necessary evils?

⁴² Foley (2001): 247.

⁴³ Boedeker (1991): 107.

As Medea remarks to the Chorus, the traditional woman fears the sight of iron (σίδηρον) and avoids bloody confrontation (ἀλκὴν). However, towards the end of the play, Medea urges herself to cast aside any traditional feminine thought as she commands her heart to “arm itself.” Rather than drawing the distinction between the masculine and feminine realms of war and childbearing (250-51), the martial resonance of ὀπλίζου as she builds her courage to murder her children perversely blends together the two realms. Once again Medea speaks of necessity (ἀνάγκη) and need (χρῆ), echoing almost verbatim the words which gave her the strength to carry out her murderous plans against Creon and the princess (1062-63).⁴⁴

The audience sees in Medea a battle between her masculine φρόνη and her feminine θυμός. Through these final monologues, the audience witnesses how both the masculine and the feminine are present within Medea, one never fully conquering the other. Medea’s masterful understanding of the feminine allows her to manipulate the way others, both male and female, view her. By revealing the injustice of female stereotypes, Medea persuades the Chorus to share in her plight. By adopting the traditional role of the pathetic female, Medea is able to manipulate Jason into softening his anger against her, thus removing the sentence of exile from her children. Her understanding of women’s susceptibility to divinely wrought gold is what finally brings about the death of the princess. Finally, we see how Medea employs the same strategies that she uses with Jason against herself. And yet, Medea’s masterful manipulation extends not only to the characters within the play, but also to the audience. Though we the audience know that Medea will commit the despicable crime of regicide and are presented with the possibility, and finally

⁴⁴ It must be noted that lines 1061-62 have been bracketed in the Oxford Classical Text edition because of the similarity between these lines and Medea’s at 1240-41.

the reality, of the unspeakable crime of infanticide, we are unable to place Medea among the ranks of other mythic murderers. It is this blend of heroic and maternal influences that sets Medea apart from such figures as Agamemnon, who murders his daughter without a hint of remorse, or Clytemnestra, for whom we feel little pity when Orestes finally murders her. Medea's feminine nature is present on stage from the beginning. We are introduced to Medea, emotionally distraught, desiring death, and mourning the loss of her marriage, all characteristics of the tragic female. Where Clytemnestra is presented to the audience as masculine from the onset of the *Agamemnon*, Medea is presented as possessing violent, heroic characteristics, yet these characteristics are inseparable from Medea's emotional, feminine side. Though Medea's violent side emerges at the end of the play, we see coupled with it Medea's maternal side, ever present through the deep remorse for the death of her children. As Medea departs in her divine chariot, holding the bodies of her dead children, we cannot help but read with horrified admiration at the masterful way Medea has exploited these female stereotypes to achieve her goals.

At tibi...Memini: Reshaping Reputation in Ovid's Heroides

As I argue in Chapter One, Euripides' *Medea* is able to control the perceptions of both the play's internal and external audiences through her skillful manipulation of common stereotypes with the result that, though the audiences witness Medea's atrocious acts, the audiences do not view her as a villain. Although not all of these stereotypes directly apply to her, such as those within her speech to the chorus of Corinthian women (214ff), we nevertheless witness as she employs them to her benefit. The result of course is that in each scene Medea is able to manipulate her image in the eyes of the internal audience with the effect that each character feels *pathos* towards her. In the case of Euripides' *Medea*, evidence suggests that Medea's own hand in the infanticide was a Euripidean invention⁴⁵. At least for the initial viewers, the external audience's sympathy for Medea develops as the play progresses with the result that, when the audience witnesses Medea's infanticide, they do so having already established the idea of Medea as victim. Rather than viewing Medea as a monstrous villain, they instead perceive her as an abandoned woman who is left with little alternative but to murder her children.

Of course, 500 years have passed between Euripides' *Medea* and Ovid's *Heroides*, with a number of reinterpretations of the myth, most prominently, Apollonius' *Argonautica*. Certainly it would be impossible to argue that any reader of the ancient world would have approached Ovid's

⁴⁵ Boedeker (1997): 127.

Heroides without previous Medeas in mind, most specifically the Medea whose own hand is the instrument in the infanticide. The complicated question then becomes how Ovid should fashion his Medea out of this deep literary history of blood, magic, betrayal, and deception. How does Ovid's Medea shape her perception in the mind of the reader so that she captures the reader's sympathy? As I argued in Chapter One, Euripides' Medea manipulates her image through a series of persuasive dialogues, explaining her plight and engaging the characters on stage. Ovid's Medea, now transformed into a letter writer, lacks the opportunity for an exchange of dialogue and therefore must resort to persuasive writing, revealing to the reader only her inner dialogue. This chapter will analyze the 12th letter of the *Heroides*, Medea's letter to Jason, and by doing so, it will demonstrate how Ovid situates his Medea within the framework of the *Heroides*, looking specifically at letters 6, 7, 11, and 13 (Hypsipyle to Jason, Dido to Aeneas, Canace to Macareus, and Laodamia to Protesilaus). This chapter will also analyze the Ovidian Medea's position in relation to its most prominent source text, Euripides' *Medea*. By analyzing Medea's letter in relation to both its tragic predecessor and within its context in a collection of letters, this chapter will demonstrate that Ovid has fashioned his Medea in such a way as to maximize her sympathy to the reader, both by omitting well-known episodes from her story and by surrounding her letter with letters written by heroines who have experiences similar to Medea's story.

In her essay "The Metamorphosis of Ovid's Medea," Carole Newlands studies Ovid's depiction of Medea in his *Metamorphoses*. In particular Newlands notes how Ovid frames the story of Medea (7.1-424) "with other myths about women and marriage," citing Procne

(6.424-676), Scylla (8.1-151), Procris (7.694-862), and Orythia (6.677-721).⁴⁶ Each of these myths represents an element of Medea's mythology, specifically those elements intrinsic to Medea's infamy: her betrayal of her father and murder of her children. Due to the experiences shared between these women and Medea, Newlands argues that each woman's story invariably shapes the reader's understanding of Medea within the *Metamorphoses*. Newlands explains that Ovid "offers not one Medea, but different figures of a single type—a woman who is so driven by passion that she oversteps cultural conventions and acts independently of her traditional male guardian."⁴⁷ Each woman in the episodes surrounding Medea's exemplifies a single crime familiar from the mythology of Medea. Procne's tale contains the gruesome and bloody infanticide in retaliation for her sister's rape and her husband's infidelity. However, rather than taking revenge upon the mistress figure, Philomela, Procne instead directs her wrath towards her husband. The story ends as Procne is transformed into a bird, forever bearing a red mark as a reminder of her son's slaughter. For Scylla, the crime represented is the betrayal of her father for the sake of a foreign lover, though instead of sailing away with the foreign man, she is transformed into a bird as punishment for her betrayal. In both of these cases, the reader sees treacherous women who are punished severely for their crimes.

The effects of Ovid's organization surrounding the story of Medea are twofold. Primarily, when the reader reaches the story of Medea, he/she expects Medea to receive a treatment similar to that of other infamous women in the *Metamorphoses*. Having showcased nearly every crime committed by the women surrounding her story, the reader expects Medea to

⁴⁶ Newlands (1997): 180.

⁴⁷ Newlands (1997): 181.

be punished in a manner similar to Procne and Scylla. However, Ovid disappoints this expectation, choosing not to follow the pattern of metamorphosis he has established for Procne and Scylla; instead, following the traditional ending set forth by Euripides, Ovid presents the reader with a Medea who is carried off by dragons (*ablata draconibus* 7.398). Additionally, due to Ovid's embedding of Medea's tale between those of Procne and Scylla, Medea's crimes become less sensational as the reader becomes desensitized through reading the stories of the surrounding women. Perhaps Ovid's treatment of Medea in the *Metamorphoses* does not evoke the reader's sympathy on the same level as we have seen in Euripides' characterization of Medea. Nevertheless, the Ovidian Medea's escape from punishment and the reduction in shock value regarding her crimes cause Medea at the very least to transcend the reader's negative expectations.

While Newlands focuses primarily on familial relationships, I will apply her approach to Ovid's treatment of Medea beyond the *Metamorphoses*. This chapter will demonstrate how Ovid frames his Medea within the *Heroides* in a manner similar to his *Metamorphoses*. Rather than setting Medea within the context of married women with complicated family dynamics, in the *Heroides*, Ovid embeds his Medea among other references of infanticide. Furthermore, we can apply Newlands' definition of the "single type" of Medea, that is a woman driven by passion and overstepping her bounds, equally to Ovid's Hypsipyle in the *Heroides*. Just as the women in the *Metamorphoses* prime the reader with negative expectations of Medea, so too does Hypsipyle's portrayal of Medea in letter 6 prepare the reader to encounter the stereotypical Medea in letter 12. Of course Ovid, true to his nature, defies the reader's expectations when he (re)introduces Medea in letter 12.

As we will see in Medea's letter, the initial verb of Hypsipyle's address to Jason sets the tone for the remainder of the letter. Upon examination of the other letters in the *Heroides*, it is clear that a heroine opening her letter with a verb whose influence is carried throughout the remainder of letter is somewhat rare. Consider the opening line of Penelope's letter, the first letter in the corpus: *haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixee* (Your Penelope *sends* these words to you, while you are delayed 1.1). This formulaic greeting in one iteration or another from the heroine to her hero can be found in the majority of the letters. Salutations tend to center around the sending of the letter, as is the case with Penelope, or focus on the letter's reception by the hero. The letters of Briseis (*quam legis*, 3.1), Phaedra (*salutem | mittit amazonio Cressa pulla* 4.1-2), Oenone (*Perlegis?* 5.1), Deianira (*gratuor* 9.1), Canace (*dextra tenet calnum* 11.3), Laodamia (*mittit...salutem* 13.1) all follow this pattern. As is the case with both Medea and Hypsipyle, however, their letter's introduction holds greater significance for the tone of the letter. For Medea, the prominent force of her letter, introduced by the verb *memini* (12.1), is driven by her recollection of past events.⁴⁸ Medea makes clear to the reader that her letter will set the record straight, so to speak, and Medea's memory features prominently throughout the letter. Hypsipyle introduces her salutation with much less force than Medea, opting instead for the passive *diceris* (6.2). Though less forceful than Medea's introduction, the undercurrent of passivity from the verb *diceris* is maintained throughout the entirety of the letter.

Contrary to Hypsipyle's assertion otherwise,⁴⁹ Jason has decided that Hypsipyle is undeserving of a letter, and because of his neglect, Hypsipyle must rely on rumor and hearsay to

⁴⁸ Compare Euripides' Medea who states that she will recount the events from the beginning, reminding Jason that all the Greeks are aware of the past events (ἐκ τῶν δὲ πρώτων πρώτον ἄρξομαι λέγειν: | ἔσωσά σ', ὡς ἴσασι τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι. *Med.* 475-476)

⁴⁹ *Hypsipyle missa digna salute fui*, I, Hypsipyle, was worthy of a sent greeting, (6.8)

learn about him.⁵⁰ As Hypsipyle has no access to direct information, the reader, too, must learn of Jason's deeds indirectly (6.10ff). In her analysis of letter 3, *Briseis to Achilles*, Sara Lindheim notes that epistolarity offers the heroine the opportunity to create the illusion that the absent lover is nearer by inserting into the letter the absent lover's words, thus engaging in a dialogue rather than a monologue. However, Lindheim also notes that this method can bring about the opposite effect in that it can "underscore the monologic structure of an epistle and the absence that makes it necessary to write."⁵¹ Yet due to Jason's forgetfulness, Hypsipyle can only refer to Jason's actions indirectly through the words of an anonymous informer, further emphasizing Jason's absence from Hypsipyle. In her first telling of the events at Colchis, Hypsipyle offers only vague details of this *fama*. Unable to identify the agent behind the tasks, she merely states:

*Cur mihi fama prior quam littera nuntia venit
 isse sacros Marti sub iuga panda boves,
 seminibus iactis segetes adolesse virorum
 inque necem dextra non eguisse tua,* (6.9-12)⁵²

Why does rumor come to me earlier than a letter with word that the sacred bulls of Mars went under the bent yoke, the crops of men were burned after the seeds were thrown and they did not need your right hand in their death.

Howard Jacobson interprets Hypsipyle's elision of Jason's hand in the tasks as her merely "wielding a sharp pen," unwilling to assign credit to Jason because "he deserves no credit."⁵³

⁵⁰ *fama...venit* (6.9)

⁵¹ Lindheim (2003): 54-55.

