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THE INVENTION AND USE OF THE INFANTICIDE MOTIF IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*

There had been various earlier versions of the Medea myth since her first recorded appearance at Jason's side¹. Corinthian tradition had her as benevolent witch and Thessalians had a very similar opinion of her. In the ancient Boeotian and Thessalian tradition Medea rejuvenates the old father of Jason². Later, connected to the myth of the Argonauts, she helps Jason and his wounded companions. So, she appears as a protector of ancient medicine, in one of its oldest cradles, Thessaly – where the centaur Chiron taught Asclepius. Corinthian myths faintly depict the magic powers of Medea, by her virtue as moon-goddess and her association with Hecate³. According to these myths, Aeetes inherited Efyra⁴ from his father, the Sun. Medea invited by the Corinthians to receive the inheritance comes from Iolkos followed by Jason, who shares with her the Corinthian throne. The same tradition is followed by Simonides (fr. 35). Even lines 11-12 of the play indicate that she strove to be liked by the Corinthians.

In *Oichalias Alosis*, an epic by Creophilus, Medea kills Creon and flees to Athens, having put her children to sit on the altar of Hera Akraia, hoping that they might be saved by their father. Creon's relatives, however, kill the children and blame the murder on Medea. In Pausanias' time, one could still be shown at Corinth the spring where Glauke, the daughter of Creon, threw herself, in order to be rid of the tortures caused by Medea's poisons. Not far from this spring, one could be shown the grave of Mermerus and Pheres, Medea's children, who were stoned by the Corinthians. The death of the innocent children caused the anger of the gods and plague fell upon the children of Corinth. According to an oracle's advice, the Corinthians established annual purificatory sacrifices and erected a statue to Phobos,

* This article is based on material of my unpublished doctoral thesis in 1997 (University of Bristol).

1. Hes. *Theog.* 956-7.

2. Most vivid account in Ovid *Met.* 7, 162ff; earliest account in *Nostoi*, fr. 6.

3. Cf. Eumelus' *Korinthiaka*, an epic which has not survived.

4. Efyra: ancient name for Corinth, or Thesprotian city (Schol. *Odys.* 1, 259).

still preserved in Pausanias' time. Those sacrifices ended when Corinth was occupied by the Romans; they also ended the tradition that had Corinth's children with shaved heads and dressed in black⁵. Another tradition has it that the fourteen children of Medea (seven boys and seven girls), run to the temple of Hera Akraia, but even there the Corinthians killed them. To purify the *miasma* the Corinthians dedicated each year seven boys and seven girls from the most noble families, who spent the whole year in the goddess' temple offering sacrifices. According to the same tradition Medea fled to Athens where she married Aegeus; but because later she planned the murder of her stepson Theseus, Aegeus exiled her and her son Medus, who became later king of Athens⁶.

By the 5th century Medea's story has a commonly accepted shape⁷. The question still remains, though: was the infanticide part of the tradition or was it Euripides' invention? According to the tradition that Creophilus used, the Corinthians blamed their own unlawful crime on Medea. In a way, this tradition introduces the elements for Medea's infanticide. Nevertheless, the purificatory rituals of the Corinthians in the honour of Hera are a fact that hints at an unlawful crime that weighed upon the city. On this, one can recall an unverified but interesting anecdote that Euripides received five talents from the Corinthians, in order to ascribe the infanticide to Medea, and so 'free' them, on the Athenian stage, from a tradition that weighed upon their shoulders⁸. One can even see in lines 1381-3, an attempt of the poet to blend the new element in the old tradition of the Corinthian rituals.

The important issue is that Euripides was the first to introduce the infanticide into the myth. Of course there is always the problem of the *Medea* of Neophron. As was reported in the first *Hypothesis* of the *Medea*, Euripides used the work of the Sikyonian tragic poet Neophron. The scholar who wrote the *Hypothesis* (it is anonymous) calls upon the authorities of Dicaearchus and Aristotle in *Hypomnemata* (lines 22-23). Diogenes Laertius talks about Euripides' *Medea*, 'that is said to have been inspired by the Sikyonian Neophron'⁹. The *Scholia* on *Medea*, also, refer to two

5. Paus. 2.3.6.

6. Medus is not mentioned as son of Medea by Pausanias, or Euripides in the present version, because Medus is a son of Medea and Aegeus. The story of Medea's banishment from Athens, where Medus appears, is reported by Hyginus. According to this story Medus helped Medea to kill Perses, brother of Aeetes. Medus is also mentioned in Hesiod *Theogony* 997.

