An Examination of the Malleable Representation of Medea

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ABSTRACT

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As a persistent character in myth from early Greek epic to Imperial Rome and still into modern times, Medea’s representation shifts as a reflection of the society and author representing her. This thesis surveys the earliest versions of Medea’s myth to establish a basic narrative and furnish a range of variations. In particular, I examine the use of similar scenes in tragedies by Euripides and Seneca for contrasting representations of Medea. Individual analyses of Medea’s representation by each playwright demonstrate how her character is altered and what the activation of different mythical variants means in their cultural contexts. Medea’s gender plays a prominent role in her myth and this thesis analyzes its affect on her representation and perception. By demonstrating the manipulability of a specific mythical character based on a playwright’s preference or societal perception, this thesis explores the organic and dynamic nature of myth.
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Introduction

Medea has a rich existence in myth, beginning from Archaic Greece well into modern times. Her traditions are varied, as to be expected from a character who has spanned millennia. Over time, her traditions see a specific, if not gradual, change in her depiction and representation. Medea is known most notably for helping the mythical hero Jason on his quest to obtain the golden fleece. After his success, Medea accompanies him back to Iolcus as his wife, where they incur and encounter a string of events forcing them to continue travelling. Although she accompanies Jason, Medea is not an emblematic wife of Rome and Greece because she exhibits autonomy. In most traditions, she is instrumental in aiding Jason obtain the golden fleece, thus succeeding in his quest, but this autonomy comes at a price both in and for her myth. Within her story, her character often acts of her own will with devastating consequences. Outside of her myth, her free will and agency renders her as a wicked woman, a danger and one not to be emulated.

This thesis follows Medea’s myth from its origins to Seneca’s dramatic play about her. Medea’s myth and representation undergo significant changes which can be seen as reflections of individual author’s representations as well as societal pressures applied to Medea’s perception. The early traditions about Medea will create a foundation with which to see and understand the change. Using the earliest accounts of Medea, an overview of her myth will be established to compare with later depictions. A chapter focusing on Euripides’ Medea will follow because it shows the pivot in her tradition that becomes the accepted version for her myth. Euripides’ dramatic play makes several distinct changes to the myth and his influence as
a playwright ensures the succession of his changes over earlier variants. Seneca’s play serves as the finality to Medea’s myth for this thesis and explains how it got there. Seneca maintains and augments the changes first seen in Euripides’ depiction of the myth but alters her characterization even further to reflect attitudes common in his society.

The variation plaguing Medea’s myth involves her gender, immortality, and status as a witch. These three characteristics make Medea exceptional because they at once give her power in myth by giving her agency and free will but at the same time punish her inside and outside of myth because of the correlation between women and power. Women in antiquity who held power and self-rule were perceived as threatening because they objected to the social norms in place. This thesis will show how Medea’s character was malleable to so many variations because of her complexity as a character and how this malleability becomes a reflection of the author and their societies.
Chapter 1: Early Depictions of Medea

There is not one, authoritative version of Medea’s myth; she travels from Colchis to Iolcus, Corinth, Athens and finally, in some versions, back to Colchis, and there is a myth about her time in each location. The earliest sources mentioning Medea are from Hesiod and a scholiast quoting Creophylus of Samos, she is not mentioned in Homer.¹ Hesiod writes in his *Theogony* about Medea’s birth origins and status as a divine figure, mentioning her twice, first as the daughter of Aeetes and Idyia and then her relationship to Jason, (956-62):

῾Ηελίῳ δ' ἀκάμαντι τέκε κλυτὸς ᾿Ωκεανίνη
Περσηὶς Κίρκην τε καὶ Αἰήτην βασιλῆα.
Αἰήτης δ' υἱὸς φαεσιμβρότου ᾿Ηελίοιο
κούρην ᾿Ωκεανοίο τελήντος ποταμοίο
γήμε θεών βουλῆσιν, ᾿Ιδυῖαν καλλιπάρηον·
ἣ δή οἱ Μήδειαν ἐύσφυρον ἐν φιλότητι
γείναθ' ὑποδμηθεῖσα διὰ χρυσῆν ᾿Αφροδίτην.

And glorious Perseis, daughter of Oceanus, bore to the unresting sun, both Circe and King Aeetes. And Aeetes, son of shining Helios, married the daughter of Ocean the ever-circling stream, beautiful cheeked Idyia, by the will of the gods. And she gave birth to beautiful-ankled Medea after being overpowered in love by golden Aphrodite.²

Medea, whose name seems to help establish her role in myth, is the divine daughter of Aeetes, granddaughter to the sun god Helios. Μήδεα is the neuter plural of μήδος and can mean plans, arts, counsels, or as the collective plural: cunning, prudence. Her mother, Idyia, means “-she

¹ Farnell 1895, 202. Medea is mentioned in the scholia for Homer but briefly and mainly pertaining to her relation to Aeetes and Jason.
² All translations are my own throughout this thesis unless otherwise noted.
who knows” and there is a theory that it is an epithet for the goddess Hecate.³ This is the only instance that Medea is mentioned by name; in the following passage, regarding her union with Jason, she is referred to as ἑλικώπιδα κούρην, “the quick-glancing girl”.⁴

Hesiod’s Theogony is a catalogue of all the gods and as such, he does not elaborate on any details of her myth outside of her birth and marriage relations (997-1002):

τοὺς τελέσας ἐς ᾿Ιωλκὸν ἀφίκετο πολλὰ μογήσας
όκεις ἐπὶ νηὸς ἀγων ἑλικώπιδα κούρην
Ἀἰσονίδης, καί μιν θαλερήν ποιήσατ’ ἄκοιτιν.
καὶ ὅ’ ἔ με διμηθείσν’ ὑπὶ ἰήσονον ποιμένι λαῶν
Μήδειον τέκε παίδα, τὸν οὔρεσιν ἔτρεφε Χείρων
Φιλλυρίδης· μεγάλου δὲ Διὸς νόος ἐξετελεῖτο.

After he had completed these tasks and endured much toil, the son of Aeson [Jason] arrived in Iolcus in a swift ship, bringing the quick-glancing girl, and he made her his youthful wife. And because she was subject to Jason, shepherd of the people, she bore a child Medeios, whom Cheiron, son of Filyra, reared in the mountains: and the will of mighty Zeus was fulfilled.

Jason travelled to Colchis in search for the golden fleece, a task set before him by his uncle Pelias, assuming he would fail. Jason assembles the Argonauts, a group of heroic men, and they sail to Colchis facing various challenges along the way. After arriving in Colchis for the fleece, he meets Medea who decides to aid him in his quest. Through her help, from most accounts, excluding this one, with magical herbs and spells, Jason is victorious and he leaves with both the fleece and Medea.