⁵² All Latin text for *Heroides* 6, 7, and 11 comes from Knox (1995). All Latin text for *Heroides* 12 and 13 comes from the Loeb edition. Knox excludes *Heroides* 12 from his commentary presumably because he does not believe letter 12 to be authentically Ovidian. For Knox's argument regarding the authenticity of *Heroides* 12, see Knox (1986). For a response to Knox's claim and an argument for the authenticity of *Heroides* 12, see Hinds (1993). I concur with Hinds' argument for Ovidian authorship.

⁵³ Jacobson (1974): 100.

However, while Hypsipyle's wrath in this letter cannot be denied, I suggest another reading here: because Hypsipyle has heard only a rumor (*fama*) of the accounts, her information is incomplete.

Interestingly, Medea begins her account of the events in a nearly identical manner, choosing also to begin her account with a form of *ire*. As if in response to Hypsipyle's letter, Medea begins with the same verb, *isset*, choosing to relate the events in her own words rather than indirectly and going even further than Hypsipyle by immediately identifying the agent behind the tasks:

*isset anhelatos non praemedicatus in ignes
immemor Aesonides oraque adusta boum;
semina iecisset totidem quot semina et hostes
ut caderet cultu cultor ab ipse suo!* (12.15-18)

That forgetful son of Aeson would have gone unannointed through the exhaled fires and the scorched faces of the bulls; he would have thrown the seeds, as many enemies as there were seeds, so that the sower would have fallen by his own sowing.

I will return to Medea's responses to Hypsipyle's letter later in the chapter, but for now the important point to consider is that Hypsipyle's letter exists in rumor; all of her points find their foundation in murky half-truths. This contrast in speech between the two characters indicates the extent to which Hypsipyle relies on the words of others to form her perceptions, perceptions invariably colored by her own prejudices. Hypsipyle even laments the fact that she cannot learn the details of such unbelievable deeds from Jason himself and must rely on others.⁵⁴ It is imperative to notice that, along with Jason's incredible accomplishments, when Hypsipyle describes Medea, she does so not from first hand accounts, but rather from *fama*. Whether Hypsipyle has heard of Medea from the Thessalian stranger (6.23ff), or, as Jacobson suggests, Hypsipyle has actually read Euripides' *Medea*, the reader must keep in mind that Hypsipyle has

⁵⁴ *o ego si possem timide credentibus | ista 'ipse mihi scripsit' dicere, quanta forem!* Oh, if I could say to those who believe such things timidly, 'He wrote this himself,' how happy I would be! (6.15-16)

never actually met Medea.⁵⁵ Upon finishing *Heroides* 6, the reader only has a vague, though notably fantastic, impression of Medea as the result of Medea's *fama*, which primes the reader to encounter another, yet far more sinister, version of Euripides' Medea later in the collection.

Medea has the sole privilege among all the heroines of appearing twice within the corpus of the *Heroides*. Yet, although the reader obtains an extensive portrait of Medea through Hypsipyle's letter, the reader does not formally meet Medea until *Heroides* 12. The opening lines of *Heroides* 12 form the reader's first-hand impression of Medea, contrasting starkly with the portrayal offered by Hypsipyle. Rather than seeing the barbarian poisoner (*barbara veneficia*, 6.19) who robs graves and curses people with waxen figures (6.89-91), the reader instead meets a Medea who is familiar with great suffering and who is hardly in command of her own fate:

*At tibi Colchorum, memini, regina vacavi,
ars mea cum peteres ut tibi ferret opem.
Tunc quae dispensant mortalia fila sorores
debuerant fusos evoluisse meos.
Tum potui Medea mori bene! Quidquid ab illo
produxi vitam tempore, poena fuit.* (12.1-6)

But for you, I remember, the queen of Colchis made time when you asked that my skills bring you help. Then the mortal threads which the sisters dispense should have completed my spindle. Then I, Medea, could have died well. From that moment, whatever life I led has been a punishment.

As I noted earlier, Medea begins her letter not with the salutation traditionally found in the *Heroides* but instead with the verb *memini*. The prominent placement of this verb in the first line, metrically occupying the middle position of the third and fourth feet, suggests that Medea's

⁵⁵ Jacobson (1974): 103. On how Hypsipyle learns of Medea, Verducci (1985): 59 sarcastically offers, "one is almost tempted to imagine that Hypsipyle's Thessalian informant either spoke far more voluminously on the topic of her Colchian rival than she claims he did, or that the same informant lightened his equipage by leaving behind him several volumes of Greek literature."

memory will be front and center in her account of the events surrounding Jason and that she will control the discourse.⁵⁶

As Fulkerson has noted, the Ovidian Medea models herself on the Vergilian Dido, who in turn has been modeled upon the Euripidean and Apollonian Medeas.⁵⁷ Not only does Medea draw attention to Jason's role in her memory (*tibi*), Ovid's Medea also evokes Dido. The reader, having just encountered Dido a few letters prior to Medea's, might recognize an echo of the opening of *Aeneid* Book IV in Medea's first words: *at regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura* (*Aen.* 4.1). In the *Aeneid*, the reader observes how Dido is in constant opposition to the gods' plans and Aeneas' fate, which is indicated in the text by Dido's introduction following *at regina* (*but the queen*).⁵⁸ Fulkerson and Lindheim both note that within the *Heroides* the vocabulary shared among the letters serves a distinctive purpose. Fulkerson suggests that the reason derives from the idea that each of the heroines is involved in the "same authorial circle," in that each heroine has read the letters of the others.⁵⁹ Lindheim suggests that the repetitive nature of the letters causes the reader "to wrestle with a general and overwhelming sense that somehow she has heard it all before."⁶⁰ I offer that, because of Medea's choice to open her letter with *at...regina*, we should also keep Vergil's Dido in mind in addition to the other heroines in the corpus when we begin her letter. Though Dido's actions are in direct opposition to Aeneas' fate, the reader cannot depart from Book IV without feeling overwhelming *pathos* for Dido. Of course, their encounter

⁵⁶ Fulkerson (2005): 44 too, notes that Medea's use of the verb *memini* could suggest that Medea plans to give the "correct" version of the account as a response to Hypsipyle's letter.

⁵⁷ Fulkerson (2005): 4

⁵⁸ For more on the structural significance of *at regina* in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, see Quinn (1965).

⁵⁹ Fulkerson (2005): 4.

⁶⁰ Lindheim (2003): 4.

does not result in equal consequences: Aeneas departs to found Rome and Dido perishes from a death undeserved.⁶¹ Like Dido, Medea is a subject of fate (12.3-4), but her encounter with Jason leaves her only wishing for death rather than hastening it (12.5). Returning to Fulkerson's and Lindheim's observations surrounding shared experiences and repeated vocabulary, by implicitly referring to Dido in her opening lines, Medea is able to evoke the sympathy that the reader feels for Vergil's Dido in Book IV. The reader's recent reunion with Dido in *Heroides* 7 would only act to compound this shared sympathy.

Unsurprising for the reader who has Euripides in mind, the first thing that Medea remembers is Jason, referred to with the pronoun *tibi*. By using this pronoun twice in the opening distich, Medea draws attention to Jason's role within her memory prior to revealing the contents of the letter. Before the reader even encounters the details of Medea's current sufferings, Ovid's Medea emphasizes from the beginning of the letter who is at fault, a choice that is reminiscent of the opening speech of Euripides' *Medea*. Moreover, the balance of the two second person pronouns surrounding the first person verb *vacavi* and the possessive pronoun *mea* suggests that, at least for Medea, this letter is about reciprocity. Medea frames her rhetoric with first and second person verbs and pronouns in order to surround the contents of her memory, and by extension the letter, with the relationship that she shared with Jason. Echoing Euripides, Medea follows her memory of *tibi* with the accusation that what followed Jason's arrival to Colchis was a fate worse than death. Unlike the Dido of Vergil, who is able to escape her suffering through suicide and to rejoin her deceased husband, Medea has been forced to carry

⁶¹ *nec fato merita* (*Aen.* 4.96)

out the remainder of her life in *poena* (12.6).⁶² A reader familiar with the story of Medea should recall that her inability to follow the paths taken by other women is nothing new, as her marginality frequently plays a role within her rhetoric. Recalling Medea's speech to the chorus of Corinthian women in Euripides' play, Medea argues that, because they are all women, they suffer singularly, and yet Medea's suffering does not apply equally to them.⁶³ Just as with Euripides' Medea, whose fate must always extend beyond the bounds of the women in the play, so too does the fate of Ovid's Medea extend beyond that of the other heroines in the *Heroides*.

Unlike Hypsipyle, whose letter largely features Medea's role in Jason's infidelity, Medea seems unconcerned with a third party, ignoring any possibility of another woman's influence. Naturally, Medea is not ignorant of Jason's new bride. However, where Hypsipyle seems preoccupied with Medea's role in Jason's infidelity,⁶⁴ Medea focuses not on Jason's predisposition to persuasion but rather his aptitude in the art of persuading others and perhaps his most damning flaw: his failing memory.⁶⁵ As I mention earlier, in what seems to be a direct response to Hypsipyle's incomplete account of Jason's stay in Colchis (6.9ff), Medea writes the events as she remembers them, using the same verb in the same metrical position (*isset* 12.15). In her account, Medea assigns agency to the events in Colchis to *inmemor Aesonides*, the

⁶² Jacobson (1974): 112 notes how *poena* almost never lacks a punitive notion before Seneca, suggesting here that Medea "for the crimes that she has perpetrated, recognizes the misery she has experienced as deserved recompense." However, it must be noted that Jacobson's analysis of Medea seems to be colored by an intense hatred of the character whose tone is remarkably evocative of Hippolytus from Euripides (*Hipp.* 616ff). While I am not disagreeing with his claim that *poena* has a punitive sense, I suggest that, based on 12.120 (*tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis ego!*), the *poena* Medea is referencing occurs in line 2, namely that she offered Jason *opem*.

⁶³ ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κάμ' ἦκει λόγος (*Med.* 252)

⁶⁴ *scilicet ut tauros, ita te iuga ferre coegit*, (6.97)

⁶⁵ Verducci (1985): 58 notes the irony surrounding Hypsipyle's Medea: "if, as Hypsipyle claims, Medea rules Jason, she dominates Hypsipyle's thoughts no less, almost entirely effacing the presence of Jason in the poem."

forgetful son of Aeson (12.16), drawing attention to the imbalance between her relationship to memory and his inability to remember their past. By referring to this imbalance, Medea also brings to light the disparity of their past—where Medea’s memory of Jason brings her to long for death and to regret her inability to die, Jason’s lack of memory of Medea prevents him from realizing that he would have died had she not offered her assistance.⁶⁶ Here Medea reminds Jason, as well as the reader, of a bitter reality of their relationship. Without Jason, Medea would be alive and well as the *Colchorum regina* (12.1); without Medea, Jason undoubtedly would have perished. For the reader, the confrontation of this harsh reality at the beginning of the poem presents Medea foremost as a victim, one whose fate was removed from her control as she saved the life of a man who is forgetful (12.16), perfidious (12.19), and wicked (12.19). Just as she is in the Nurse’s speech in the opening of Euripides’ *Medea*, Ovid’s Medea is initially painted as a victim before her crimes are revealed, preventing the reader from viewing Medea simply as villain *par excellence*. If the reader approaches Medea in *Heroides* 12 with the expectation of encountering Hypsipyle’s Medea from *Heroides* 6, the reader will find a Medea who disappoints his/her expectations on every level.

In accordance with the letter’s fixation on memory, Medea begins her recollection of the events at Colchis by asserting her position within the memory with the emphatic pronoun *ego*.

*Tunc ego te vidi, tunc coepi scire, quid esses;
 illa fuit mentis prima ruina meae.
 et vidi et perii; nec notis ignibus arsi,
 ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos.
 et formosus eras, et me mea fata trahebant;
 abstulerant oculi lumina nostra tui.
 perfide, sensiti—quis enim bene celat amorem?
 eminent indicio prodita flamma suo.* (12.31-38)

⁶⁶ *ut caderet cultu cultor ab ipse suo! | quantum perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset, | dempta forent capiti quam mala multa meo!* (12.18-20)

And then I saw you, then I began to know what you were; that was the first downfall of my mind.
I saw you and I was ruined; and I burned with unfamiliar fire just as pine torches burn for the
great gods. And you were beautiful, and my fate dragged me under; your eyes had stolen mine.
You felt it, traitor—for who hides love well? The treacherous flame shines with its own proof.