7. The infanticide was popular among vase-painters in the 5th century, often found on Italiote vases (see *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Graecae*). It inspired a famous painting by Timanthes, which was probably the prototype of a Hellenistic picture. See S. Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage* (Marburg 1960), 163, 348.

8. *Scholia* on Eur. *Med.* 10.

9. Diog. Laert., 2.10, par. 134.

extracts from Neophron's play, and a longer one is found in Stobaeus¹⁰. However, it is still a very controversial matter whether such a work existed. The problem is that our information about Neophron (or Neophon) comes from Suidas, after the 10th century, and is not very illuminating. It is indicative that Neophron was said to have been killed by Alexander the Great (along with Callisthenes), but he seems to be alive in the 4th century, and even to appear as a predecessor of Sophocles and Euripides. Then, he was supposed to have written 120 works, of which none survives. Aristotle does not mention him in the *Poetics*, when he talks about the *Medea* of Euripides. As for Dicaearchus, he is not a reliable authority, and the *Hypomnemata* is not written by either Dicaearchus or Aristotle. Then, in the *Hypothesis* by Aristophanes Byzantius, a more reliable source, it is said that neither Sophocles nor Aeschylus dealt with the myth — Neophron is not even mentioned¹¹. Even the surviving extracts of Neophron can be considered as imitations of Euripides' play.

The truth is that there can be no conclusive decision on whether Neophron's — alleged — play was Euripides' prototype. Even if it was, it was not unusual for a poet to take from an other the successful elements of a myth's texture. Still, Euripides' infanticide remains original in the full extent of her character's analysis. Why did he do it, though? Did he merely wish to add a new dramatic dimension to the stage-action? Did he wish to present Medea as evil? Surely, if his intention was the latter, he need not have invented another reason for the audience to dislike Medea; the myth already contained the elements of Glauke's and Creon's murders — not to mention the old story about Apsyrtus. So, why the use of the infanticide? This will become clear at the end of the article.

One thing that would bring the audience to Medea's side is the betrayal of the oaths of faithfulness by Jason. As Easterling points out, Euripides does not 'allow any character to raise the question of the legal relationship between Jason and Medea'¹². The validity of this relationship is fundamental to the play's action. However, if we contrast the relationship to the social and moral practices of 5th century Athens we might come to question some of its aspects. Jason is in a relationship with a foreign woman, who, despite her high status as princess and descendant of the Sun, has abandoned her family in no fitting manner. Jason is not an Athenian, but as most plays are to be seen through the socio-moral prism of Athenian beliefs, it would not be inappropriate to consider him judged according to Athenian standards. At the time when the *Medea* was produced, the law of Pericles concerning citizenship was in force and it was actually taken very seriously¹³. In order to gain citizen status, one

10. Stobaeus, *Anthologia Graeca*, 20.34.

11. Arist. Byz., *Hypoth.* ii, 35-40.

12. P. Easterling, "The infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*", *YCS* XXV (1977): 177-191; 180.

13. Cf. C. Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy* (Munich 1988), translated in Greek by

had to be descended from two Athenian parents. Whether such laws are to be regarded as having been valid in Iolkos — especially that of the heroic age — cannot be verified, but it is probably not important¹⁴. It is more than likely that the law was in the Athenian audience's mind, when they witnessed Jason's exile. This is not to say that any character in the play suggests that Jason was justified in abandoning Medea because she was a foreigner¹⁵. But even if such a citizenship-law did not exist in real Iolkos (not that of the stage), it is obvious that by their flight Jason's children lost all their rights to their father's wealth in Iolkos — and this is something that the Athenian audience could definitely sympathize with. If Medea is considered the main cause of this flight, she obviously takes the blame for the loss of the children's status through inheritance, and subsequently, the destruction of Jason's ancestral *oikos*. The importance given by Athenians to the continuation of the ancestral *oikos* is evident in many a source, and it makes Medea's responsibility in this affair even more consequential for the *oikos*¹⁶. When Jason says in 562-7 that he planned to marry Glauke, Creon's daughter, so that his children might gain Corinthian status and prosper in Corinth, many a member of the Athenian audience would give him credit for this — whether or not Euripides intended it to be so.