³ Tuana 1985, 256.
⁴ Although she is only named once by her name, Jason is also only named once by his name and then as the son of Aeson. This may be done for poetic reasons as opposed to intentionally calling her by name.
The accounts regarding Medea and the Argonauts bear the most similarities. Apollonius of Rhodes has an epic, *Argonautika*, which details the entire journey of the Argonauts and Medea is not mentioned until book 3. There was an epic version of the *Argonautika*, now lost, but if it were extant it could settle the debate over how much of the tasks were accomplished by Jason with or without Medea’s aid.\(^5\) There are vase paintings which clearly detail scenes of Jason obtaining the fleece but Medea is missing which implies that she was either not present or played a lesser role.\(^6\) From Hesiod’s account, Medea comes off as a prize herself, rather than the reason Jason succeeded in his quest.

The loss of the earliest sources about Medea means that there is no sure evidence she was a consistent help to Jason or that she played a dominant role in the myth.\(^7\) She does become a dominant figure in the myths about what happens following the events in Colchis. Leaving Colchis, Jason and Medea journey back to Iolcus where Medea tricks Pelias’ daughters into killing him.\(^8\) Thereafter, Medea and Jason flee to Corinth as exiles until Creon, king of Corinth, dies and Medea is forced to flee to Athens. This is an extremely brief and vague overview of Medea’s myths because of the amount of variation that accompanies each part of her myth. In Hesiod’s account, Jason brings Medea with him back to Iolcus, however the word Hesiod uses is ἅγων which can also mean to lead rather than bring, and carries with it implications for marriage.\(^9\) Aeetes is Medea’s father but also the king of Colchis and, although

\(^5\) Gantz 1993, 358.
\(^6\) Gantz 1993, 358. There is also a cup by Douris which shows Jason with the fleece, aided by Athena, 359.
\(^7\) Although we know about a lost *Argonautika*, that doesn’t mean that there weren’t other accounts mentioning Medea that are also lost and I would, personally, be surprised if there weren’t.
\(^8\) Pindar and Apollodorus credit this to Hera. Pelias slighted the goddess who vowed she would get her vengeance on him. In Pindar’s *Pythian 4*, Medea is named as the agent but Pelias’ death is foretold regardless.
\(^9\) Latin uses a similar word meaning “to lead” which has implications for marriage; a man leads the woman and the use here expresses a dominant act.
Hesiod does not elaborate further on the potential marriage of Jason and Medea, his omission of information and word choice seem to imply Aetes’ handing over of Medea to Jason. Here, however, the voice of the verb used is important because ἄγων is the masculine nominative active present participle. The present tense can be easily explained as a use of historic present, in which the author, referring to the past, utilizes the present tense. The voice is significant with ἄγω because here it is used in the active but in connection to marriage it requires the middle. For Jason to lead Medea definitively away from Colchis in the form of marriage, the verb would need to be ἄγομενος. It is very likely that the formality of the appropriate verbs regarding marriage be used in their proper voices may have been perceived as unnecessary or redundant given that the text is, in one way, a list of unions and by its very nature implies the act of marriage. What Hesiod omits is equally as important as what he leaves in. Medea and Jason leave Colchis together and end up in Corinth in every variation of their myths, whether they are formally married or not.

The two parts of Medea’s myth that have the most variation is when she flees with Jason from Colchis and what happens in Corinth. Most accounts have Jason and Medea fleeing Colchis together as fugitives; she has betrayed her father by helping Jason and must leave with him. Medea’s brother, Apsyrtus, is either a small child or a grown man, depending on the account. Apollonius’ Argonautika has Apsyrtus as a grown man who pursues Jason and Medea

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10 Liddell and Scott, Greek English Lexicon, ἄγω. See also Smyth, § 1721. For the historic present see Smyth, § 1883. This is also the only use found of ἄγω in this context in the Theogony.
11 It is worth noting that, although it may not be explicitly stated, Jason and Medea enjoy some sort of union together and this union is the source of much trouble for Medea, both because of her and for her. In his Histories, Herodotus offers a different version of their union, calling it an abduction (ἁρπάσαι). He says that Aetes sent a herald to reclaim Medea but they refused and even cites this as motive for Paris abducting Helen 1.2.8-1.4.1.
12 In Hesiod’s Theogony, his use of ἄγω implies a union, thus that Medea left as Jason’s wife instead of the alternative, that they needed to flee from Aetes.
only to be killed by Jason. In other accounts, Apsyrtus is a child, kidnapped by Medea and gruesomely dismembered to avoid being caught by her father, Aeetes. The major variation in their flight from Colchis involves Apsyrtus’ age which in turn dictates what is done to or about him.

From Colchis, they arrive in Iolcus where Medea’s infamous boiling of Pelias occurs. This part of Medea’s myth is alluded to in Pindar’s Pythian 4, but it is also depicted on various pottery as early as 550BCE so, although it may not always be used in representations of her myth, it is established early as being a part of it. In this part of her myth, Medea convinces Pelias’ daughters to boil him to get back at Pelias. The daughters do this because they believe they are in fact rejuvenating him. Medea is found out for what she has done and is forced, again, to flee with Jason. They become exiles in Corinth and it is here that her myth varies the most.

Euripides’ drama, written in 431BCE, focuses on Medea’s revenge for Jason abandoning their union to marry Creon’s daughter, however, there is no sure evidence of this happening before Euripides. In his play, Medea is responsible for the murder of Creon, his daughter, and her own children. Creophylus of Samos is one of the oldest known sources for the Medea

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13 4.415-6 Jason tells Medea that “κεῖνόν γε τεὰς ἐς χεῖρας ἱκέσθαι μειλίξω; I will soothe that man to come into your hands.”

14 Several Athenian vases found in the Beazley Archives dating from 550-500BCE depict the scene in which Medea places the ram in the cauldron to convince Pelias’ daughters that it can be rejuvenated BZA 5602, 302037, 301685.

15 Pindar’s Pythian 4 can be roughly dated to around 466BCE. In Pindar’s poem he mentions that Pelias was destined to die and that Medea was merely the instrument in this. He somehow dishonors Hera, thus sealing his fate, but in some other accounts, his death is for what he does to Jason’s parents and for usurping and keeping the throne.

16 Gantz 1993, 370.

17 Euripides’ purposeful infanticide as a literary invention will be discussed further in the following chapter.
It is said that Medea, delayed in Corinth, killed Creon, ruler of the city at that time, with drugs. Fearing Creon’s friends and relatives, she fled to Athens, but because her sons were young and unable to follow, she set them at the altar of Hera Akraia, believing that their father would be mindful of their safety. But Creon’s household, after killing them, told the story that Medea, not only killed Creon, but her children also.