Unlike Hypsipyle, whose indirect account of Jason's tasks is rooted in *fama*, Medea provides her account first hand, deploying an abundance of first person verbs not only to emphasize the role she played in his salvation, but also to indicate the negative effects her aid had on her own life (*vidi, coepi, perii, arsi*). As with the opening lines of the letter, Medea juxtaposes her own role against that of Jason's (*ego te vidi*), narrowing the scope of her memory and excluding the role of any external party. By retaining the active voice of the verbs, Medea reclaims control over the memory. Though she suffered because of his actions, nevertheless, he is still the object of her gaze. The emphasis that Medea places on sight—occurring no less than four times within this passage (*vidi, 12.31; vidi, 12.33; oculi, 12.36; lumina, 12.36*)—becomes even more important when the reader takes into consideration Hypsipyle's accusations against Medea:

*nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina novit
diraque cantata pabula falce metit,* (6.83-84)

She is pleasing neither in her face nor deeds, but she knows spells and with an enchanted scythe she cuts down the dreadful herbs.

As Hypsipyle would have the reader believe, without Medea's knowledge of magic and love spells, Jason would never have preferred Medea over Hypsipyle, for Medea lacks both beauty and merit. Knox interprets the *carmina* in this passage as simply referring to the spells that Medea uses to subdue the sleepless dragon rather than as a direct reference to Medea bewitching Jason.⁶⁷ Perhaps this is the case. However, with Hypsipyle's claim that Medea lacks beauty, a reference to her knowledge of spells takes a new meaning if we consider that Hypsipyle

⁶⁷ Knox(1995): 188.

may be referring to love spells.⁶⁸ Even supposing that Hypsipyle does not at this point have love spells directly in mind, it is certainly in her mind later in the letter when she refers to Jason as *demens Colchisque ablate venenis* (6.131). In what seems to be a direct response to Hypsipyle's accusation, Medea indicates that it is she who suffers upon seeing Jason (*perii*, 33).⁶⁹ It is not Jason, but Medea who undergoes a change in mental state upon introduction (*coepi scire, quid esses*, 12.31). And it is Medea, not Jason, who is forced to submit to her passion (*et me mea fata trahebant; | abstulerant oculi lumina nostra tui*, 12.35-36). Here Medea indicates the irony of the situation. If the reader accepts that Ovid's Medea exists within the tradition where Medea is skilled at enchanting others through the power of her eyes, it is unexpected that through her own eyes Medea falls victim to Jason's spell. Moreover, as Jacobson notes, Medea's choice of *abstulerant* seems to recall directly Hypsipyle's use of *ablate* in her accusation at 6.131.⁷⁰

As dramatically different as Medea's portrayal is between *Heroides* 6 and 12, so too is the similarity of both writers' portrayal of Jason. Within the *Heroides*, Jason is given direct speech twice: first in *Heroides* 6 and again in *Heroides* 12. Both instances of Jason's speech serve an identical purpose, that is to provide an exact account of his promises to each woman and to highlight the element of betrayal. If the *Heroides* are marked by a slew of men who abandon their heroines, Jason has the singular honor of appearing twice, painting him as a serial offender. The similarities between Jason's two farewell speeches enhance the status of both Hypsipyle and Medea as a victim. Jason speaks the following words in *Heroides* 6:

⁶⁸ For Medea's ability to enchant others by gazing into their eyes, see Jacobson (1974): 115.

⁶⁹ Fulkerson (2005): 50 argues that Medea's uses of *igitur* and variations of *meritum* later in the poem (12.21, 82, 163, 192) also suggest that Medea is responding directly to Hypsipyle's accusations at 6.83-84.

⁷⁰ Jacobson (1974): 115.

*Abstrahor, Hypsipyle; sed dent modo fata recursus,
vir tuus hinc abeo, vir tibi semper ero.
quod tamen e nobis gravida celatur in alvo,
vivat, et eiusdem simus uterque parens.* (6.59-62)

I am taken, Hypsipyle; but may the fates just grant my return, I am leaving here as your husband, I will always be a husband to you. Nevertheless what is hidden from us in your pregnant womb, let it live, and may both of us be its parent.

Here Jason indicates the tone of his speech with the passive verb *abstrahor*. According to Jason, he is but a victim of fate, a notion that he reinforces with his following words as he wishes that the fates might grant his return. Though Jason must depart, he professes what Hypsipyle wants to hear, namely that he will be forever hers and his absence is only momentary as he will return to raise “whatever is hidden” in her womb as a co-parent.⁷¹ By framing his declaration with tears, Jason successfully persuades Hypsipyle that his words are sincere (*inplesti lacrimis talia verba suis*, 6.58; *et lacrimis in falsa cadentibus ora*, 6.63).

The reader sees similar elements in Jason’s speech to Medea, though with Medea, his speech is four times in length (16 lines) than his speech to Hypsipyle. The disparity in length between Jason’s two speeches suggests a few possibilities for interpretation. Jason’s request from Medea undeniably holds more gravity than his request from Hypsipyle. The purpose of Jason’s speech to Hypsipyle seems only to be to soothe her distressed spirit and therefore requires little effort on his part aside from a few words mixed with tears. From Medea’s perspective, however, Jason’s purpose is to safeguard his life, and the intensity of the request is reflected in the length of the speech. Jason’s attention to the amount of effort needed to accomplish his persuasion indicates that he is accomplished at deception. Just as Hypsipyle cannot be held at fault for falling for his *falsa ora* (6.58), neither can Medea be viewed as guilty

⁷¹ Verducci (1985): 62 notes here that Jason’s marriage to Hypsipyle is purely an Ovidian invention.

for believing a request made from an *infido ore* (12.72). The second purpose for featuring a longer speech in *Heroides* 12 is that Jason's words, though given in direct speech, are a product of Medea's memory, the driving force behind *Heroides* 12. By ascribing a direct quotation to Jason rather than simply paraphrasing his words as she does in Euripides' *Medea*, Ovid's Medea assigns equal validity to his words as she does in her own first person narrative of her letter. If the reader accepts that Medea's letter serves two distinct purposes—consoling Medea by upbraiding Jason (*est aliqua ingrato meritum exprobrare voluptas*, 12.21), as well offering a rebuttal against Hypsipyle's accusations in *Heroides* 6—Medea's recollection of Jason's longer speech in *Heroides* 12 seems to serve as a response to Hypsipyle as well. Jason's deception of Hypsipyle is unfortunate, but for Medea, his deception of her is all the more significant. If Hypsipyle's account of Jason's betrayal garners for her the reader's sympathy, then Medea's longer account of Jason's betrayal must function similarly.

Medea sets the scene of her account first by describing the location of her encounter with Jason (12.67-70) and then by describing Jason's entrance (12.72). On the surface, Medea's description serves only to establish a context for the reader of Medea's memory; however, Medea then reveals the true motive behind her ekphrasis. Medea's portrayal of herself throughout the letter serves to establish herself as *memor* in contrast to *inmemor Aesonides* (12.16). She remembers the events clearly, as she has just demonstrated, whereas Jason seems to have forgotten entirely his oath to her, immediately placing Medea in the authoritative position.⁷² She then recalls Jason's words verbatim:

*Ius tibi et arbitrium nostrae fortuna salutis
tradidit, inque tua est vitaque morsque manu.*

⁷² *noscis? an exciderunt mecum loca?* (12.71)

*perdere posse sat est, siquem iuuet ipsa potestas;
 sed tibi servatus gloria maior ero.
 per mala nostra precor, quorum potes esse levamen,
 per genus, et numen cuncta videntis avi,
 per triplicis vultus arcanaque sacra Dianae,
 et si forte aliquos gens habet ista deos—
 O virgo, miserere mei, miserere meorum;
 effice me meritis tempus in omne tuum!*
(12.73-82)

Fortune has brought this right and judgment of my safety to you, and my life and death are in your hand. It is enough to be able to destroy, if such power pleases anyone; but I will be a greater glory for you if I am saved. I beg you by my misfortunes, of which you are able to be a solace, by my race, and the power of your grandfather seeing all, by the triple face and sacred rites of Diana, and if by chance that race has other gods— oh maiden, pity me, pity my men; with your kindness, make me yours for all time.

As Jason does in his speech to Hypsipyle, here too he emphasizes his passivity to Medea. With Hypsipyle, Jason is a victim of *fata* (6.59), where with Medea, he is subject to *fortuna*. The words that Euripides' Medea only alludes to, namely the oath that Jason swears to the gods to remain faithful to her, become manifest in the *Heroides*. Through the letter of the Ovidian Medea, the reader encounters Jason's words directly, thereby dispelling any disbelief the reader might have carried over from Euripides' *Medea*. In what Jason tells Hypsipyle in two lines (6.59-60) Medea expands into ten lines as she recalls the depth of Jason's vows before he swears to be Medea's for all time. Medea concludes Jason's words with claims that should immediately recall to the reader Medea's accusations from Euripides:

ὄρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις, οὐδ' ἔχω μαθεῖν
 ἢ θεοὺς νομίζεις τοὺς τότε οὐκ ἄρχειν ἔτι,
 ἢ καινὰ κείσθαι θέσμι' ἀνθρώποις τὰ νῦν,
 ἐπεὶ σύννοισθά γ' εἰς ἔμ' οὐκ εὖορκος ὄν.
 φεῦ δεξιὰ χεῖρ, ἧς σὺ πόλλ' ἐλαμβάνου
 (Med. 492-496)

Faith in your oaths is gone, I am not able to know whether you think those gods no longer rule or that new laws now hold for men, since you know that you are no longer faithful to me. Oh, my right hand, which you often took...

Unlike in Euripides' *Medea* the reader has a chance to read the oath verbatim from Jason's mouth through the memory of Ovid's Medea. In *Heroides* 12, the reader learns that Jason clasps

Medea's right hand after swearing by the gods of his people and hers that he will forever be faithful. As a result of this altered perspective, Ovid's Medea receives the validation that she lacks in Euripides' variation of the myth; the reader needs no longer simply rely on her claim that Jason violated his oaths to the gods, for Medea allows the reader to share her memory of the event.

Either Jason employs the same tactic that proved so successful with Hypsipyle against Medea, or Medea has crafted his words with Hypsipyle's letter in relief. In either scenario, it is Jason, not his heroine, who appears at fault—though according to Medea, in believing Jason, she is the one who has committed the crime (*meritas subeamus in alto | tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis ego!* 12.119-120). No two lines elicit scholars' predisposition towards hatred for Medea more clearly than these do. Arthur Palmer refers to this couplet as “frigid and absurd...laughable,” suggesting that if Ovid had indeed written *credulitatis*, then “verily bonus Ovidius dormitat.”⁷³ Jacobson follows Palmer, not taking issue with the wording, but nevertheless agreeing that Medea's statement is nothing less than absurd.⁷⁴ The difficulty that scholars have with these lines seems to revolve around their wanting and needing Medea to be, as Jacobson refers to her, a “dastardly villain.”⁷⁵ Here Medea admits to the role she played in her brother's death, yet for Medea, the guilt of the crime should not be ascribed equally. However, scholars' reluctance to accept Medea's words as sincere here illustrates readers' preconceived

⁷³ Palmer (1967): 395. Here Palmer suggests that Ovid perhaps had written *crudilitatis* rather than *credulitatis*, and *credulitatis* is simply a result of scribal error. For an argument against Palmer's reading of *crudilitatis*, see Verducci (1985): 69.

⁷⁴ Jacobson (1974): 113 states, “It is the very triviality of the remark following hard upon her admission of fratricide that makes the juxtaposition so horrifying. To be so concerned with her own image, her pride, her power when she recognizes herself as a fratricide brands her character and her values in the most sinister and blackest tones.”