But what about Jason's oaths? The theme of these oaths is given repeated stress in the play¹⁷. Easterling suggests that 'the essential situation is clear-cut: Jason and Medea are to be regarded as permanently pledged, so that when Jason abandons Medea he *is* breaking faith (and even he does not deny it)'¹⁸. In fact, Jason's admitting of his 'unjust weddings' appears to support such a conclusion (908-910).

However, he does not show signs of remorse or guilt, and he even praises Medea for coming now into her right mind, by accepting these weddings (913). Further on, he declares his care for his children: by his marriage to the princess of Corinth, when he expresses his hope that his children will one day 'be the first' along

Flora Manakidou (Athens 1997), 51. According to Meier, this law expressed the initial desire of Athenians for civic homogeneity and preservation of superiority on others.

14. E. McDermott, *Euripides' Medea. The Incarnation of Disorder* (Pennsylvania 1989) 44, suggested that the blurring between Euripides' times and Medea's times merely enhances the sense of anomaly, so essential to the play.

15. It is interesting to consider the dilemma from the point of view of an Athenian citizen: Jason abandons the mother of his children. However, this mother is a murderer and cannot secure citizen status for her children; the other woman is a legal citizen of Corinth, and she would obviously have more to offer as a parent.

16. On the centrality of the *oikos* and the danger posed to it by female behaviour see S. Siropoulos, "The prominence of women in Athenian Drama. *Alcestis* and the *oikos*", *ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ* 50/2 (2000). On the interrelation between *oikos* and *polis* see L. McLure, *Spoken Like a Woman. Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton 1999) 164 and notes 16-17.

17. Eur., *Med.* 21-2, 160-3, 168-72, 208, 439-40, 492-5, 1392.

18. Easterling, "Infanticide," 180.

with their other siblings (914-21), presumably meaning the ones that would follow from his marriage with the Corinthian princess. What we see here is the picture of a father concerned about the future and the status of his offspring — a status shaken by the flight from their city, for which their mother appears responsible.

Jason is not justified in abandoning his wife, but I believe that an Athenian audience would not condemn him unreservedly. In 534-46 he recounts the benefits that Medea won through their union, and in 446-64 he tells her that he was willing to secure her future — and that of her children — in Corinth, even after his new marriage. This speech of Jason ends with the assurance that he would never be able to think badly of Medea, even if she hated him (463-4).

In response to this speech, Easterling characterizes him as ‘a status-seeker, embarrassed by his barbarian wife who refuses to go quietly, anxious to have her out of the way but insensitive enough to talk about exile being a hardship, crassly patronizing in his offer of material help’¹⁹. Easterling’s response is characteristic of the approach based on modern moral and ethical perspectives. However, I believe that the ancient Athenians would have considered Jason as thoughtful and caring as can be, considering the circumstances. Infidelity was not an unusual occurrence amid the material of Greek myths, or indeed in Athenian life²⁰. In *Trachiniae* Heracles brings home Iole and despite her reluctance and jealousy Deianeira, Heracles’ wife, accepts her²¹. Even Andromache, in Euripides’ homonymous play, describing her happy marriage with Hector, explains that she, far from rebelling at his infidelities, took upon herself the task of nursing and bringing up his illegitimate children²². As Barlow points out, ‘Medea is different and her situation is worse than that of these ‘established wives’, for whereas Deianeira and Andromache were never ousted from their places in the home, Medea has to suffer just that’²³. This is true, yet it is highly unlikely that an ancient audience would have found it as offensive as we would today. Again, they might not have approved his abandoning of his wife, but at least he did the best he could to provide for her after their separation, and the weight that he

19. Easterling, “Infanticide,” 183-4.

20. In lines 236-7 Medea complains that husbands have the right to opt out of a marriage if things go wrong. This statement could be regarded as criticism of an established norm, yet it also points out a norm that would have been accepted by a large part of the audience.