Here, Medea kills Creon, the motive is not mentioned, and leaves her children at the altar of Hera Akraia but they are killed by Creon’s kinsmen. This is not the only account that has Corinthian citizens killing Medea’s children. In other accounts, Medea is the ruler of Corinth\(^{19}\) and in one tradition, the Corinthians kill her children because they dislike the idea of being ruled by a foreign woman.\(^{20}\) In this fragment, Helios gave his son Aeetes the region of Corinth to rule, explaining how Medea came to be in power in Corinth (FGrHist 451 F 2a, Paus. 2.3.10):

\[\text{Εὔμηλος δὲ Ἰλιὸς ἔφη δοῦναι τὴν χώραν Ἀλωεῖ μὲν τὴν Ἄσωπίαν, Αἰήτην δὲ τὴν Ἐφυραίαν. καὶ Αἰήτην ἀπιόντα ἐς Κόλχους παρακαταθέσθαι Βοῦνωι τὴν γῆν, Βοῦνον δὲ Ὑπατοῦ καὶ Ἀλκιδαμείας εἶναι· καὶ ἔπει Βοῦνος ἔτελευτησεν, οὔτως Ἐπωπέα τὸν Ἀλωέως καὶ τὴν Ἐφυραίων σχεῖν ἀρχήν. Κορίνθου δὲ}\]

\(^{18}\) Farnell 1895, 1.202 & Mastronarde 2002, 51. Creophylus’ dates are disputed, he is either a poet and contemporary to Homer and Hesiod or a chronicler and much later. Farnell states that he is “the oldest authority for the story of Medea” but does not give anything more.

\(^{19}\) SCHOL. EURIP. Med. 9 (= 19): “ὅτι δὲ βεβασίλευκε τῆς Κορίνθου ἡ Μήδεια, because Medea was ruling Corinth”

\(^{20}\) Gantz 1993, 369.
Eumelos said that Helios gave the country Asopos to Aloeus and Ephyros to Aeetes. And Aeetes, since he was away in Colchis, entrusted the land to Bounos. Bounos was the son of Hermes and Alcidamia, and when Bounos died, Epopeus, son of Aloeus, also held the rule over Ephyros. But because there was no child left behind by Korinthos, the later son of Marathon, the Corinthians sent for Medea from Iolchus to give the rule to her.

In this tradition it is the Corinthians who send for Medea to rule Corinth when they no longer have someone to succeed after Marathon. She is not responsible for Creon’s death and he is not even mentioned.

Medea’s myth is complicated because it contains so many variants and traditions, but this is not to say that her myth is an exceptional case. Like many major myths, the most agreement remains in the overarching narrative while there are conflicting variations in the details. Medea always leaves Colchis with Jason; how and why she leaves differs. The type of character Medea is is also riddled with inconsistency; her categorization in myth wanders among goddess, witch, princess, and priestess, in some accounts embodying one of these, in others multiple. Returning to the *Theogony*, Hesiod labels the women collectively as ἀθάναται, immortal, deathless, and specifically contrasts them with his next catalogue of women who are merely γυναῖκες. This difference in classification distinctly marks the female figures as divinities and so too, Medea. Their importance or level as goddesses may vary among other goddesses but they are still divine and therefore separate from mortal women. Although Hesiod’s language for Jason and Medea’s union is open to interpretation, his language regarding her divinity is not (1019-22):
αὕται μὲν θνητοῖσι παρ’ ἀνδράσιν εὐνηθεῖσαι ἀθάναται γείναντο θεοῖς ἐπιείκελα τέκνα.
[νῦν δὲ γυναικῶν φύλον ἀείσατε, ἡδυέπειαι Μοῦσαι ᾿Ολυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.]

These immortal women, lying beside mortal men, begot children resembling gods. But now, sweet-speaking Olympian Muses, sing about the race of women, daughters of aegis bearing Zeus.

This is not the only reference to Medea’s divinity, as a scholiast for Euripides’ Medea explicitly writes “ἀθάνατος ἦν ἡ Μήδεια; Medea was immortal” [FHG IV p. 518a].

While it can certainly be said that Hesiod is not representative of all Greece and that his Theogony may not reflect a Panhellenic view of the gods and therefore Medea’s registration as a goddess is negligible, he is not the only one to refer to Medea’s divinity. Pindar, centuries after Hesiod, writes about Jason and his expedition for the golden fleece in his Pythian 4. Here, Pindar provides the details Hesiod omits about Jason and Medea’s union. In his introduction of Medea, she is announcing a prophecy (9-12):

καὶ τὸ Μηδείας ἔπος ἀγκομίσαι ἐβδόμα καὶ σὺν δεκάτα γενεὰ Θήραιον, Αἴήτα τὸ ποτε ζαμενὴς παῖς ἀπέπνευσ’ ἀθανάτου στόματος, δέσποινα Κόλχων. εἶπε δ’ οὕτως ἤμιθέοισιν ᾿Ιάσονος αἰχματᾶο ναύταις·

And then the fierce daughter of Aeetes, princess of Colchis, breathed forth from an immortal mouth, Medea’s prophecy that the 17th generation [would] return to Thera. And she spoke in this way of the warrior Jason with his demigod sailors.

Pindar uses the word ἀθανάτου to describe Medea, the same word used by Hesiod for all the goddesses. Hesiod is Boeotian while Pindar is Theban, and writing much later, but there is still the agreement that Medea is ἀθάνατος.
Over time, her divinity seems to become contested; a comparable example of this can be found in Helen. Not only does Helen suffer from equally conflicting variation to her myth, her divinity also varies from myth and region. The most significant variation is whether or not Helen was abducted or seduced by Paris. In almost every version of her myth, Helen is taken to Troy but the detail of agency differs; either she was taken by force or she went of her own volition. Although the inconsistency behind these minor details in myth seems trivial when the principal narrative remains the same, they often become the most significant aspect of the myth. If Helen was abducted she can no longer be vilified as a whore for forsaking her marriage but this is at the cost of her agency, in which she becomes an object of the myth rather than a main player in it. If she went willingly or was the one proposing to go, she has agency which means she was responsible for her own fate. This amount of control in women is dangerous and often vilified. Helen becomes a whore, Medea becomes a murderous witch, both of whom cannot be trusted and serve as reminders of wicked women.

There is one version in which Helen, after being abducted, never makes it to Troy but is replaced by a phantom.21 Although Euripides did not invent this alteration, he does focus a play around it.22 Unlike the alteration to Medea’s narrative, this version did not eclipse the preexisting story but it does show Euripides’ propensity for invention and to utilize unusual variants of common myths.