⁷⁵ Jacobson (1974): 113.

perceptions of Medea and their unwillingness to see Medea as anything other than the vindictive fratricide later turned infanticide featured at the end of Euripides' *Medea*. However, I suggest that Ovid is keenly aware of any prejudices that readers bring with them when they approach *Heroides* 12 and that perhaps Ovid intends lines 119-120 to serve the purpose of defying readers' expectations. If the reader assumes that he/she will encounter Hypsipyle's Medea, where Hypsipyle seems to model her vision of Medea from the final lines of Euripides' play, then this distich seems incongruous with the myth, as both Jacobson and Palmer observe. And yet, for those readers who have a familiarity with Euripides' version of the myth, this sentiment expressed by the Ovidian Medea is quite in line with Euripides' tragedy. The first 1135 lines of Euripides' play serve to paint Medea as a sympathetic figure, a character who deserves pity as a result of Jason's maltreatment. Euripides' audience is never ignorant of Medea's past crimes, but nevertheless the audience understands why she committed them and moreover the audience understands that, were it not for Jason's influence over Medea, she never would have committed such crimes. The opening scene of the play features the Nurse recounting Medea's infamous regicide (*Med.* 9-10), yet the Nurse quickly shifts the blame to Jason and relates the suffering that Medea has endured as a result of his treachery (*Med.* 20-23). The audience witnesses a similar pattern when Medea confronts Jason for his crimes:

νῦν ποῖ τράπωμαι; πότερα πρὸς πατρός δόμους,
οὓς σοὶ προδοῦσα καὶ πάτραν ἀφικόμην;
ἢ πρὸς ταλαίνας Πελιάδας; καλῶς γ' ἂν οὖν
δέξαιντό μ' οἴκοις ὧν πατέρα κατέκτανον.
ἔχει γὰρ οὕτω· τοῖς μὲν οἴκοθεν φίλοις
ἐχθρὰ καθέστηχ', οὓς δέ μ' οὐκ ἐχρῆν κακῶς
δρᾶν, σοὶ χάριν φέρουσα πολεμίους ἔχω. (Med. 502-08)

Where should I turn now? Either to my father's home, betraying it and my father for you when I came here? Or to the wretched daughters of Pelias? Indeed they will receive me well in their home whose father I killed. For this is how it is: I have made myself hated at home to my friends, whom there was no need for me to treat terribly, doing it for your sake I have made enemies.

Medea admits to Jason that she betrayed her father and her fatherland, but just as the Ovidian Medea reminds Jason that her crimes were completed on his behalf (*pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens*, 12.132), she quickly reminds him that she did it for his sake (σοὶ, 502). After recalling how she murdered the daughters of Pelias and made enemies of her friends, Euripides' Medea again asserts that it was "for you" (σοὶ, 508). With each account of Medea's crimes, Medea skillfully entwines Jason's role within them, ensuring that she is never seen as the sole perpetrator and therefore never receives the entirety of the guilt.

In Euripides' play, the death of Pelias plays a prominent role in the audience's characterization of Medea. Unsurprisingly, Ovid's Medea goes even further by mentioning the murder of her brother at her hands (*quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere destra*, 12.115). Though in many variations of the myth Medea's brother is murdered, as Jacobson notes, Ovid decidedly deviates from previous versions, namely that of Apollonius.⁷⁶ In the *Argonautica*, Apollonius assigns the murder of Apsyrtus to Jason rather than Medea (4.464-481), perhaps indicating that there existed already a reluctance to portray Medea as a villain. Jacobson interprets the shift of the myth in the *Heroides* as an affirmation that Ovid intends the reader to see Medea in a monstrous light. I would argue, however, that there is a different motive for Ovid's retelling of the murder. Fulkerson, I believe, is correct to interpret Medea's lines at 12.115 as a response to Hypsipyle, who in her letter uses the brother's murder as a point of comparison between the two heroines.⁷⁷ While I agree with her connection between the letters, I disagree with Fulkerson when she suggests that Medea in these lines "naturally downplays" the

⁷⁶ Jacobson (1974): 111.

⁷⁷ Fulkerson (2005): 45.

murder. On the contrary, I would argue that Medea describes the unspeakable nature of her crime by evoking the sense of Hypsipyle's words at 6.93.⁷⁸ By mentioning that unspeakable acts have occurred, neither Hypsipyle nor Medea are suggesting that the acts are of little consequence, but rather that the crimes are so great that words cannot describe them. As is the case with the Euripidean Medea, Ovid's Medea quickly entwines Jason in the crime (*sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui*, 12.116). She embeds the pronoun *te*, balancing it equally in the line with *ego*, in order to indicate that Jason's role in the crime is at least equal to her own and, though she freely admits that she deserved a violent punishment, the crime and punishment should not be hers alone.

Returning to lines 12.119-20, Medea reinforces her claim that Jason is equally, if not more, culpable (*Meritas subeamus in alto, | tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis ego!* 12.119-20). Remaining consistent with the opening lines of the letter and echoing the theme of reciprocity, Medea balances the pronouns *tu* and *ego* in the second line of the couplet, using them to frame each side of the line. The object of both pronouns (*poenas*) is located precisely in the center of the line, suggesting that the punishment applies to both pronouns equally. Yet, even though the pronouns seem to be balanced on either end of the line with *poenas* occupying the center, the meter of the line assigns more weight to Jason's half of the line than it does to Medea's half. The half describing Jason's crimes consists entirely of long syllables, adding gravity and emphasis to *tu fraudis poenas*, while the second half of the line, the one describing Medea's crime, consists rather of dactyls, speeding the reader over *credulitatis ego*. As is the case with Euripides' Medea, Ovid's Medea does not shy from her part in the crimes. Ovid's Medea confesses to

⁷⁸ *et quae nescierim melius*, (6.93)

having committed an unspeakable act against her brother, an act that, even to Medea, whose focus throughout the letter has been to relate from memory all of their shared experiences, eludes description. Her message is clear: though both Medea and Jason are culpable, even metrically, Jason's crimes outweigh hers. While Medea was responsible for the horrific murders and betrayals, they were made possible by the lies and words that captured her (*vidi etiam lacrimas—sua pars et fraudis in illis. | sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis*. I even saw tears, and in them was their own part of your lies. So I, a girl, was captured quickly by your words. 12.91-92). That Medea cites Jason's tears in conjunction with his lies further paints Jason as a serial offender. Whether or not Medea is intentionally recalling Hypsipyle's encounter with Jason, the reader will undoubtedly draw another parallel between Jason's two speeches. As with Medea, Hypsipyle, too, recalls how Jason framed his request with tears, lending to his speech a sense of false sincerity: *implesti lacrimis talia verba suis... et lacrimis in falsa cadentibus ora | cetera te memini non potuisse loqui* (you filled those words with your tears...and I remembered that you could not speak further because of the tears falling down your false face. 6.58-64). If the reader assigns the blame to Jason for his betrayal of Hypsipyle, the similar vocabulary and themes in Medea's recollection of Jason's words in *Heroides* 12 (*infido*, 12.72; *fortuna*, 12.73, *effice me meritis tempus in omne tuum*, 12.82; *lacrimas*, 12.91) suggest that, in Medea's case as well, the reader must hold Jason at fault.

As I suggest earlier, the visceral reaction from scholars to lines 12.119-120 reveals a deeper prejudice against Medea that likely results from Euripides' treatment of her at the end of his tragedy. However, it is important to remember that until the scene featuring Medea's infanticide (1271ff), Medea is portrayed as a victim of Jason's wavering passion and betrayal.

Even when Medea speaks of murdering her children, she is irresolute, repeatedly changing her resolve (791ff, 1021ff). Jacobson rightly notes that Ovid's Medea does not feature such a change of heart: "Even Euripides' Medea wavers when contemplating her revenge against Jason. Ovid ignores this. The conflict between reason and passion is nowhere in sight. This Medea has no such qualms."⁷⁹ Presumably, when Jacobson cites the conflict between reason and passion, he is referring to Medea's claim that her passion is stronger than her reason,⁸⁰ however here he seems to be reading Ovid's Medea in the shadows of Euripides' *Medea*, specifically the Medea after line 1271—just as he suggests Hypsipyle has done—and therefore he reads *Heroides* 12 grossly out of context. Quite simply, he is condemning the present Medea for future Medea's crimes. In Euripides' tragedy, when Medea expresses doubt about her revenge, it is solely within the context of the infanticide; nowhere in the play does she waver in her resolution to exact revenge upon Jason by killing Creon and the princess. The reason for the lack of doubt in the Ovidian Medea can be explained by the simple fact that, in *Heroides* 12, Medea has never expressed the wish to murder her children and therefore she has no reason to express the inner conflict so present in Euripides' *Medea*. Indeed, Medea ends her letter with an ominous tone, one which hints at the possibility of infanticide, yet she explicitly does not mention it (*viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat! | nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!* 12.211-12). The reader sees the echo of the Euripidean Medea's conflict between reason and passion, expressed here in the balance between *pectora* and *mens*, nevertheless, whatever her mind is heading towards, not even she knows. Moreover, Medea's refusal to acknowledge the exact nature of her crimes is

⁷⁹ Jacobson (1974): 119.

⁸⁰ θυμὸς δὲ κρείστων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων, (*Med.* 1080)

duplicitous in nature. Citing her crimes as *nescio quid*, Medea recalls her previously unspeakable crime, her fratricide (12.115). On another level, Medea's claim that she does not know the extent of her crime echoes Hypsipyle's accusation that Medea is capable of crimes Hypsipyle would rather not know (6.93). With this admission, Medea engages both with the audience familiar with the Euripidean Medea as well as with Hypsipyle.

Jacobson's quite negative response to Medea illustrates well what readers bring with them to any story of Medea; they expect to find a figure who has a single minded penchant for revenge and who ultimately murders her children. As Fulkerson observes, "any post-Euripidean Medea engages with this issue, whether explicitly or implicitly."⁸¹ What then is the significance of Ovid's quite shocking omission of what is arguably Medea's defining characteristic? If Ovid understands, and most certainly he does, that the reader expects to engage with a Medea who has a "casual propensity for violence," what then is the implication that this episode is nowhere to be found?⁸²

This omission becomes all the more shocking when one takes into consideration the many other references to infanticide within the *Heroides*; clearly Ovid has no aversion to the topic, for he makes reference to infanticide in four of the letters. More intriguing still is that each reference to infanticide within the *Heroides* occurs either in a direct reference to Medea, as is the case in Hypsipyle's letter, or the references to infanticide frame Medea's letter itself through the surrounding letters of Canace (*Her.* 11) and Laodamia (*Her.* 13). The final mention of infanticide occurs in Dido's letter to Aeneas (*Her.* 7). While Dido, of course, does not mention Medea in

⁸¹ Fulkerson (2005): 42.

⁸² Jacobson (1974): 120.

any way, several features of Dido's letter have parallels in Medea's letter, and therefore the foreshadowing of Dido's infanticide must be taken into account when considering the lack of infanticide in *Heroides* 12. The characterization of Dido and Medea are so entwined that the presence of infanticide in the former, albeit fantasy, is a glaring addition to the story especially when the latter's infanticide is elided from her story.

The first mention of infanticide occurs in Hypsipyle's letter, serving as a warning to Jason that perhaps Medea has the capacity for the murder of children. Hypsipyle does not seem concerned for Jason's children with Medea, but rather her concern is directed towards her own children with Jason:

*Medeam timui: plus est Medea noverca;
Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus.
Spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros
 corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis?* (6. 127-130)

I was afraid of Medea: Medea is more than a stepmother; Medea's hands are useful for every crime. She who could scatter her brother's mangled body throughout the fields, would she spare my children?

Hypsipyle's fear seems to stem from the fact that Medea has become a stepmother to Hypsipyle's children, and due to her status as a stepmother, Medea has the capacity to harm them. Indeed, what is to stop Medea from murdering Hypsipyle's children, whose hands have already committed the dreadful crime of fratricide? Moreover, Medea's hands seem to be capable of every crime imaginable (*ad scelus omne*, 6.128). Yet, as much fear as Medea inspires in Hypsipyle, not even Hypsipyle can imagine that Medea's murderous hand would someday be directed towards Medea's own children. That Hypsipyle's warning is misplaced occurs only to a reader who is already familiar with Euripides' Medea. Perhaps it is only because Hypsipyle is unconcerned with the fate of Jason's children with Medea that Hypsipyle does not feel compelled

to warn Jason about their safety. However, the emphasis on Medea's status as a stepmother and the threat that it poses seems to suggest otherwise: Medea is only a threat to Hypsipyle's children. Regardless, Hypsipyle's letter has primed the reader to expect that Ovid's Medea, like her Euripidean counterpart, will engage in infanticide.

The letter following Hypsipyle's introduces the reader to Dido, recently abandoned by Aeneas and on the verge of suicide. When read against Vergil's *Aeneid*, the reader immediately notices a number of innovations in Ovid's retelling, most notable for this chapter is Ovid's treatment of Dido's pregnancy:

*Forsitan et gravidam Dido, scelerate, relinquo
parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo.
Accedet fati matris miserabilis infans,
et nondum nato funeris auctor eris.
cumque parente sua frater morietur Iuli,
poenaeque conexos auferet una duos.* (7.133-38)

Perhaps, wretch, you are also abandoning Dido, pregnant, and part of you lies hidden in my body. The poor infant will fall upon the mother's fate, and you will be the cause of your not-yet-born son's funeral. And Iulus' brother will die with his parent, and one punishment will take the two of us joined together.