21. In *Trachiniae* Heracles is destroyed by his wife, not due to an intentional act of revenge on her part but due to the malevolence of Nessus.

22. Euripides *Andromache* 224-5. Andromache is often viewed as the epitome of a perfect wife. See *RE* 1.2.2 .2151-2 under *Andromache* and particularly Euripides *Troades* 643-5 and Seneca *Troades* 642-5. Cf. Pausanias 10.25.9 and Plutarch *Brutus* 23. On the antithesis between concubine and wife see also McLure, “Spoken Like a Woman” 168-9 and 173.

23. S. A. Barlow, “Stereotype and reversal in Euripides’ *Medea*”, *CR* 36 (1989):158-71, 158.

gives to the welfare of his children and the continuation and establishment of his *oikos* would counter-balance the notion of abandonment not of his legal wife, but of his partner.

Medea's image suffers more blows as she transgresses from the most celebrated feminine trait: motherly love. Her first words uttered after her laments, are curses for her children (110-4). So cruel are her words, that even her faithful nurse protests. Her appearance in outrage is anticipated after the nurse's comments in lines 36-45, where Medea is depicted as a woman with *βαρεία φρόνη* and *δεινή* and one who hates her own children. These lines (in conjunction with 90-5, where the nurse tries to keep the children away from their *δυσθυμουμένη* mother) obviously prepare the ground for the murder of her children, but they also present a terrible side of the woman — a side that no audience could have sympathized with. Her negative colouring continues in lines 97-110. Here she is drawn as a woman with “ἄγριον ἦθος, στυγεράν τε φύσιν φρενὸς αὐθάδους” (103-4). Contrasted to the image of the children playing innocently with their hoops (46-7), Medea appears all the more unmotherly and dangerous. Easterling comments on Medea's famous claim (250-1.) that she would rather stand three times in the battle line than bear one child, by saying that Medea ‘wins our respect’²⁴. Easterling says that Medea is talking about the emotional hazards of being a mother, but even so, not many women would say what Medea says? Could we imagine Medea earning the respect of a 5th century audience by uttering this statement? Even if there were women in the ancient audience, it is highly improbable that Medea's claim would have sounded rational. Rejection of maternity and assumption of the all-male role of warrior must have been absurd notions for a woman — or man — reared with the values of *εὐγονία*, continuation of the *oikos* and the strictly defined gender roles. Of course, we must not overlook the psychological aim of Medea's statement. By preferring war to childbearing she alludes to the physical and emotional hazards of not only birth, but also maternity. Because it would be unfair to deprive Medea of all maternal emotions. Her speech in 1019-80 is a moving display of the struggle between her maternal feelings and her desire for revenge — of which she considers the murder of the children an essential part. This is the key to the speech, and the monologue ends with the resolution to proceed with the murder²⁵. Later on she will admit to Jason that the loss of her children pains her, too (1362), but she considers his misery more satisfying to her. Her maternal feelings appear to be strong only for the short time in 1019-80, and they are condemned to be extinguished. In fact, the profound misery

24. Easterling, “Infanticide,” 182.

25. K. Alt., “Medeas Entschluß zum Kindermord (Zu Euripides, *Medea*, 1078-1080)”, *Hyperboreus* 4 (1998): 271-285.

of Jason, after he sees his dead children, comes in complete contrast to the cruelty of Medea. As a mother, she feels and thinks of her children less than their father does.

There are different opinions on the existence of role-reversal in the image of the Medea-warrior. Pucci, says:

The image in itself, indeed, does not violate the coherence of the ideology of the feminine world, ... a common mythical pattern presents women as fighters when they are abandoned and betrayed by their husbands²⁶. In accordance with this pattern Medea's preference for the battle line receives a further justification. Nevertheless, the rhetorical emphasis ("three times . . . than bear a child once") betokens a martial spirit that we have already encountered in the image used by the Nurse (44-45)²⁷.