21 Euripides has a play titled Helen in which Helen is whisked away by Hermes at Zeus’ command and remains in Egypt, waiting for Menelaus. A phantom made from clouds is molded to look like her and takes her place at Troy with Paris.
22 Allan 2008, 18. Stesichorus, Herodotus, and Euripides discuss this version but it seems that there were other authors who used this variation as well. Stesichorus has a play about this also titled Helen which predates Euripides by some considerable time.
Euripides is not alone in utilizing unusual variants from myth; Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century BCE, differs from Hesiod and relates his own version of Medea’s ancestry. In his version Medea is still the daughter of Aeetes, who remains the son of Helios, but her mother is now Hecate, and Circe becomes Medea’s sister. In his account, Helios had two sons, Aeetes and Perses. Perses’ daughter was Hecate who, after poisoning her father, marries Aeetes, her uncle, giving birth to Circe, Medea, and a son Aegialeus. In Diodorus’ account of Medea, she is a benevolent helper of strangers but has the misfortune of having a cruel mother. Where Medea wants to help those who come ashore, Hecate wants to kill them, which leads to a distrust brewing in Hecate towards Medea. Suspecting this, Medea realizes she must flee before she becomes a victim and when Jason comes ashore, she sees a mutual opportunity for them to help each other (4.46.3-4):

καθ’ ὃν δὴ χρόνον τοὺς Ἀργοναύτας ἀπὸ τῆς Ταυρικῆς κομισθέντας νυκτὸς καταπλεῦσαι τῆς Κολχίδος εἰς τὸ προειρημένον τέμενος. ἔνθα δὴ περιτυχόντας τῇ Μηδείᾳ πλανωμένη παρὰ τὸν αἰγιαλόν, καὶ μαθόντας παρ’ αὐτῆς τὸ τῆς ξενοκτονίας νόμιμον, ἀποδέξασθαι μὲν τὴν ἡμερότητα τῆς παρθένου, δηλώσαντας δ’ αὐτῇ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἐπιβολὴν πάλιν παρ’ αὐτῆς τῇ ξενοκτονίας νόμιμον, ἀποδέξασθαι μὲν τὴν ἡμερότητα τῆς παρθένου, δηλώσαντας δ’ αὐτῇ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἐπιβολὴν πάλιν παρ’ αὐτῆς τῇ ξενοκτονίας νόμιμον, ἀποδέξασθαι μὲν τὴν ἡμερότητα τῆς παρθένου, δηλώσαντας δ’ αὐτῇ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἐπιβολὴν πάλιν παρ’ αὐτῆς τῇ ξενοκτονίας νόμιμον, ἀποδέξασθαι μὲν τὴν ἡμερότητα τῆς παρθένου, δηλώσαντας δ’ αὐτῇ τὴν ἐαυτῶν ἐπιβολὴν πάλιν παρ’ αὐτῆς τῇ ξενοκτονίας νόμιμον, ἀποδέξασθαι μὲν τὴν ἡμερότητα τῆς παρθένου.

According to which time the Argonauts, travelling at night, sailed down from Tauris into the aforementioned sacred land of Colchis. There, they fell in with Medea who was wandering beside the beach, and after they learned from her the custom of killing strangers, they received the gentleness from the maiden, after she again revealed their penalty, they learned about her danger from her father because of her piety towards strangers. Because a common unity was

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23 Diodorus, 4.45
revealed, it was announced that Medea will unite with them until they might complete the proposed contest, and Jason [would] give his pledge through oaths that after marrying her, he will live with her for the rest of their life.

Hecate

Although in most accounts of Medea her mother is Idyia, there is a theory that the name Idyia is an epithet for Hecate. As mentioned above, the name means “-she who knows”, which is not only appropriate for the mother of Medea, whose name means cunning, but is also fitting in connection with Hecate who presides over mysterious realms in Greek mythology, such as magic or the underworld.24 From Diodorus’ account of Hecate, she is powerful in respect to authority and knowledge of her craft, but her divinity is in question. In his account, she maintains some aspects associated with her divinity, for example, she is extremely knowledgeable of poisons and she teaches what she knows to her daughters; but she also has a temple built to Artemis and forces people to sacrifice at it (4.45.2). Although it is not unusual for a god or goddess to have mortals build a temple to themselves, it is unusual for a goddess to build a temple for herself, let alone for anyone other. This point seems to attest to her humanity rather than her divinity which shows the complexity surrounding her character in myth and may explain Medea’s uncertain divinity.

There may be a correlating fluctuation regarding the divinity of Medea and Hecate which stem from shifting perceptions. Hecate seems to be a later edition to the Greek

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24 Tuana 1985, 256-7; West 1966, 420 line 960. A part of the waning and waxing of the moon, she is also a gatekeeper in the underworld and thus knowledgeable about life and death. In Hesiod’s Theogony, she is described as not being limited to one realm but “μοῖραν ἔχειν γαῖς τε καὶ ἀτρυγέτοιο θαλάσσης. To have a portion of the land but also the barren sea (413).” West notes in his commentary that it means less that she is all powerful and more that she in not limited to one. Given her associations with the underworld and death in general, this may explain the prominence Hesiod gives to her.
pantheon because she is not mentioned anywhere in Homer and her absence, particularly when Odysseus visits the underworld, is noted as unusual. In Diodorus’ account, she is portrayed as a powerful queen, but not a goddess and, in this way, Medea’s divinity is also absent.

Hecate and Medea have many things in common that may stem from there being an archaic relationship between them or one organically forming in later depictions, such as Hecate named as Medea’s mother. Hecate is a liminal goddess, existing in both public and private cults, known for her associations in supernatural realms and adopted into the Greek pantheon from Eastern traditions. In many variations to Medea’s myth she is a priestess to Hecate or becomes a double to her. In one theory, Medea, rather than being a goddess in her own right, is a manifestation of Hecate. Later depictions of Medea, especially in Roman society, present her with deeper associations into the realm of the supernatural and more as a witch than in previous depictions and her close relationship with Hecate could easily be responsible for this. Hecate herself undergoes a gradual change from being an essential part of the triple goddesses, representative of the old woman, crone, which in turn represents death in the cycle of life, to taking on negative connotations and darker associations. The triple goddesses represent birth, maturity, and death, and the stages of womanhood are linked to them: maiden, matron, and crone. Hecate was always associated with death but as a natural

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25 Farnell 1895, 2.501.
26 Oxford Classical Dictionary, “Hecate”.
27 Farnell 1895, 2.505.
28 Tuana 1985, 256.
29 Tuana 1985, 256.
30 Makowski 1985, 74.
stage of life, not as a negative opposition to life.\textsuperscript{31} These stages are also closely linked to the stages of the harvest because in early Greek society the harvest, and vegetation in general, meant life and carried a veneration.\textsuperscript{32} Through time, there is a correlation between a waning reverence for harvests, and the life cycles associated with it, and Hecate.\textsuperscript{33}

While Hecate suffers a shift in importance and representation she is comparable to Medea in this regard as well. Medea does not carry any association with the harvest outside of her association with Hecate but even this stems from genealogical and supernatural connections. Instead, Medea’s shift may be tied more closely to her gender and initial status as a powerful female, if not a marginal goddess. Just as a negative connotation becomes coupled with death and Hecate, so to does a perception of danger come to be coupled with powerful female figures.\textsuperscript{34} As Medea’s divinity becomes diluted she remains an autonomous figure but residing in a marginal realm between mortal and divine. The more she resembles a mortal woman, a γυνή, the more of a danger she is perceived to be.