Knox and Lindheim both interpret this passage not as an admission to an actual pregnancy but, echoing the Vergilian Dido's wish that she were pregnant (*Aen.* 4.327-330), rather as a fantasy. Knox's interpretation of this passage argues that, "by reminding Aeneas of this possibility, O.'s Dido heightens the reader's sense of his guilt. This point is forcefully driven home by conjuring up the thought of an unborn child, whose death would also be Aeneas' responsibility."⁸³ Lindheim reads Dido's imagined pregnancy as a way to highlight Dido's vulnerability, which reflects directly Aeneas' power over Dido.⁸⁴ Dido appeals to Aeneas, Lindheim argues, in hopes

⁸³ Knox (1995): 224.

⁸⁴ Lindheim (2003): 108-109.

that he will return not only for her sake, but for that of the child.⁸⁵ I offer another reading of these lines. Even if the Ovidian Dido's pregnancy, like that of her Vergilian counterpart, is mere fantasy, the effect is nonetheless chilling, especially given the context of Hypsipyle's portrayal of Medea in the previous letter. Hypsipyle accuses Medea of having the potential to murder Hypsipyle's children but never once imagines that Medea would murder her own children (6.130). Ovid's Dido, on the other hand, surpasses Hypsipyle's dark portrayal of Medea in that Dido *is* prepared to murder her own child.

Heroides 13 hints obliquely at the final infanticide of the collection: the death of Iphigenia at the hand of her father, Agamemnon (*Aulide te fama est vento retinente morari*. "There is a rumor that you are delayed in Aulis by a stubborn wind," 13.3). Here the commonality lies not in a punitive sense, but in that the child dies by the parent's hand. Agamemnon's motivations derive from the pursuit of *kleos* and nothing more. In none of these references does the reader see the horror that Euripides' *Medea* evokes, specifically the punitive element combined with the parent's direct involvement in the murder. Returning to Dido, given her letter's immediate proximity to Hypsipyle's letter, the mother's own hand in the murder, and her desire for revenge, I argue that Dido is "true Medea" of the collection. Dido is the figure who most closely mimics Euripides' Medea.

The parallels between Ovid's Dido and Euripides' Medea go beyond this connection however. Dido ends her epistle to Aeneas by describing the words that will be inscribed on her epitaph.⁸⁶ From her epitaph, the reader learns that Ovid's Dido follows her Vergilian double by

⁸⁵ Lindheim (2003) also draws a parallel between Dido's words in this passage and Medea's words: *si tibi sum vilis, communis respice natos* (If I am worthless to you, look back at our shared children, 12.187).

⁸⁶ *praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ense | ipsa sua Dido concidit usa manu*. (7.195-196)

committing suicide. Although Dido dies by her own hand, she emphasizes that her suicide falls upon Aeneas, who has provided both the cause and the sword. In this way, the final distich of *Heroides* 7 mirrors her earlier claim that, though she will wield the sword that will ultimately bring about the end of her unborn child, Aeneas will nevertheless be the *nato funeris auctor* (7.136). Looking at Medea's final exchange with Jason in Euripides' *Medea*, the reader sees similar accusations from Medea:

Ja: ὦ τέκνα, μητρος ὡς κακῆς ἐκύρσατε.
 Μη: ὦ παῖδες, ὡς ὤλεσθε πατρώα νόσῳ (Med. 1363-64)

Ja: οἶδ' εἰσὶν, οἴμοι, σὺν κάρῳ μιάστορες
 Μη: ἴσασιν ὅστις ἤρξε πημονῆς θεοί (Med. 1371-72)

Ja: Oh children, how you have lighted upon a wicked mother.
 Me: Oh children, how you have been destroyed by your father's disease.

Ja: The avengers know it is on your head.
 Me: The gods know who was the origin of this pain.

The audience sees that Euripides' Medea does not hide the fact that she held the knife; when Jason accuses her of the crime, Medea responds that the gods know who was the *origin* of the crime, absolving her of the guilt. Ovid's Dido employs similar rhetoric against Aeneas to the same effect. According to Medea, Jason is the murderer of his children because his abandonment brought about their death. So too for Dido is Aeneas the murderer of his unborn child, who also stands accused of abandonment. Even as if to anticipate the Ovidian Medea's words at 12.120 (*tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis ego!*), Dido emphasizes that Aeneas' crime will result in a punishment that the two will share (*poenaque conexos auferet una duos*, 7.138).

Hypsipyle's letter warns Jason, as well as the reader, of an *adultera virgo* (6.133) who is capable of committing the horrific crime of infanticide. Naturally, the reader expects this infanticide to occur by the hand of Medea; however, rather than waiting until letter 12, the reader

encounters the infanticidal heroine in the following letter. As the reader approaches Medea's letter, the reader sees yet another reference to infanticide through the words of Canace in letter 11, whose son dies violently at the hand of his grandfather. This third reference to infanticide only serves to heighten the reader's expectation for what he/she might discover in the letter of one of mythology's most infamous and murderous heroines. Yet, as Medea's letter unfolds, the reader's expectations are never satisfied. The reader obtains glimpses of Medea's deadly future (*quo feret ira, sequar!* "where my anger shall take me, I will follow!" 12.209), but Medea never becomes the fully realized figure from Euripides, prohibiting the reader from viewing her in the manner in which Hypsipyle foretold.

Lindheim interprets these lines as Medea, "finally resembling the invincible Medea, who pays no heed to human laws or to the ties of kin, imagined in the *Heroides* 6 as Hypsipyle's antithesis."⁸⁷ However, it is imperative to note that Medea uses the future tense, suggesting that, as terrifying as she might become, Ovid's Medea has not yet become Hypsipyle's Medea.⁸⁸ Furthermore, lest the reader begin to think that Ovid had exhausted his infanticidal references before reaching Medea's letter, Ovid introduces the readers to his final infanticide, that of Iphigenia by Agamemnon, in the letter immediately following Medea's (13.3). Considering that Ovid has framed Medea's letter with references to infanticide, after having already primed the reader to expect it in letter 6, Ovid's omission of Medea's most infamous act becomes all the more striking. He prevents the reader from judging his Medea for the Euripidean Medea's crimes, for she has yet to consider the act.

⁸⁷ Lindheim (2003): 128.

⁸⁸ Fulkerson (2005): 51 too, notes that Medea—especially in contrast to Hypsipyle "who has her actions planned to the last detail,"—"coily refuses to divulge her plans-if in fact she has made them at all."

As Lindheim suggests, each Medea after Euripides' Medea must come to terms with the trail of blood her predecessors have left for her.⁸⁹ Euripides' Medea had the advantage over subsequent Medeas. As scholars have argued, his Medea is the first to lend her own hand to the death of her children, suggesting that audiences approached his Medea unaware of the terror that the end of his play offers, and as such, they did not bring with them preconceived prejudices regarding her eventual infanticide.⁹⁰ Because of this advantage, the Euripidean Medea is able to manipulate the internal audience in each scene so that the internal audience views her as a victim, forgiving her of her past transgressions, before the infanticide occurs. In turn, the internal audiences influence the way the external audience perceives Medea, blurring the lines between victim and villain. Naturally, the post-Euripidean Medea does not have this advantage as her hand in the infanticide becomes the major variant in the myth after his *Medea*. Even still, poets seemed to be reluctant to assign Medea to the role of villain. Apollonius omits Medea's stay in Corinth, focusing instead on Medea's life before Euripides' version of the myth, and therefore never needs to reconcile his Medea with the infanticidal actions of Euripides' Medea. Because Apollonius ends his poem before the infanticide occurs, the reader sees only the youthful Medea. Ovid's *Heroides*, however, gives Medea a voice that blends both Euripides' and Apollonius' Medea. Verducci writes, "Medea's epistle to Jason is the only literary artifact preserved from antiquity in which the mature, demonic Medea of Euripides' play speaks with the same voice as the young, sympathetically engaging Medea of Apollonius of Rhodes'

Argonautica."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Lindheim (2003): 42.

⁹⁰ Boedeker (1997): 127.

⁹¹ Verducci (1985): 71.

And yet, this description does not describe Ovid's Medea, for his Medea is not the same as the "mature, demonic Medea of Euripides'." The Ovidian Medea is carefully positioned within Euripides' narrative so that the very episodes within Euripides' play that make Medea so monstrous do not occur within Ovid's work. As a result of this careful positioning, Ovid's Medea is able to draw from sympathy gained by Euripides' Medea by recreating some of Euripides' Medea's most powerful speeches and to avoid the recoil by omitting the ending. In *Heroides* 12, the reader sees how Jason approached Medea, requesting aid. Through Medea's memory, the reader witnesses first hand Jason's oaths to Medea in a speech that Euripides' Medea is unable to share with the audience. Though, due to the multi-voiced nature of the *Heroides*, the reader recalls similarities between Jason's speech to Medea and his speech to Hypsipyle, for they have nearly identical elements, including betrayal.

Finally, because the *Heroides* is a collection of letters, Ovid is able to surround his Medea with the voices of other abandoned heroines, thus allowing Medea to engage with the sympathy the reader feels towards any of the other women and evoke that sympathy through the use the shared genre and vocabulary. These heroines offer another benefit to Ovid's portrayal of Medea, however, in that Ovid is able to address Medea's most infamous crime in the letters of the women surrounding her rather than applying it directly to Medea herself, thus diffusing potential animosity that the reader might feel for Medea. Hypsipyle introduces Medea as a villain *par excellence*, yet the reader never meets this portrayal in *Heroides* 12, instead encountering various incarnations of Medea in the other letters. The result is clever, for the reader is able to project any negative prejudices to these other letters, allowing the reader to encounter Medea as abandoned heroine rather than Medea as infanticide. In this way, Ovid is able to portray Medea

not as a monster, but rather as an elegiac heroine who is in closer alignment with the concerns of the other abandoned heroines. By looking at Medea within the context of her surrounding heroines, as Newlands suggests that we should do in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we begin to see a greater complexity of an already difficult figure, one who is as equally capable of horrific crimes as she is deserving of the reader's sympathy.

Medea Nunc Sum: A Return to the Tragic Stage

Perhaps the appeal of Medea to ancient poets lies in her versatility: she is a foreign figure whose tragic story of betrayal was easily adopted by Greek theater, most notably in Euripides' *Medea*, but finding her way into more than a few non-extant tragedies as well, thus demonstrating her wide appeal among the viewers of drama. On the tragic stage of Euripides, the audience heard her pain-filled laments as she agonized over the suffering that her husband caused her as a result of his abandonment. The audience witnessed how, through her carefully crafted speeches, Medea interacted through dialogue with each of the characters on stage, and by influencing the on-stage characters, she in turn influenced the way the external audience perceived her. It is on the tragic stage that, after listening to Medea's turmoil regarding the future of her children, we also hear of the horrific murder of her two children, permanently marking every subsequent Medea as an infanticide. She is a figure who transitioned into the world of epic after flying from the tragic stage as her own *deus ex machina*, showcasing her adaptability in the heroic world where, as an innocent, love-stricken maiden, she saved the many heroes of Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

Drawing upon her literary history as a woman abandoned by her lover, Ovid gave Medea a new voice within the world of the epistle where she invites the reader into her memory, giving the reader first-hand knowledge of the pain and betrayal that she had experienced at the hand of a trusted lover. Through Medea's memory, the reader gains significant insight into Medea's mind

as she illuminates the unfortunate path that has brought her to her current state, leading the reader to the moment immediately preceding her infamous infanticide, yet stopping short of the infanticide and preserving Medea's status as elegiac heroine rather than murderous barbarian. Medea then returns to epic with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where we watch Medea grow from the innocent maiden of Apollonius into a formidable sorceress, who, through her awe-inspiring magical abilities, once again rescues a helpless, perjurious Jason, before she takes to the sky anew upon her familiar chariot drawn by dragons. Having encountered Medea within these various genres of tragedy, epic, and elegy, this chapter will return once again to the realm of drama with Seneca's *Medea*, keeping in mind the versatility that Medea has shown in her literary past. With these precedents in the background, Seneca's Medea brings centuries of experience from the dramatic world, as well as her experience from these other literary genres. With such a deep history spanning hundreds of years, it would of course be naive to think that, as we the audience experience Seneca's drama, we do not sit with each of these Medeas in close familiarity.