An example of abandoned women who turn fighters is that of the Lemnian women. The story is quoted in Apollonius Rhodius: the women of Lemnos neglected Aphrodite in their sacrifices. As a punishment Aphrodite made them reek a foul smell, so that their husbands could not approach them sexually. Instead, the men of Lemnos took Thracian concubines. In order to take revenge, the women agreed and killed all the men in one night²⁸ — with the exception of Hypsipyle, who spared her aged father, a son of the god Dionysus. After this the women neglected their feminine tasks and lived as fighters in constant fear of Scythian pirates²⁹. On their return journey the Argonauts stopped at Lemnos and fathered the Minyae, the next generations of the island's inhabitants³⁰. The story must have been familiar to the audience of *Medea*. Pucci draws attention to this story, in order to point out that there is nothing 'un-feminine' in a woman who kills a treacherous husband; no matter how extreme, revenge stays within the range of femininity³¹. Thus Medea's revenge is not an indication of role-reversal but of wounded femininity.

However, whether the case of the Lemnian women can be seen as the norm of how women behaved when abandoned by their husbands, remains subject to personal perception. It seems exaggerated, though, to present in literature any such image which presented women with such 'dangerous' characters, without making sure that they were obviously negative. Even in the *Argonautica* we cannot say that Hypsipyle balances the negative tone with which the Lemnian women are described; she, rather,

26. See M. Shaw, "The female intruder: women in fifth-century drama," *CPh* 70 (1970): 225-232, 227.

27. M. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea*, (London 1980) 66-7.

28. This is where the phrase *Ἀῆμνία ἔργα* derives from (Herodotus 6.138).

29. Apoll. Rhod., *Argonaut.*, 602ff.

30. Pind., *Pyth.* 4; Herodotus 4.145.

31. Pucci, *Violence*, 67.

emphasizes by contrast the horror of the other women's action. On top of this, we do not have other celebrated mythological examples of women who become 'warriors' after their husbands desert them, so we should treat the parallel with the Lemnian women with extreme caution.

Medea's established status as a witch is central in this play. Magic was known in 5th century Athens but its status was controversial. Two basic facts should be recalled briefly: that magic was supposed to be 'imported' to Greece, and that the use of magic by women was mainly limited to lower-class women — and even then, it was considered immoral and doubtful. Medea embodies most of those characteristics that 'enable' her to use witchcraft. She is a foreign woman — though of high social status — and she even has divine familial ties, with the Sun (she is his granddaughter, 1321). Her magic has already helped Jason to attain the Golden Fleece. This is something that is viewed positively. However, since her arrival in Greece, her magic has been used only to harm: the murder of Pelias, after a convincing demonstration of rejuvenation to his daughters, and the murder of the princess of Corinth and her father.

It is interesting to stress the fact that Medea does not use her powers to regain her husband's affection, just as Deianeira opts to do in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*³². Instead, she prefers to use her magic, in order to kill the princess using the motif of the poisonous and deadly *chiton*, by which Heracles came to his death in the aforementioned play³³.

The final scene with Medea on the divine chariot (1318-21) surely has some touch of the supernatural and, magic or not, strengthens the idea of her superhuman powers. In general, I am inclined to believe that these powers of Medea in this treatment of the myth by Euripides add to the negative image of her in the play³⁴.

If Medea was brought to justice in a modern court, the most likely line of defence her lawyer would follow would be insanity. Indeed, a central issue in the play

32. Soph. *Trach.* 584-5; see also Arist. *Mag. mor.* 1188b30-38.

33. Erotic magical operation is not unknown in antiquity. See C. A. Faraone, "Sex and power: male-targeting aphrodisiacs in the Greek magical tradition", *Helios* 19 (1992): 92-113 and C. A. Faraone, "Deianira's mistake and the demise of Heracles: erotic magic in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*", *Helios* 21 (1994): 115-135. In a later work Plutarch advises brides against the use of *pharmaka* to regain lovers' affection; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 139A. See also, Antiphon 1.14, 1.19, who refers to a mistress contorting to *pharmaka*, in order to regain her lover's devotion.