\textit{Other Divine Associations}

Hecate is not the only goddess Medea is associated with, often in the role as a priestess or worshipper; she also has associations with Artemis and Hera and is even credited with building temples to them.\textsuperscript{35} Her association with Artemis stems from the supernatural; the Artemis of

\begin{itemize}
\item[$\textsuperscript{31}$] Tuana 1985, 256.
\item[$\textsuperscript{32}$] Murray 1947, 38.
\item[$\textsuperscript{33}$] Tuana 1985, 254. O’Brien 1983, 44.
\item[$\textsuperscript{34}$] Sharrock 2011, 57. Chapter 3 of this thesis explores in greater detail the notion that powerful women are dangerous or perceived negatively.
\item[$\textsuperscript{35}$] Aristotle, \textit{On Amazing Tales} 839b16-18; Farnell 1895, 1.202, 2.505.
\end{itemize}
Iolcus has dealings with spells and poisons and Medea’s name gets coupled with her. The relationship between Hera and Medea is all centered around Medea’s children and it is in these stories that Medea seems to lose her divinity entirely. In each version, Medea’s children meet a tragic end, either by being killed by the Corinthians, for one reason or another, or killed by Medea, though not on purpose. In each instance, the end result remains the same, that the Corinthians thereafter sacrifice to the children buried at the temple of Hera Akraia and the reason behind it, of course, changes between who did the killing. If it was the Corinthians, they are forced to sacrifice to atone for murdering the children in Hera’s temple. When Medea is the culprit, she accidentally kills the children while trying to make them immortal and as Hera’s promise to Medea, they do, in a way, become immortal by being forever celebrated in association with the goddess by the Corinthians sacrificing to them. Medea becomes a reactionary figure in these versions of her myth, losing some of her agency and therefore, implicitly losing her divinity as well.

An unusual story explaining the ancient stereotype that Cretans are liars goes back to Medea and Thetis competing over which of them is more beautiful:

Ἀθηνόδωρος ἐν ὀγδόῳ Ὑπομνημάτων φησὶ Θέτιν καὶ Μήδειαν ἐρίσαι περὶ κάλλους ἐν Θεσσαλίᾳ, καὶ κριτὴν γενέσθαι Ἰδομενέα, καὶ προσνεῖμαι Θέτιδι τὴν νίκην. Μήδειαν δ’ ὀργισθεῖσαν εἰπεῖν· Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψευσταὶ, καὶ ἐπαράσασθαι αὐτῷ, μηδέποτε ἀλήθειαν εἰπεῖν, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς κρίσεως ἐποίησε. Καὶ ἐκ τούτου φησὶ τοὺς Κρῆτας ψεύστας νομισθῆναι· παρατίθεται δὲ τοῦτο ἱστοροῦντα ὁ

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36 Farnell 1895, 2.505.
37 Farnell 1895, 1.202.
38 Farnell 1895, 1.202.
40 The death of Medea’s children can be seen as a release from her mortal state. Chapter 2 discusses this at greater length when Medea purposefully kills her children after her marriage is broken by Jason, leaving her without any ties to mortality. This will also have an affect on how her character is perceived, discussed more in chapter 3, as a woman who willingly kills her children.
Ἀθηνόδωρος Ἀντίοχον ἐν δευτέρῳ τῶν Κατὰ πόλιν μυθικῶν. (Fr. Gr. Hist Athenodorus of Eretria)

Athenodorus says in his eighth [book] that Thetis and Medea quarreled over beauty in Thessaly, and Idomeneus was the judge, and he granted the victory to Thetis. [Because of this] Medea became angry and said: Cretans always lie, and to curse him to never speak the truth, just as in the decision he made. And they say that because of this, Cretans are deemed as liars. Athenodorus adds this to Antiochus inquiring in his second work concerning city myths.

Although Medea’s divinity is not explicitly stated, it does not need to be. Here, she is compared to a goddess and retaliates to his decision just as a goddess would. The scene is reminiscent of Paris in which the goddesses who were not chosen went off enraged and retaliated against the judge, just as Medea does. Medea curses Idomeneus that he will never speak the truth and from this story the idea that Cretans are liars originates. This passage also makes it clear that Thetis and Medea are meant to be equals. Unhappy with the decision, Medea curses the mortal, Idomeneus, but does nothing to Thetis. As in the judgment of Paris, the losing goddesses retaliated against Paris but did nothing to Aphrodite. When Athena, in the weaving contest, competed against Arachne, furious at Arachne’s skill over her own, she transformed her into a spider.\footnote{Ovid, Metamorphoses, 6.129-45} Arachne was a mortal who had the audacity to rival a goddess; she reached above her station and was punished for it. In this case, there is no retaliation between Thetis and Medea because they are equals however, Medea has every right, as a goddess, to punish Idomeneus.

Hesiod’s separation of immortal from mortal women is important because divinity changes the rules for mythical figures. A goddess is not subject to the same structures in myth
as a mortal woman is. Medea is able to punish Idomeneus because her divinity places her station above his. Goddesses are not confined to the same roles as mortal women are and there is no better example than Hera as a goddess willfully disobeying not only another god, but her husband. This is not to say that she is his equal, only that her divinity sets her apart from the confines mortal women face. She can be obstinate to her husband and choose for herself the actions she carries out.

*Some Conclusions*

While in the earliest accounts Medea is portrayed and named as a goddess, she undergoes a change, through her myth and through time, in which her divinity is weakened. When Medea loses her divinity in later retellings, she gains a close association with a goddess, for instance as a priestess to Hecate.42 Her lineage remains present and with it her knowledge of magical incantations and herbs. As with Hecate, Medea seems to have begun in early Greek myth as a divine figure but gradually her myth became confused and thus also her categorization in myth, leaving her to encompass multiple subcategories in myth. Her accepted status as a goddess may fade but its remnants let her retain the ability to act outside the boundaries of a mortal woman. This, along with her myth’s variation in general, allow playwrights, writing about specific moments in her myth, to shape her character and her myth further as they wish. Authors can give her agency and alter her character as they choose because even though they may deviate from a previous telling of her myth, her liminality between immortal and mortal give them room to do so.

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42 In Apollonius Rhodes’ *Argonautika*, Medea is a priestess to Hecate.
Medea in Literature

Several authors in Greek and Roman literature have written works around Medea. Apollonius’ lengthy Argonautika focuses on Jason and the Argonauts’ journey to obtain the golden fleece in Colchis where in book 3, Hera persuades Aphrodite to make Medea, whom she knows has the power to help Jason, fall in love with Jason. Medea is a major component to this epic because she is a major component to Jason’s myth. Ovid, notably, has also written a, now lost, tragedy about Medea but his representation of her can still be found through his Metamorphoses and his Heroides. Although their representations of her differ, this can easily be blamed on their choice of which part of Medea’s myth they write about, rather than time period or societal differences affecting it and this is why a close analysis of Euripides and Seneca is a valuable tool to observe changes in her representation that stem either directly from the author, time period, or society in which they were created. Euripides’ and Seneca’s Medea’s share almost identical scenes and the differences in style and representation express the differences in their backgrounds. Euripides is writing just before the outbreak of war and offers his audience a Medea resembling a male hero consumed with notions of honor and respect. The crimes she commits are presented as necessary and although the audience may object to them, they at least understand her reasoning to commit them lacks malicious intent. Seneca, writing much later, dramatizes his representation of Medea by emphasizing her supernatural background. Her motives become entirely malicious and this seems to bring her joy.