As Christopher Trinacty argues, the elegiac genre is far too limiting for the character of Medea, for it does not allow for the full expression of Medea's abilities and sensibilities.⁹² While Medea can hint at violence or even threaten it within elegy, the genre of love poetry constrains her from carrying out those threats. To Trinacty, by reestablishing Medea in the world of tragedy, Seneca has reclaimed Medea from the elegiac and epic world and has re-situated Medea in her rightful place.⁹³ While I find this argument compelling, for the violent murder of her

⁹² Trinacty (2007): 72.

⁹³ Trinacty (2014): 66.

children and the enactment of bloody revenge on the ruling family would be out of place in a love letter, to ascribe Medea as a rightful inhabitant to any particular location, a figure who is routinely marked by her exile and her frustrated attempts to establish a home, is providing a disservice to the character herself. We consistently see with each attempt by the poets to locate Medea within a genre the subsequent flight of Medea as a result of her unwanted presence and foreign status. Rather than arguing that Medea is once more at home in tragedy or that the genre of tragedy is best suited for her character, this chapter will discuss how Medea's return to the tragic genre has shaped her as a speaker, giving her a new voice as she nevertheless interacts with the Medeas of other genres. In the first chapter, I analyzed how Euripides' Medea, through dialogue on the tragic stage, interacted and influenced the other characters. Through the medium of dialogue, Medea is able to sway each of the characters to view her circumstances through her perspective, delivering speeches with such emotion that the external audience likely would have been swayed as they viewed the reactions of the internal audience. However, as spectators, the external audience is limited in their views of Medea as the audience lacks the intimacy of any internal relationship with Medea.

The second chapter analyzed Medea on a much more intimate level, through her own words in a letter to her absent lover, Jason, in Ovid's *Heroides*. As the reader approaches Medea's words, the reader naturally brings with him/her the Medea of Euripides, that is, the murderous Medea who emerges at the end of his play. Indeed, with the added dimension of having read Hypsipyle's letter, a demonic Medea is certainly the expectation. However, Ovid's Medea lacks Euripides' Medea's ability to speak and interact with other figures. Yet these limitations do not seem to hinder her, for as the reader delves into her mind, the he/she

understands Medea's humanity as the reader experiences her love and her betrayal through her own eyes rather than simply her words. Ovid's Medea is therefore able to reestablish Medea primarily as a human figure, a woman, rather than the blood-stained sorceress the audience witnesses at the end of Euripides' play. If the audience lost sympathy for Medea on the tragic stage, Medea reclaims it through her emotional epistle.

This final chapter will address Medea's return to tragedy, rightful home or otherwise. In an attempt to explain the appeal for Seneca to retell an already (in)famous myth, Alessandro Schiesaro writes, "if to sing of *nefas* is to perpetuate it, then re-telling means also deepening an already existing wound."⁹⁴ Indeed by the time of Seneca's *Medea*, Medea has been on the tragic stage for centuries, and although the audience is viewing a story with many familiar elements—Medea's abandonment followed by the deaths of Creon, Creusa, and most shockingly her own two sons—Seneca's Medea is not Euripides' Medea. Where Euripides' Medea commands an audience, both internal and external, Seneca's Medea must face the external audience alone, without the benefit of interlocutors to assist her in swaying the external audiences' perception of her. This chapter then will analyze Medea's speeches to the external audience, focusing on Medea's ability to speak in monologue rather than dialogue. This chapter will discuss how Seneca's Medea incorporates elements from her literary past partly as a former tragic figure, but specifically as a letter writer, as this Medea relives episodes of her life most familiar to the audience. Seneca fashions a new Medea, one who seems to surpass on every front the actions of her tragic past. Understanding how her previous incarnations have solicited audiences' and readers' sympathy, Seneca's new Medea does speak with audience approval in mind, which is

⁹⁴ Schiesaro (1992): 61.

reflected in her isolated position on stage as well as her agonistic rhetoric. With the sympathetic heroines of Ovid's *Heroides* in hindsight, Seneca creates a Medea who is no longer human, who surpasses the limits of human sympathy because she has departed from the realm of humanity. Though Medea is characterized by her exiled status and her foreign nature, Seneca has refashioned her into figure who is so far removed from her previous portrayals that she becomes something "other" even in light of her characteristic violence.

As the Medeas of poets past have often lamented, Jason's desertion of Medea has left her friendless and isolated without anyone to whom she can turn for comfort. Like her counterparts, Seneca's Medea, too, portrays herself to the external audience as isolated not only in words (*erepto patre | patria atque regno sedibus solam exteris | deserere durus?* Could Jason desert me, alone, who lost my father, fatherland, and kingdom on foreign land? 118-120),⁹⁵ but also physically isolated as she delivers her initial monologue without the presence of other actors on the stage. If the audience has Euripides' *Medea* in mind, the audience might expect the opening monologue to be delivered by the character of the Nurse, who stands alone on stage as she explains to the audience the current affairs of Medea. Because the Nurse stands alone, she commands the fullest attention of the audience as she impresses upon them Medea's tragic state, explaining how Medea calls upon the gods as witnesses of Medea's wretched abandonment (*θεοὺς μαρτύρεται, Med. 22*). While Euripides' *Medea* is not the primary focus of this chapter, it is important to note the parallel between the Nurse's isolated delivery of her initial monologue,

⁹⁵ All Latin text of Seneca's *Medea* is taken from Boyle's commentary (2014). All translations are my own. Note here Medea's enjambment of *deserere* in order to place emphasis on Jason's characteristic desertion.

before the choral entrance, and Medea's opening monologue in Seneca, again, prior to the choral entrance.

In his book *The Dramaturgy of Senecan Tragedy*, Thomas Kohn argues that Medea does not actually deliver her monologue as the sole figure on stage, but rather is accompanied by the silent Nurse, who incidentally occupies the stage with Medea throughout the entirety of the play.⁹⁶ Admittedly, Kohn cites no specific evidence for his claim, only that there are "other indications that she is onstage."⁹⁷ With such lack of evidence, it is tenuous at best to suggest anything definitive regarding the staging of the play. However, even with a lack of definitive evidence, I would argue that, with the isolated monologue delivered by the Nurse in Euripides' *Medea* as precedent, is it reasonable to suggest, along does Boyle, that Seneca's Medea is alone on stage as well.⁹⁸

While Euripides' Nurse addresses the audience, inviting the audience to sympathize with Medea and drawing the audience into the action of the play, Seneca's Medea addresses absent gods—perhaps recalling Euripides' Nurse's statement that Medea calls upon the gods as witnesses (*Med.* 22)—and is seemingly unaware of the presence of an audience. Where Euripides' Medea calls upon on the gods and begs for them to end her suffering (*Med.* 144-45), through the use of imperatives (*nunc, nunc adeste*, 13; *adeste*, 15; *date* 18) Seneca's Medea calls upon the gods as she commands them to do her bidding, abandoning the optative of

⁹⁶ Kohn (2013): 81-82. I must also note that I do not intend to address the long debated question on the performative aspect of Senecan drama. For the sake of this chapter, my argument assumes that the dramas were in actuality performed in some manner, either on a formal stage or in private performance. For more on the debate surrounding performance, see also Boyle (1997, 2014); Fitch (2000); Littlewood (2015); Trinacty (2015).

⁹⁷ Kohn (2013): 161.

⁹⁸ Boyle (2014): 100.

Euripides' (βαίη, *Med.* 145). This initial portrayal of Medea marshaling the gods rather than addressing the audience is significant in understanding where Medea stands in relation to the viewer. Where Euripides' Medea's humanity is emphasized as she interacts with the other human characters around her, the same cannot be said of Seneca's Medea, who disregards the company of mortals and immediately turns to the divine. Moreover, the shift here in language, from optative to imperative, suggests a deeper familiarity with the gods as she feels comfortable in addressing the gods in such a harsh manner.

This familiarity and close proximity to the gods (*adeste, thalamis horridae quondam meis | quales stetis*, come, just as wretched as you once stood in my bedroom, 16-17) provide an important contrast to Ovid's Medea of the *Heroides*. As Trinacty correctly observes, there exists a strong connection between the wedding songs at the end of the *Heroides* 12 and the wedding procession following Medea's opening monologue.⁹⁹ Where Ovid's Medea ends her letter (*Her.* 12.137ff), Seneca's *Medea* begins, suggesting a level of continuity between the two poems. Yet, Seneca has made some curious alterations in Medea's language in relation to the extent of her isolation and her portrayal to the audience. Regarding the arrival of the wedding procession, Ovid's Medea writes the following:

*Pertimui nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam:
Sed tamen in toto pectore frigus erat.
Turba ruunt et 'Hymen' clamant 'Hymenaeae' frequenter:
Quo propior vox haec, hoc mihi peius erat.
Diversi flebant servi lacrimasque tegebant;
Quis vellet tanti nuntius esse mali?* (Her. 12.141-146)

I was afraid and I still didn't think the crime was so great: but nevertheless my entire heart was frozen. The crowds break forth and over and over they shout, "Hymen, Hymenaeae!" The nearer the voice came, the worse it was for me. Various slaves were crying and they covered their tears; who would wish to be the messenger of such a great evil?

⁹⁹ Trinacty (2014), 102.

From Medea's words, the reader learns of her state of mind as she hears the procession approaching. She is terrified (*pertimui*), while also in a state of disbelief (*nec...putabam*). Yet, although Medea is in a state of alarm, the reader learns that she is not, in fact, alone. Surrounding Medea are various slaves (*diversi...servi*) who join in Medea's lamentation (*lacrimasque tegebant*). The slaves sympathize with Medea, unwilling to confess to her the reality of her situation (*quis vellet tanti nuntius esse mali?*). As the reader learns a few lines later, slaves are not the only figures who have come to Medea's side:

*Cum minor e pueris lassus studioque videndi
constitit ad geminae limina prima foris:
'Hinc' mihi 'mater, abi! pompam pater' inquit 'Iason
ducit et adiunctos aureus urguet equos.'* (Her. 12.149-52)

When the younger boy, exhausted from his effort to watch, stood at the edge of the threshold of the double doors said to me, 'mother, I have come from there! My father, Jason, leads the procession and golden drives on the yoked horses.'

In addition to the slaves, Medea's son has run to her side in order to disclose information regarding the procession, demonstrating again that Medea is not alone when she learns of her increasingly terrifying situation (*quo proprior vox*). Moreover, Ovid's Medea laments that, outside of the human presence around her, she has lost the aid of the divine: *Ipsi me cantus herbaeque artesque relinunt: | Nil dea, nil Hecates sacra potentis agunt*. (My very spells and herbs and skills abandon me: there's no goddess, no rites of powerful Hecate carry me forward. Her. 12.167-68). Not only has Jason abandoned her, but each element of Medea's own familiar magic has as well. Here, when disclosing the loss of divine company, Medea specifically cites Hecate, the infernal goddess perhaps most closely associated with Medea. The contrast between who is present and who is absent for Ovid's Medea highlights her current state of helplessness. While she is indeed surrounded by others, none of them possesses the capacity to assist her

(slaves, children). In contrast, aids that are traditionally associated with Medea and her power (magic, goddesses) are curiously absent.

The state of Ovid's Medea as she hears the wedding procession is far from that of Seneca's Medea. Rather than being surrounded by weeping slaves or children, Seneca's Medea addresses no one, at least no human character, nor does she suggest that there is anyone on stage with her. Instead, Medea's opening speech is addressed to unnamed gods (*di coniugales*, 1; *profundi saeve dominator maris*, 4; *Titan*, 5). Following her initial address to the unnamed gods, Medea summons Hecate by name (*Hecate triformis*, 7), the very goddess whom Ovid's Medea laments abandoned her. The contrast between the two figures is clear: the powerful goddesses who have no regard for Ovid's Medea's words (*cantus*, *Her.* 12.167) bend to Seneca's Medea's prayers (*voce non fausta precor*, 11). Moreover, when Ovid's Medea understands finally that Jason is no longer hers, she begins to mourn (*protinus abscissa planxi mea pectora veste, | tuta nec a digitis ora fuere meis*. "Immediately I tore off my clothes and beat my breasts, my face was not safe from my fingers." *Her.* 153-54). Rather than turning her violence towards herself, Seneca's Medea directs her attack outwards, threatening not to beat herself, but to strike the wedding torches (*manibus excutiam faces | caeloque lucem*. I will shake the torches with my hands and the light from the sky, 27-28). Finally, because Ovid's Medea is limited to her epistolographic form, she, by the very nature of the genre, is limited to words. As if in response to her Ovidian counterpart, as well as to the hymenal, Seneca's Medea cries out, "do I sow complaints and words in vain," suggesting that, at least in her present state, words are not enough. Where the Ovidian Medea is limited to her words and pen, the Senecan Medea displays prominently her agency.