34. The negative characterization of a person who uses magic is stressed in Tragedy by the association of those persons with lower status. cf. Eur. *Andr.* 156-8; *Ion* 616-7, 843-6, 1185, 1220-1, 1286; *Hec.* 876-8. Medea's status is not low, but her deployment of magic adds to her negative colouring. On female characters and magic in classical literature, see J. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, (Oxford, N. York 1992) 79, 244.

is Medea's *σοφία*. With this we should understand not only her mental capacities but also her reasoning processes, her judgement and the way she uses her abilities throughout the play.

Medea herself describes the state of her mental capabilities in two indicative instances. First, referring to her previous state of mind, when she had originally followed Jason from Colchis, she says that she was 'more eager than wise' to follow him (485). Second, when she refers to the present time, she calls herself 'not that wise' (*οὐκ ἄγαν σοφή*, 305). However, she also admits twice that she is *sophe* (*σοφή* γὰρ οὖσα, 303) and *μάλιστα σοφοί* (384-5), and the events prove her to be right. This is in response to what Creon tells her in 285: "*σοφή πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις*". In this scene with Creon Medea's *σοφία* is fully exposed. Creon wishes to exile Medea and her children because he is afraid of her cleverness and he is worried about the safety of his daughter (282-3)³⁵. Medea responds by an exhibition of supreme psychological manipulation. She exerts emotional pressure on him by appealing to his fatherly feelings (340-7) and Creon succumbs. He allows her to stay for a day, to make arrangements for her children. After this, he exits the stage and Medea changes her tone: 'Do you think I would have fawned on that man if I had not had some profit or plan in mind?' (368-9). As Easterling put it, here we see 'the contempt of the clever person for the fool'.

Earlier on, Medea had expressed a sense of fear, almost, of those who are *σκαιοί*, foolish people, who consider as *σοφός*, anyone who knows something more than them, even if this is something trivial (292-305). At that time she seemed worried and defensive of her cleverness, as if it were something dangerous, attributed to her without good reason³⁶. But now she exults in the realization of her powers. The acknowledgment of her manipulative powers gives a distinctive meaning to her *σοφία*: it is more appropriate to call it *δόλος*. As such, it gives a different insight into Medea's actions and holds a lot of gravity in her characterization. Whether it is a positive or negative trait is difficult to determine, and it depends on the context. Certainly, when we think of Odysseus and his abilities, the word becomes a positive asset of the heroic values. However, the rest of the Homeric heroes, in the *Iliad* at least, do not seem to employ such means; it is only Odysseus who uses *δόλος*.

35. It is strange that Creon says that he exiles Medea and her children, too (271-6); because Jason seems to consider his children's future as if they were going to stay with him in Corinth (914-21). Medea seems to be of the same opinion (877-9), even after she has received Creon's ultimatum. However, we could consider that Jason is unaware of Creon's plans, and indeed, Medea reveals them to Jason, so that she will be able to use the acknowledgement of his fatherly interest as part of her *δόλος*.

36. Perhaps Medea refers to the Corinthians attributing wisdom to her, because of the — probably magical — help that she offered them since she moved to Corinth (cf. line 13).

Whether he constitutes a positive image, exemplifying a value that even women could aspire to, is not obvious. Of course, there is the figure of Penelope, who employs *δόλος* in order to keep the suitors away from her. In this case could we perhaps distinguish between the circumstances in which one uses *δόλος*? Can we say that Penelope and Odysseus use *δόλος* for good, while Medea uses it for bad? Certainly, employment of deception and manipulation of others sounds bad, no matter what the circumstances. Even if we say that the Homeric figures use *δόλος* in order to harm enemies, the same could be said for Medea, too: for her, Creon is an enemy.

Perhaps the underlying difference is the fact that Medea crosses the line which separates 'the enemies'. She considers as enemies her own family (374-5). Inevitably her *δόλος* harms them. Even if at first she plans to murder only Creon, Glauke and Jason (375), her children are drawn into the frenzy of her revenge.

Medea not only deceives Creon with her *δόλος* but also Jason. In lines 870-905, she presents to Jason a Medea who has totally regretted her previous accusations, and she even manages to shed a tear (905). Even the chorus is moved to tears by her speech (906). But Medea's speech is a deception; just the beginning of the murderous schemes that she has thought up for Creon, his family and most of all, her own family.