43 Ovid writes two letters to Jason, one as Hypsipyle and one as Medea. Hypsipyle, in her letter, criticizes Medea for stealing Jason away from her.
These differing representations of the same character in myth reflect the authors and their societies. In the following chapters, this thesis will closely analyze their plays individually, what they demonstrate about their society, and lastly what this means in terms of the Medea myth as a whole.
Chapter 2: Euripides’ Medea

I have discussed the varying traditions of Medea’s myth and I will now turn to Euripides’ version of her character in his Medea. Of the authors that write plays about Medea, Euripides offers the most dramatic representation of her character because of his violation of gender norms. Euripides has a distinct style and preference of character in his plays in which he often chooses marginal or female characters as the focal points for his plays and forces the audience to see from their perspective. He accomplishes this with internal monologues and a study of human nature that borders on psychological.44

Medea is an unsettling character because she crosses carefully placed boundaries. Euripides masculinizes her and has her commit unspeakable and violent crimes, both of which encompass male and female attributes. By establishing her character with traditionally male ἀρετή, Medea exchanges her femininity for masculinity, crossing the boundary into a male character. Her reasoning behind killing Creon, the princess, even her children, lies behind a facade of reestablishing her honor by harming her enemies, traditionally a masculine thing to do. When Achilles felt he was treated unjustly, he set out to regain his honor by killing those he believed wronged him. In this way, Medea is no different. Where she differs is in the way she is wronged. Achilles believed he was being disrespected and thus dishonored by not being given what he was entitled to. Medea’s situation is complex because Euripides makes it clear that an oath was taken, there was an agreement between her and Jason and now Jason is breaking that oath. While it is Achilles’ station and skill which provide him with the reasonable assumption

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that he is entitled to a certain treatment and spoils, Medea was actually promised these things.\(^45\) The broken oath is also important to remember in what role Medea’s gender plays.\(^46\) As Jason’s wife, Medea is subject to him; her job as his wife is to provide him with heirs, something she does and even admits that if she had not, he would be right in leaving her.

Euripides’ treatment of her myth reveals his style as well as contemporary themes and issues. In manipulating Medea’s characterization as a masculinized figure, obsessed with honor and respect, he creates a motive for her deliberate infanticide of her own children, a shocking variation which he is said to have invented. Euripides shows a common theme in his plays, his propensity for the unusual; he chooses marginal characters, uncommon myth variants, or invents traditions from myth, and his play Medea is no different. Euripides’ style and the events occurring during the play's writing and production, alter the representation of Medea, creating a female character behaving as a man would. She assumes and obsesses over male ἀρετή, gradually shedding what holds her in her feminine realm, with the penultimate thing being her children.

Oaths Established and Broken

From the opening monologue, the audience is aware of a broken oath between Jason and Medea and that Medea has been wronged by Jason 20-9:

Μήδεια δ' ἡ δύστηνος ἠτιμασμένη
βοᾷ μὲν ὤρκους, ἀνακαλεὶ δὲ δεξιᾶς
πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοὺς μαρτύρεται

\(^45\) Kovacs 1993. Kovacs argues that Medea is able to do what she does with impunity because it is Zeus’ will after Jason broke his oath to Medea.

\(^46\) Fletcher 2003, 33. Oaths are a prominent feature in this play and are common in Euripidean plays. Here they serve as plot points and a means to show Medea’s rhetorical skill.
οἵας ἀμοιβῆς ἐξ ᾿Ιάσονος κυρεῖ.
κεῖται δ’ ἄσιτος, σῶμ’ ὑφεῖσ’ ἀλγηδόσιν,
tὸν πάντα συντήκουσα δακρύοις χρόνον
έπει πρὸς ἀνδρός ἡμιθετ’ ἡδικημένη,
οὔτ’ ὁμμ’ ἔπαίρουσ’ οὔτ’ ἀπαλλάσσουσα γῆς
πρόσωπον· ὡς δὲ
κλύδων ἀκοῦει νουθετουμένη φίλων

But Medea is wretched because she has been dishonored. She shouts for the oaths and summons the greatest pledge of the right hand, and calls the gods to witness the sort of return she obtains from Jason. She lies without food, her body placed under continuous sorrow dissolving in tears since she learned how she was wronged by her husband, she neither lifts her eyes nor removes her face from the ground. She hears the advice of friends just as a stone or waves from the sea.

The Nurse’s monologue is fueled with words denoting an official union between Jason and Medea. Other than explicitly using the word ὅρκους, oaths, she uses δεξιᾶς, to denote the right hand with which one pledges an oath and adds πίστιν μεγίστην, greatest trust, to further emphasize the point. The word πίστις can also carry the meaning of a pledge; because of its meaning as faith or trust, it also bears the meaning of something that comes with trust, a pledge.

This passage, and especially its prominence as among the first lines of the play, establishes a backstory in which Jason and Medea formed an agreed union which he has broken. It also foreshadows Medea’s unique characterization in the play. From the Nurse’s statements, the oath was formed between Medea and Jason, giving Medea an equal amount of power within the oath.47 Medea’s representation, however, is also reminiscent of a tragic hero

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47 Mastronarde 2002, 167, n.21-2. Typically, the bride’s guardian or father would give the bride over to her husband, who then becomes her new guardian. This cannot happen in Medea’s narrative because by most
stuck in a woman’s body.\textsuperscript{48} She refuses to eat, she does not listen to friends, she is forsaking everything that links her to her mortality.\textsuperscript{49} She is comparable to an Achilles or an Ajax, who seeks revenge for her slighted honor and reputation and decides to commit heinous crimes to regain her honor, however, she is still treated as a woman by the male characters and the chorus. The nurse seems to be the only character aware of her capabilities, saying: “δέδοικα δ’ αὐτήν μὴ τι βουλεύσῃ νέον ἐγὼ δα τήνδε; I fear that she will plan something new...I know this woman. (37,39)”. Just a few lines later, she refers to Medea as δεινή, clever, terrible; a word also used to describe Achilles and Odysseus.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Anger as a Masculine Feature}

Euripides is clearly building upon the tradition that Medea aided Jason in obtaining the golden fleece and their union appears to be an agreement stemming from that. Their union is significant because, from the passage, there is no mention of a male guardian of any kind handing over Medea to Jason. The play then begins with an implicit autonomy given to Medea;\textsuperscript{51} she has entered into a contract with a man and what becomes problematic is the obvious disconnect between the two characters and how they view one another. Throughout accounts, except Hesiod who is slightly vague, Medea betrays her father for Jason. This practice will be discussed at greater length later on.