As Medea's opening speech comes to a close, she reflects upon her memory, which, as I argue in chapter two, is the very force driving Medea's letter in *Heroides* 12:

*effera ignota horrida
tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum
funus per artus. Levia memoravi nimis;
haec virgo feci. Gravior exurgat dolor;
maiora iam me scelera post partus decent.
accingere ira teque in exitium para
furore toto. Paria narrentur tua
repudia thalamis. quo virum linqvis modo?
hoc quo secuta es. Rumpe iam segnes moras.
Quae scelera parta est, scelere linqvenda est domus. (45-55)*

Wild, unknown, terrible things, fearful, and things equally evil to the sky and the earth my mind urges within: wounds and slaughter and death wandering through their limbs. I have remembered things too trivial. As a maiden I did these things. Let a heavier pain drive me; now greater wickedness suits me after giving birth. Gird yourself with anger and prepare a destruction with all of your fury. Let the story of your divorce be told equal to your marriage. How do you leave your husband now? The way in which you followed him. Now, break through your sluggish delays. The house must be left in crime, crimes which have been born.

As Medea reflects upon the crimes she has in store for the princess, Medea draws a contrast between the deeds that she has planned for this moment and the trivial ones she recalls from her past, actions that she accomplished when she was a maiden in Colchis. However, here Medea is recalling something more specific than simply the deeds of her childhood, though she specifically refers to her younger self as a *virgo*. As Trinacty observes, the connection between Medea's *mens* in the above passage recalls Medea's final line in the *Heroides*: *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*, "certainly my mind urges on something greater, I don't know what. *Her.* 12.212).¹⁰⁰ Trinacty argues that the key to interpreting "something greater" lies in Medea's usage of *levia*. He draws a parallel with another of Ovid's works, *Amores* 3.1, in which Ovid describes the genre of elegy as *levia* while associating the genre of tragedy as *gravia*. With this connection, Trinacty suggests that, in conjunction with the verb *memoravi*, which recalls Ovid's

¹⁰⁰ Trinacty (2014): 99.

Medea's opening line, Seneca's Medea makes a direct reference to the actions that Ovid's Medea remembers. Certainly this seems to be the case, especially considering Seneca's Medea's use of *ignota*, which echoes the sense of Ovid's Medea's *nescio* (*Her.* 12.212), to describe the direction of Medea's mind, as well as the presence of a first person perfect form of a verb of remembering. However, I would offer another reading here, drawing attention to Medea's use of *virgo* in this passage and building on Trinacty's reading of *levia*. It is clear that Medea does not refer to herself as a *virgo* in the traditional sense of an unmarried maiden or virgin, as the things she has done occurred after her marriage to Jason (*vulnera et caedem et vagum | funus per artus*. wounds, and slaughter, and death wandering through his limbs, 46-47).¹⁰¹ Rather than an unmarried maiden, I suggest that Medea's sense of *virgo* is more general, referring to her actions not just of her youth, but also to the actions of her literary youth, namely her treatment in both Euripides' and Ovid's version of her myth.

While the three texts depict the character of Medea differently, Euripides, Ovid, and Seneca each portray the same episode within Medea's life: Medea's actions after discovering her abandonment by Jason. Euripides' *Medea* and Seneca's *Medea* begin at the same place within the myth, and yet, Seneca's Medea emerges on the stage as the fully fledged figure from the closing scene of Euripides' play. Though we meet Medea following Jason's betrayal, Seneca does not portray his Medea as the human wife and mother, but as the powerful sorceress. Seneca's Medea even evokes the final image of Euripides' play in her opening monologue, suggesting that she is already aware of her place within the myth:

*da, da per auras curribus patriis vehi;
committe habenas, genitor, et flagrantibus*

¹⁰¹ Lewis and Short Latin-English Lexicon: 1995.

ignifera loris tribue moderari iuga.

(31-33)

Grant, grant me to be carried through the air on my grandfather's chariot; entrust to me the reins, father, and allow me to control the fiery yokes with flaming lashes.

The crimes that she commits in her literary youth however—the murder of her children and the murder of Creon and the princess by poisoned gifts in Euripides' play, as well as the dismemberment of her brother, to which she refers in both Euripides and Ovid—are simply not enough for Seneca's Medea, as she describes them as too trivial (*levia...nimis*). Indeed, she is preparing herself, and the audience, to expect crimes that have since been unfamiliar (*ignota*). Where in Euripides' play, Medea is content to murder her children off stage, perhaps if only due to the constraints of Greek tragic conventions, Seneca's Medea must go beyond this and do something even more terrible and wild (*effera...horrida*), going further to murder one child on stage in front of the audience (1018). Where Euripides' Medea murders the royal family with flames (*Med.* 1136ff), Seneca's Medea burns down the entire palace, murdering everyone within it (879ff). Seneca's Medea seems to possess this awareness of her previous lives and is consumed by this need to improve upon her past crimes, taking these crimes far beyond her literary predecessors. As Guastella (2001) describes Medea, her crimes become a way of “reconstructing her own identity.”¹⁰² Although Guastella is more interested in Medea's identity in relation to her status as wife and partner to Jason, I believe this idea of reconstruction applies equally in relation to her previous treatments by Seneca's predecessors. Rather than repeating the actions of Euripides' Medea on stage, Seneca's Medea here hints that, at least in this play, she will depart from her traditional role and she will reconstruct herself into a new Medea entirely.

¹⁰² Guastella (2001): 198. Littlewood (2004): 9 speaks also to this idea that Medea strives to fulfill a role with which she is already familiar.

What is potentially the most important scene for the characterization of Medea in Euripides' play, Seneca completely elides in his play. Where in Euripides' *Medea*, the interaction between Medea and the Chorus of Corinthian women is paramount to the shaping of the external audience's perception of Medea as an abandoned woman who is deserving of sympathy, Seneca's Medea is not only denied the opportunity to speak to the Chorus, thus engaging in an important dialogue that could potentially lead the external audience to view her as sympathetic, but is presented with a hostile chorus. Indeed, this elision of choral interaction with Medea is as significant in shaping the audience's perception of her as Euripides' harmonious relationship between Medea and the Chorus in that it denies Medea the opportunity to defend her actions with her own voice. Furthermore, the Euripidean Chorus consists of an all-female Chorus, allowing Medea to appeal to the Chorus on the grounds of common gender and shared female experience, contrasting starkly to the mixed-gendered Chorus of Seneca.¹⁰³ Yet, as quickly as the Chorus enters, it disappears from the stage, once again leaving Medea in isolation for her subsequent monologue:¹⁰⁴

*Occidimus, aures pepulit hymenaeus meas.
Vix ipsa tantum, vix adhuc credo malum.
Hoc facere Iason potuit, erepto patre
patria atque regno sedibus solam exteris
deserere durus?*

(116-20)

We are finished. The hymenal beats my ears. Hardly even I, hardly could I still believe such great evil. Could Jason do this? Could that harsh man, after my father, my country, and my kingdom have been taken, desert me alone in a foreign land?

¹⁰³ See Kohn (2013): 81 on the gendering of the Chorus in Seneca's *Medea*.

¹⁰⁴ Kohn (2013): 81-82 believes that the Chorus is ever present on stage following their hymenal. However, I side with Boyle (2014): 133, who argues that the Chorus is only present on stage when they have speaking parts. Here Boyle cites other instances in Seneca's tragedies where the Chorus markedly departs from the stage after their speaking roles.

As scholars have observed, Medea's response to the choral ode is highly evocative of Ovid's Medea, who cries out when suddenly the chanted Hymen came to her ears (*ut subito nostras Hymen cantatus ad aures | venit*).¹⁰⁵ Additionally, Medea's tripartite lament that she has lost father, home, and kingdom resonates with nearly every previous treatment of Medea. Yet, what is more curious here is where Seneca alters her reaction to the news of Jason's recent remarriage. For Medea's change in demeanor, I return to *Heroides* 12.140-43:

*at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba,
pertimui nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam:
sed tamen in toto pectore frigus erat.*

But to me it was more lamentable than a funeral trumpet. I was afraid and I still didn't think the crime was so great: but nevertheless my entire heart was frozen.

When the Ovidian Medea receives the news, she is filled equally with fear and disbelief.

Likewise, Seneca's Medea describes her state of disbelief and her confused state of mind, which is emphasized by the repetition of the adverb *vix* (117). Neither Medea can bring herself to believe that Jason is capable of committing such a great (*tantum*, 117; 12.141) crime. However, where the Ovidian Medea is overcome by a frigid heart, the Senecan Medea begins to contemplate her next move while simultaneously reflecting upon her past crimes: *qui scelere flammas viderat vinci et mare? | adeone credit omne consumptum nefas?* Had he seen the flames and the sea conquered by my crime? (Does he honestly believe that my wickedness gone? 121-22). After recounting a few of her more infamous crimes—the murder of her brother (131)¹⁰⁶ and the murder of Pelias (133-34)—she emphasizes the change she has undergone and reiterates that she is not the Medea of her past: *et nullum scelus | irata feci. Saevit infelix amor*

¹⁰⁵ Trinacty (2014): 103-04; Boyle (2014): 154-55.

¹⁰⁶ Both Boyle (2014) 160 and Guastella (2001) 204 note the parallels between Medea's killing of her brother and Philomela's murder of her son in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. On this parallel, Guastella observes that in both cases, the female character is torn between two identities: wife and sister/mother.

(and I did no crime in anger. Unlucky love raged. 135-36).¹⁰⁷ On what is perhaps one of the more unsettling lines of the play, I favor Glenn Most's reading, who notes that, because of the enjambment of *irata*, the emphasis must be placed on her anger.¹⁰⁸ Yes, Medea has committed horrific, unholy (*impie*, 134) crimes, and even so, when she enacted such crimes, she was not even *angry*, thus setting the current, enraged Medea against the love-sick Medea of her literary past. The effect is anything but subtle. Where the Ovidian Medea is overcome with fear and inactivity, the Senecan Medea turns to action, reminding the audience that, though she has once again found herself as an abandoned woman, she is not in a weakened state and therefore does not deserve the audiences' pity—nor does she ask for it. Where Ovid's Medea is still under the power of her love for Jason, Seneca's Medea has chosen anger as her guide, fulfilling the threat of her Ovidian counterpart's final words: *quo feret ira, sequar!* (wherever anger shall lead me, I will follow! 12.209).¹⁰⁹

Although Medea's final words in the *Heroides* hint at the direction in which Seneca's Medea will take in the narrative, it is rather Hypsipyle's fantasy-like depiction of Medea that becomes fully realized in Seneca's play. Fearing the worst about Medea's reputation as a witch, Hypsipyle allows her imagination to run wild:

*nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina novit
diraque cantata pabula falce metit.
illa reluctantem cursu deducere lunam
nititur et tenebris abdere solis equos;
illa refrenat aquas obliquaque flumina sistit;
illa loco silvas vivaque saxa movet.
per tumulos errat passis discincta capillis*

¹⁰⁷ Compare Medea's usage of *feci* here and her earlier claim *haec virgo feci* (49).

¹⁰⁸ Most (1999) 216. For more on the manuscript variations on this line, see Most (1999) 217ff and Boyle (2014) 160-61.

¹⁰⁹ Trinacty (2007): 66 also notes this parallel.

certainque de tepidis colligit ossa rogis.

...
et quae nescierim melius.

(*Her.* 6.-83-93)

She is pleasing neither in appearance nor deeds, but she knows spells and she gathers her harsh herbs with an enchanted blade. She presses on to draw down the moon, struggling in its course and hide the sun's horses in the shadows; She restrains the waters and stays the twisting rivers; she moves the forests and living rocks from their place. She wanders through the tombs with her hair scattered, unbound, and she gathers certain bones from warm pyres...And the rest I would rather not know.