The play ends with a disconcerting sense of disorder. Medea escapes in a magic chariot given to her by the Sun³⁷. Not only does the infanticide escape unharmed but she takes with her the bodies of the children, denying their father the right to bury them (1410-4). However, the most terrible aspect of the plan's conclusion is that there is no hope for the reversal of disorder, as no divine figure intervenes at the end. In other plays (e.g. the *Bacchae*) some divine authority offers a sense of *κάθαρσις*, by justifying the events that took place, or by re-establishing moral and social order. In the *Medea*, no such authority appears at the end. Of course, there is the assistance of the Sun, but this can hardly count as direct intervention. Then there is Medea herself. She is a descendant of the line of Circe and the Sun. Could we consider her as the substitute for the divine authority that is lacking from the end of the play? Neither the Sun nor Medea is part of the influential pantheon. Medea is not an immortal and she should not be attributed with any divine authority. As for

37. There have been many references to Sun throughout the play (352, 752-3). He is evoked as symbol of justice and witness to oaths. His assistance to Medea at the end makes his role more dubious and dramatic. One should not forget that the Sun was Medea's relative. However, he puts his relatives above justice, thus becoming partial and unjust himself. Mythological tradition has more examples of Sun's partiality: not rising for two days when Zeus tricked Alcmena and allowing Phaethon to drive his chariot, thus disrupting universal order.

the Sun, it is true that his assistance provides the grounds for some kind of divine justification; but this is such a distant resonance, as he does not even appear next to Medea, that his intervention — if it can be considered as such — is rather negligible, since it does not disrupt really the course of events³⁸. Even without the divine chariot, the set parameters of the mythical version demanded that Medea escape to Athens unharmed. So, in conclusion, we realize the absence of divine justification of the course of events. No god appears to justify the events or offer solution and new hope. This explains the invention of infanticide by Euripides. If anything else had happened, perhaps there could be space for forgiveness and the restoration of order, even if in appearance only. But infanticide is too terrible to be justified or forgiven.

One might recall that in other plays of Euripides we come across parents who kill their children — namely the *Bacchae* and *Heracles*. In the *Bacchae*, though, a divine figure at the end of the play justifies the events, no matter how unjust or cruel they appear; and in *Heracles* a friend (who is a demigod) offers peace and forgiveness and hope for restoration. The striking difference between these two plays and the *Medea* is that in *Bacchae* and *Heracles* parents killed their own children while they were driven mad, out of their minds, by some divine agent³⁹. Agaue thinks that she has killed a lion, not her son; Heracles thinks that he has killed his enemies, not his children. Medea, on the other hand, committed her crime with a sound awareness of whom she was going to murder, having planned the crime in a most cold-blooded way. In total control of her σοφία, she had space for options and she made the choices. This is what sets the parameters of the play. This is why Medea cannot be justified or forgiven. And this is the synopsis of the play. I believe that Euripides wished to present a Medea that the audience could understand; they could sympathize, even, with her at the beginning; but they could not forgive her, because what she did was an irreparable wrong, committed freely and consciously. Perhaps she could have gained the audience's sympathy, had she remained a victim. By crossing the line and becoming victimizer, she loses every hope for sympathy. This does not mean that a woman should be a victim in order to earn sympathy and respect; but, according to the circumstances, a woman can have all the above by

38. Her relationship to the Sun has led some scholars to suggest that she substitutes the *deus ex machina* herself. However, a god's relative has no *sine qua non* claims to divinity (one has only to think of all the illegitimate divine offsprings in the greek mythology) and I do not think that Euripides' audience would consider her exit of the play as divine-like, despite the impressive stage-effects.

39. The same is true of Ino, whom Euripides alludes to, in lines 1282-5; she, too, killed her children while she was driven out of her mind. Euripides makes sure that he emphasizes this point (Ἰνώ, μανέισα ἐκ θεῶν, 1284).

being *σώφρων* enough to weigh the situation and make the right choices⁴⁰. This is the message in lines 1367-9:

ΙΑ. Λέχους σφέ κήξίωσας οὔνεκα κτανεῖν;
 ΜΗ. Σμικρόν γυναικί πῆμα τοῦτ' εἶναι δοκεῖς;
 ΙΑ. Ὅτις γε σώφρων· σοὶ δὲ πάντ' ἐστὶν κακά.