\textsuperscript{48} Bongie 1977. In her article she argues that Medea exhibits traits comparable to a Sophoclean tragic hero who displays Homeric traits. The Homeric traits are cited in Adkins 1960, 31-7; they range from prowess in battle and speaking, and therefore having power over your opponent in both, and succeeding in one’s endeavor despite the cost. Bongie argues that according to the criteria, Medea is even more of a tragic hero than her male counterparts because her sacrifice is greater and she is successful.

\textsuperscript{49} Scully 2003, 39. In his article, Scully is discussing Achilles’ transition from mortality to divinity. The same process is described by the Nurse about Medea, that she does not eat or listen to friends.

\textsuperscript{50} This is the same adjective used to describe Achilles by Patroclus in the \textit{Iliad}, 11.654 and Odysseus just after he has slain the suitors in the \textit{Odyssey}, 22.405. Bongie 1977, 32, n.18; the word is also used to describe each of Sophocles’ heroic figures.

\textsuperscript{51} Mastronarde 2002, 167, n.21-2.
the play, the problems Medea encounters stem from how she views herself and how others view her. She perceives herself to be an equal to Jason, however, no one else does. Naturally, Medea grows angry and frustrated at this which may be accurate for any woman in a similar situation, but broadcasting her emotions and obstinance toward the circumstances are not feminine things to do. Medea is not eating, she does not listen to advice from friends-- these characteristics are comparable to Achilles after he was publicly shamed by Agamemnon. Her anger pushes her to retaliate but her belief that she is equal allows for her anger to be a governing factor.

_Euripides’ Style_

Medea is angry because she believes Jason broke his oath to her and dishonored her. The Nurse establishes that there was a union and gives the audience the feeling there either was at one time an equality to the couple, or at the least Medea perceived as much. Euripides’ style of writing, most notably his tendency for psychological narrative, is what delivers this to the audience. Euripides uses narratives derived from the point of view of the characters he is writing for, both in character’s internal monologues and their actions.52 His use of internal monologues reveals the thought processes of his characters, allowing the audience to follow along with these characters as they work through whatever situation they find themselves in. The audience then, knows why the characters act as they do because they know what is motivating them and the reasoning behind the character’s actions. This is also true when they see how the characters interact with one another and the psychology at play there. In _Medea_,

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the title character often employs manipulation to obtain what she wants, and the audience can see her do this. They understand her motives because she has voiced them either in her monologue or to the chorus, and they know when she is being manipulative because her demeanor changes.

Medea is also an ideal example of Euripides’ use of marginal characters and how he gives them a voice, even if they are not a main character. The title character is not only a woman but also a foreigner and while she is given the most attention and dialogue, the opening scenes of the play present the audience with the worries and fears of the Nurse, one of Medea’s servants. Euripides was ridiculed for his style, especially by the comedic playwright Aristophanes.⁵³ He often makes women the central focus of his plays, going against the custom in Athenian society that women were not supposed to be a topic of conversation, in fact, as Thucydides says in Pericles’ Funeral Oration that (2.46):

τῆς τε γὰρ ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως μὴ χείροσι γενέσθαι ὑμῖν μεγάλη ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ ἂν ἐπ’ ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεις κλέος ὅ.

There is great glory for you in not being less than your character and of whom there is the least talk concerning either excellence or fault among men.

Whether Thucydides said this himself or it was indeed Pericles, the point remains the same and it strengthens Aristophanes’ criticisms. Euripides chooses female characters and gives them a voice and agency, but in 5th century Athens, this was not how women were supposed to behave. Women were meant to be spoken of as little as possible because it meant that if they were fulfilling their roles, there was nothing worth speaking of.

⁵³ Murray 1946, 17
Female ἀρετή

To achieve glory, women were not meant to stand out. Their ἀρετή, excellence, was different from a man’s ἀρετή and therefore, achieved in different ways. Male and female ἀρετή is contrasted with one another; prowess in war and rhetoric fuelled a man’s ἀρετή while women were excellent from the absence of those qualities.54 The character Andromache, Hector’s wife in the Iliad, is said to embody the ideal female.55 She is dutiful to her station and husband, really one and the same, and she lacks any real complexity.56 Her role is reactionary to the events around her and she has no true agency. She is also portrayed as very feminine in the sense that her character never strays into the realm of masculinity. In the Iliad, she is always shown within the female realm, weaving or within the household, and when she is not, she is surrounded by handmaidens who act as a barrier between the two realms.57

Andromache is an ideal wife because she is loyal and subservient. From what readers learn of her, she lacks complexity because she is not given a voice; this changes in Euripides’ play about her. Now the audience understands her internal conflict when she is torn between being faithful to her, now dead, husband or obeying her new master. She is also confronted with the challenge of dealing with a jealous wife, Hermione. Euripides has cast a light on an issue that may have otherwise gone unrepresented in drama. He shows the very everyday conflict of human emotion and explores it in his dramas. There is no doubt that such a conflict,

54 Adkins 1960, 36-7. Adkins defines female ἀρετή by “The qualities demanded are beauty, skill in weaving and housekeeping, chastity, and faithfulness”.
55 Lefkowitz 2005, 11. Two excerpts are listed from Euripides’ Trojan Women (643-58) and Andromache (205-27).
56 Sharrock 2011, 64.
57 Ibid.
a wife jealous of a concubine or female slave, occurred in normal, day to day life, as it is even mentioned in the *Odyssey* when Laertes avoids fornicating with a female slave specifically to avoid angering his wife.\(^5\)\(^8\) Even here, Andromache remains an ideal female character; her internal conflict is only because she is at odds with what is actually the right thing to do. Each decision has its moral values so that whatever she does choose, she is, in some way, still upholding a quiet obedience and subservience to a man and she remains in her female realm.

Medea’s character embodies several characteristics which do not coincide with female ἀρετή and while they brand her in a negative light, they also allow playwrights more freedom with her representation. Euripides makes Medea outspoken, disobedient, and competitive. As a woman, these are not ideal qualities to have, however, they are in a man. In addition to giving her masculine characteristics, he removes feminine characteristics. She is never shown weaving, with handmaidens or any other defining feminine feature. While speaking to the chorus she says (248-51):

> λέγουσι δ’ ἡμᾶς ως ἀκίνδυνον βίον
> ζώμεν κατ’ οίκους, οί δὲ μάρνανται δορί,
> κακῶς φρονοῦντες: ώς τρὶς ἂν παρ’ ασπίδα
> στήναι θέλομ’ ἄν μᾶλλον ή τεκεῖν ἄπαξ.

They say that we live a life free from danger at home, and they fight with a spear, but they think poorly, since I would rather stand beside a shield three times rather than give birth once.