While Hypsipyle imagines Medea as an omnipotent sorceress, the Medea the reader encounters in *Heroides* 12 is far from Hypsipyle's portrayal. Where Hypsipyle is mistaken in the *Heroides* in regards to her depiction of Medea, Hypsipyle predicts with uncanny accuracy the Medea we meet in Seneca's tragedy. Over the course of 80 lines in Act IV, which describes Medea's "black mass," Seneca's Medea transforms into the Medea of Hypsipyle's nightmare. Hypsipyle begins her fantastic account of Medea's magical knowledge by describing the instrument that Medea uses: an enchanted blade (*cantata...falce*, *Her.* 6.84). After recalling the stereotypical abilities of witches¹¹⁰—the ability to change the course of nature—Hypsipyle explains Medea's habit of haunting graveyards with her hair disheveled as she collects the bones from her recently deceased victims.¹¹¹ Indeed, this is precisely the figure of Medea that the audience encounters in Seneca's tragedy. To gather her baleful herbs (*frugis infaustae*, 706) from around the known world, Medea uses a variety of instruments including a bloody blade (*cruenta falce*, 722) and an enchanted fingernail (*ungue...cantato*, 730), thus expanding the single instrument of the Ovidian Medea into two instruments. While Hypsipyle's Medea uses an enchanted blade, Seneca's Medea opts for a bloody blade, a change that Boyle argues makes for a much more "intimate and

¹¹⁰ For more on witches' abilities to draw the moon from the sky, see Ovid *Am.* 2.1.23 and Propertius 1.1.19.

¹¹¹ On the adjective *certa*, Knox (1995): 189 offers that Hypsipyle is describing Medea as "no run-of-the-mill witch. Medea knows exactly what she needs and takes only that.

potentially chilling” addition.¹¹² While the adjectives describing Medea’s blades are not identical, they nevertheless possess similarities: each begins with the same letter, contains three syllables, possess a harsh t sound in the word, as well as both adjectives belonging to the same declension in the ablative case. Yet Seneca still retains the element of enchantment, for his Medea possesses an enchanted nail, transferring the magic from her instruments to her very body, emphasizing the growth of Medea’s abilities. Continuing to fulfill Hypsipyle’s prophecy, Seneca’s Medea twice recalls her unbound hair, (*solvens comam*, 752; *passos cingit vitta capillos*, 803) echoing the words of Hypsipyle’s *passis...capillis*, and expanding upon

Hypsipyle’s accusations:

*et evocavi nubibus siccis aquas
egique ad imum maria, et Oceanus graves
interius undas aestibus victis dedit
pariterque mundus lege confusa aetheris
et solem et astra vidit...* (754-58)

...
*violenta Phasis vertit in fontem vada
et Hister, in tot ora divisus, truces
compressit undas omnibus ripis piger.
sonuere fluctus, tumuit insanum mare
tacente vento. Nemoris antiqui domus
amisit umbras vocis imperio meae.
die relicto Phoebus in medio stetit,
Hyadesque nostris cantibus motae labant.
adesse sacris tempus est, Phoebe, tuis* (762-70)

And I have summoned water from dry clouds and have driven the seas to their depths, and greater Ocean’s tides gave its waters after it was conquered and equally the world, confused by the law of the sky, saw both the sun and the stars...Phasis turned its violent waters to its source and Hister, divided into so many mouths, restricted its fierce waters, sluggish on every bank. The waves resounded, the ranging sea swelled although the wind was silent. The home of the ancient grove lost its shadows at the command of my voice. Phoebus stood in the middle of the abandoned day, the Hyads give way, moved by my spells. It’s time, Phoebe, to be present at your sacred rites.

In each account, Medea holds domain over nature, yet Seneca’s Medea progresses further with her magic. Not only does she command the rivers, she holds sway over entire oceans. Beyond

¹¹² Boyle (2014): 310.

the sun and the moon, Medea rearranges the stars. After producing her dazzling display of magical abilities, Medea relates to the audience how, following Ovid's Hypsipyle's accusations, she entered funeral grounds and stole specific items from graves:¹¹³

*Vectoris istic perfidi sanguis inest,
quem Nessus expirans dedit.
Oetaeus isto cinere defecit rogas,
qui virus Herculeum bibit.* (775-78)

In this is the blood of the treacherous ferryman, which Nessus gave while dying. Oeta's pyre lacks its ash, who drank Hercules' poison.

What seems like an exaggerated fear for Hypsipyle, Seneca's Medea reenacts, choosing the same word *rogas* to describe her crime, a crime that is not traditionally associated with Medea's magic, and therefore drawing a direct parallel to Hypsipyle's accusation and the reality of her actions within this play.

It is here that Hypsipyle ends her warning, simply stating that the rest of what Medea is capable of doing she would rather not know (*et quae nescierim melius*, 6.93). However, Medea furthers her display of magic and describes how she shall offer another type of human sacrifice for her revenge scheme: her own blood (*tibi nudato pectore Maenas | sacro feriam bracchia cultro*; "for you, as a Maenad I will cut my arms with a sacred knife, my breasts bared" 806-07). In Acts IV and V, Medea demonstrates that she indeed is a figure to be feared, as Hypsipyle has correctly predicted: *Medeam timui* (I was afraid of Medea, *Her.* 6.127). Hypsipyle's fear certainly seems justified, as Hypsipyle then claims that Medea's hands are suitable for every crime (*Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus*, *Her.* 6.127).¹¹⁴ It is precisely Medea's hands and

¹¹³ Recall Knox' (1995): 189 note on Hypsipyle's claim that Medea only takes *certa ossa* (*Her.* 6.90).

¹¹⁴ Tarrant (1995): 223 credits Hypsipyle's words in lines 12.127-28 for the inspiration of Seneca's Medea's words "*Medea nunc sum.*"

their capabilities that lead Medea to her final crime of infanticide. Looking at her hands, she recites the following words:

*quid manus poterant rudes
audere magnum, quid puellaris furor?
Medea nunc sum. Crevit ingenium malis.
Iuvat, iuvat rapuisse fraternal caput,
artus iuvat secuisse et arcano patrem
spoliasse sacro, iuvat in exitium senis
armasse natus. Quaere materiam, dolor:
ad omne facinus non rudem dextram afferes.* (908-915)

What great deed could unskilled hands dare to do, what girlish passion? Now I am Medea. My nature has grown with its evil. It pleased me, pleased me to have snatched away my brother's head, pleased me to have cut up his limbs and to have stolen the secret and sacred item from my father, pleased me to have armed those daughters for the death of the old man. Seek out material, pain. You shall not bring your unskilled hand for every deed.

Reaffirming Hypsipyle's sentiment that Medea's hands are dangerous, Medea contrasts the crimes of her unskilled hands (908) with those that will be done with skilled hands (915), crimes that, upon reflection, bring her great joy. This joy is reiterated again and again as she repeats the verb *iuvat* no less than four times in three lines, indicating that she draws excessive pleasure from the memory. This excessive joy contrasts starkly with Ovid's Medea, who can hardly bring herself to recall the actions of her hands, and when she does remember, she exclaims that she should be killed for her actions: *quod facere ausa mea est, non audeo scribere | sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui*; "what my hand dared to do, it dare not write, so I should have been torn to shreds, but with you." *Her.* 12.115-16). Ovid's Medea desires death in response for her deeds, but Seneca's characterization is far from Ovid's Medea. What the audience witnesses here is rather a transformation into Hypsipyle's nightmarish Medea, a Medea who has become fully actualized into the character she believes she was always meant to be: *Medea nunc sum*.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹⁵ See Tarrant (1995): 222 for more examples of characters within Senecan tragedy who formally recognize themselves. For more on the change of mood between Hypsipyle's *Medeae Medea forem* (6.151), Medea's earlier claim "[Medea] *fiam*," (171), and Medea's claim here of "*Medea nunc sum*" (910), see Trinacty (2007): 72.

emphasis of the *nunc* draws a contrast with her mythological past, but also, as I would argue, her literary past. This connection is affirmed by Medea's request that her pain seek out *materia* for inspiration for her new and improved self, a word that is commonly associated with poetic material.¹¹⁶ Medea seems to be reaching beyond the confines of her own poetic history, for her actions in previous works have been insufficient, and seeks out new *materia*. It is only through this new *materia*, predicated upon her pain (*dolor*), that she is able to become the fully realized Medea.

Though Medea has returned to the tragic stage, an arena in which she has performed frequently, Seneca's treatment of the character is far from what the audience and readers have experienced in the past. In contrast to Euripides and Ovid, Seneca presents first and foremost a Medea who is isolated entirely from those around her. Where Euripides displays at first Medea in seclusion, throughout the play he presents her with a multitude of opportunities in which she is able to build a relationship with those on stage, emphasizing her connection with them and presenting herself, although of foreign status, as an abandoned wife and mother. The audience understands that, in spite of her history as a sorceress, Medea is human in nature and grieves and suffers as a human woman. Ovid builds upon Euripides' portrayal of Medea as a human woman, and though she is limited as a result of her the constraints of the epistolary genre, she nevertheless recreates her suffering at the hands of those around her. While it is true that Ovid is working with a character who has a long history of murder, he takes care to elide that aspect of Medea's history, focusing only on the elements of her story that create a bond with both a reader of elegiac poetry as well as the other heroines in the surrounding letters of the *Heroides*. Neither

¹¹⁶ Boyle (2014): 357 notes that *materia* is a favorite of Ovid, who on a number of occasions uses it to refer to poetic material and subject matter.

of these approaches applies to Seneca's tragedy, whose character treats the world as her magical playground, marveling at the extent to which she can push her boundaries and create new *materia* for herself. The result is a character who pushes herself beyond her traditional status as foreign woman into a status of other, of something non-human. Where the reader and audience could sympathize with the human character of Euripides and Ovid, Seneca denies that opportunity for his audience as he presents a figure who is unapproachable. Yet, Seneca's Medea is not so removed from her own history as not to interact with it. Throughout Medea's many monologues, the audience hears the verbal echoes of her past, drawing connections with not only her literary past, but also the Medeas of another character's imagination, that of Hypsipyle. By drawing upon Hypsipyle's portrayal of Medea in *Heroides* 6 for inspiration for his Medea, Seneca has ensured that his Medea is the ultimate villain, thus fulfilling Hypsipyle's final wish for Medea: *quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti | filia, tam natis, tam sit acerba viro* (As the sister was to her brother and the daughter to her miserable father, so may she be as bitter to her children, as bitter to her husband, *Her.* 6.159-60).

Conclusion:

With such a sensational story as Euripides' *Medea*, the question we must ask ourselves is whether it is possible to break away from the precedence Euripides has set forth. Is it possible to view Medea as anything other than the prolific murderer who emerges at the end of the play or has Medea perhaps presented an argument strong enough that readers and audience members are able to take with them her powerful words, words that expose the betrayal and hopelessness she has endured at the hands of Jason?

As scholarship has shown, Euripides at the very least benefited from uncharted territory concerning Medea's story.¹¹⁷ As I demonstrated in Chapter One, Euripides seemed successful in portraying Medea as a figure who deserved the audience's sympathy. However, as Fulkerson observes, each subsequent Medea is affected on some level by the crimes committed in Euripides' play.¹¹⁸ Certainly this seems to be the issue facing Ovid's Medea. Invariably each reader will bring with him/her some level of preconception regarding Medea, an idea that Ovid masterfully displays through his characterization of Hypsipyle in the *Heroides*. In her letter, Hypsipyle is obsessed with this negative characterization of Medea and this infamy dominates Hypsipyle's epistle to Jason. Yet, Ovid demonstrates that it is possible for Medea to reclaim her image as a woman who has been unjustly treated and therefore is a figure worthy of the reader's

¹¹⁷ For more on Euripides' invention of Medea's direct involvement in the infanticide, see Boedeker (1997): 127.

¹¹⁸ Fulkerson (2005): 42.

sympathy. Though we as the reader understand that multiple murders lie in Medea's future, we are faced once again with a vulnerable figure.

However, we have seen with Seneca's *Medea* the lengths to which a poet can take his Medea, crossing boundaries never before attempted. Again, we as the reader and audience must ask ourselves to what extent our perceptions of Seneca's Medea are contaminated by previous Medeas. Even when witnessing Medea perform her "black mass" (670ff) or hear her lament that she has only two children to murder (954-57), can we forget her famous speeches of her literary past in which she persuaded the reader to see her plight from her own perspective? I do not believe this is the case.

To the reader familiar with Medea's literary past, it would be challenging to sympathize with one Medea while simultaneously condemning another. This belief is strengthened by the many verbal echoes from Seneca's Medea to her past treatments. By recalling the words of her literary past, Seneca's Medea invokes on some level the sympathy garnered for the previous Medeas, even if Seneca's Medea pushes her story beyond the reader's and audience's comfort. In this way, the figure of Medea truly is a "conglomeration" of her past.¹¹⁹ While she exists as each poet's individual creation, she interacts continually with each former treatment of her, presenting to the readers and audiences a figure who is both loving mother and child-killer, devoted wife and vengeful barbarian.

¹¹⁹ Trinacty (2014): 65.

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