Medea had the space for choices in the play. From what Jason said, she could have chosen to be content in her own home in Corinth (446-9). However, as she herself admitted, she knew well what she was going to do, but her passion overcame her logic (1077-80), thus reminding us of Euripides' *Phaedra*, when she admits of women:

τὰ χρήστ' ἐπιστάμεθα καὶ γινώσκομεν,
 οὐκ ἐκπονοῦμεν δ', οἱ μὲν ἀργίας ὕπο,
 οἱ δ' ἥδονήν προθέντες ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ
 ἄλλην τιν'⁴¹.

Even after she learned that the events had taken an irreversible turn (when Glauke received the poisoned clothes), she admitted that it was the gods' wish and her own schemes, devised at an ill time, that were responsible (1013-4). However, no divine intervention justifies Medea's first claim. Tradition might have determined that she escaped unharmed, but, through the infanticide motif, Euripides makes sure that she remains forever stigmatized.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΙΣ

Τὸ ἐρώτημα ποῦ τίθεται εἶναι ἐὰν τὸ θέμα τῆς παιδοκτονίας ἦταν ἀναπόσπαστο συστατικό στοιχείο τῆς μυθολογίας τῆς Μήδειας ἢ ἀποτελεῖ ἐπινόηση τοῦ Εὐριπίδη. Μετὰ ἀπὸ μία ἀναλυτικὴ προσέγγιση τῆς παραδόσεως κρίνεται ὅτι ὁ Εὐριπίδης πρωτοτυπεῖ, τοῦλάχιστον ὅσον ἀφορᾷ στὸν τρόπο μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο παρουσίασε τὴν ἀνάλυση τοῦ χαρακτήρος τῆς παιδοκτόνου.

Ἐν συνεχείᾳ κρίνεται ἡ σκοπιμότητα τῆς χρησιμοποίησεως ἐνὸς τέτοιου στοιχείου ἀπὸ τὸν τραγῳδὸ. Προτείνεται ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῆς ὑποθέσεως ὑπάρχουν στιγμὲς ὅπου ἡ Μήδεια μπορεῖ νὰ κερδίση τὴν συμπάθεια τοῦ ἀκροατηρίου, καθὼς τὸ σύγχρονο (καὶ σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ ἀνδρικό) κοινὸ τοῦ Εὐριπίδη θὰ κατανοοῦσε τὶς ἐπιλογές τοῦ Ἰάσονα, ποῦ ἐγκαταλείπει τὴ Μήδεια πρὸς ὄφελος τῆς δικῆς του ἀποκαταστάσεως στὴν κοινωνία τῆς Κορίνθου. Ὅμως, ἡ νομιμότητα τῆς σχέσης Ἰάσονα - Μήδειας δὲν ἀμφισβητεῖται στὸ ἔργο καὶ ὁ Ἰάσων δίκαια χαρά-

40. *Σωφροσύνη* is also praised by the chorus in 635-43.

41. Eur., *Hippol.* 380-383.

κτηρίζεται ἀρνητικά. Βέβαια, ἡ χρήση μαγείας καὶ ἡ διεξαγωγή τῆς παιδοκτονίας μὲ ξεκάθαρο πνεῦμα, τὴν σοφία γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ὑπερηφανεύεται ἡ Μήδεια, καθοδηγοῦν τὴν κρίση τοῦ θεατῆ.

Ὑποστηρίζεται ὅτι ὁ Εὐριπίδης ἐπινοεῖ τὸ μοτίβο τῆς παιδοκτόνου Μήδειας, προκειμένου νὰ ἐξασφαλίσῃ τὸν τελικὸ ἀρνητικὸ χαρακτηρισμὸ τῆς ἀπὸ τὸ κοινό, ἐὰν αὐτὸ παρασυρόταν ἀπὸ τὶς σκηνές ἐκεῖνες ὅπου ἡ Μήδεια κέρδιζε τὴν συμπάθειά του.