Here she wishes to cast off the ability to give childbirth, ultimately her gender because it is the one feature left that marks her role in the feminine realm. Following the collapse of her

\(^5\)\(^8\) *Odyssey*, 1.429-33; In introducing Eurykleia, she is said to have been by bought by Laertes and treated like a wife but that Laertes “εὐνή δ’ οὐ ποτ’ ἐμικτο, χόλον δ’ ἀλέειν γυναικός: never mixed with her (her bed) [because] he avoided the anger of his wife.”
marriage, the last thing holding her in any type of mortal and female role is her children with Jason. Although she has not conceived of her plan to kill her children, these lines may be foreshadowing it, and with their death she breaks the final boundary keeping her in the feminine realm.

Medea’s representation as a masculinized character living in a female realm makes her character threatening. Those looking at Medea as a woman will see one that is wicked, flouting the customs of society because she moves outside of her respective realm. The playwright has given her qualities a Greek male can identify with but presented her in the everyday role of wife and mother. She may act comparably to Achilles, but when the audience views her, they still see her as a woman, just as Jason sees her. She is acting outside her gender boundaries and is thus deemed a wicked woman, possibly grouped with Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra is wicked because she, with her lover, murdered her husband Agamemnon. This was done in retaliation for Agamemnon sacrificing their daughter Iphigenia, but the motive, justified or not, is irrelevant. Like Medea, she is expected to accept her fate and obey, acting within the roles of her gender boundaries.

The Final Boundary Broken

Along with choosing marginal figures to be the focus of his play, Euripides likes to shock his audience.59 In Medea, this is no doubt accomplished when she purposefully murders her children. What makes this unique among the myths regarding Medea is that it is apparently one

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59 Page 1967, xi. Page writes that “this was the subject and lesson of many plays; to disturb his audience profoundly”.

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of Euripides’ literary inventions, and that previously, Medea either was not responsible for their death, or, if she was, it was done by accident. Deviations from the traditional narrative, or outright invention, are not a unique feature to Euripides. In his play *Alcestis*, performed in 438BCE, Alcestis gives up her life so that her husband may live, but Heracles wrestles death and rescues Alcestis. Although Alcestis is saved in other accounts by the gods, this is the first preserved account of Heracles rescuing her. In a later work, *Helen*, Helen is whisked away by Hermes and replaced with a phantom before Paris takes her to Troy where she stays in Egypt during the Trojan War. There, she remains a virtuous wife to Menelaus until they are reunited once again. Euripides did not invent this plot deviation but it is fitting that, instead of choosing an unusual title character, he chooses an unusual variant of a traditional myth.

Euripides uses internal monologues to express Medea’s anger and grief, and the cause of her anger. He has given a woman slighted in marriage a voice and presents it to a male dominated audience. He goes a step further by masculinizing her and having her speak, very closely to a Greek male. This culminates, however, when she comes to the decision that in order to regain her reputation, she must harm her enemies as much as she can, which is how

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60 Gantz 1993, 368-9. Gantz posits that Euripides invented the deliberate infanticide, mainly on the basis that there is no evidence of it before Euripides. Another playwright, Neophron, wrote a *Medea* that seems, from the fragments, remarkably similar to Euripides’ *Medea*, including the deliberate infanticide; however, it is unclear which play came first (Wright 2016, 36-40). Neophron’s work is cited by Dicaearchus but there is a theory that it is in fact falsely attributed to Neophron and that it was produced after 431 (Mastronarde 2002, 60-2). For the purpose of this thesis and the lack of evidence that Euripides did not invent the deliberate infanticide, I agree with Gantz that this was a Euripidean invention.

61 Scullion 1999. In this article Scullion argues that Euripides did not only invent new aitiologies for existing cults but also entire cults.


63 Murray 1946, 95. Supposedly, Stesichorus, a lyric poet, lost his eyesight and became convinced it was the deified Helen who caused it because of all the terrible things he had written about her. To make amends, he wrote a poem based on the myth variant, that Helen was in fact in Egypt the entire time.

64 Lawrence 1997, 49.
she rationalizes the murder of her and Jason’s children. This is the final boundary Medea must
cross. Like Achilles, Medea is close to death when the Nurse relates to the audience her withdrawn state.\textsuperscript{65} Jason has dissolved their marriage, broken his oath, and dishonored her. Her retaliation to kill their children, while shocking, also follows a pattern. Medea believes she is on equal footing with Jason but to be seen as such, she must act as a man because there was no perception that women were or could be equals to men. She chooses to kill her children to hurt Jason the most, but it also fully severs their oath and is the final boundary holding her in a female role and also her mortal role. The final scene of the play shows her ascending, literally free of any obstacle or boundary that once held her.

\textit{Medea’s [Im]Mortality}

Euripides’ invention of the deliberate infanticide drastically changes the story line. Although it can not be said that he also invented Jason’s casting aside Medea for Creon’s daughter, there is no certain evidence of this happening before Euripides either.\textsuperscript{66} Taken together, the invention of these two plot points makes sense, given that it is Medea’s abandonment that acts as the catalyst for the events that follow. Medea possesses masculine \textit{ἀρετή} and she concludes that the only way she can regain her honor is by murdering her children. Male heroes in tragedy often have to sacrifice something in order to make amends or regain their honor but Medea takes it further by choosing her own children.\textsuperscript{67} This drastic conclusion, which follows closely along the Homeric traits for a hero, has been noted as a

\textsuperscript{65} Scully 2003, 37.
\textsuperscript{66} Gantz 1993, 370.
\textsuperscript{67} Bongie 1977, 32.
potential criticism by Euripides of such traits in general.\textsuperscript{68} When Medea encounters Aegeus, she uses her male ἀρετή to bind him in an oath that they will help one another without him realizing any of her true intentions.\textsuperscript{69} As the noble character he is, he agrees and swears to the oath, and although Medea has succeeded, and will succeed with her future plans, the audience is left to find out what cost she is willing to pay to mend her tarnished honor.

In earlier versions of the myth, Medea is responsible for killing Creon, but there is no explanation as to why she does so in the first place. In myth, a crisis can cause a female character to become divine and a broken marriage is one such example of a crisis. In such cases it is also not uncommon for a woman to commit infanticide.\textsuperscript{70} The beginning of the play follows just after the marriage has collapsed and Medea enters the stage in her crisis state. Her crimes stem from this crisis but there is a structural pattern in the play regarding Medea’s divinity. Medea is divine; at line 406 she states her descent from Helios the sun god. Throughout the play, Medea resides among mortals and her divinity has no presence outside of that line. Her marriage to Jason and their children lock her into this state but when Jason breaks their marriage, the infanticide frees Medea from mortality and Euripides shows this at the end of the play, when she flies off in her grandfather’s chariot as the deus ex machina. A mother killing her own children is a shocking plot point but not one that is only found with Medea and it has its associations in myth with divinity. Euripides did not fabricate this plot point without any

\textsuperscript{68} Foley 1989, 66.

\textsuperscript{69} On ἀρετή, Adkins 1960, 32. Adkins discusses male prowess in speaking. On the oath with Aegeus, Fletcher 2003, 33.

\textsuperscript{70} Lyons 1997, 64. Ino, Prokne, and Philomele also commit infanticide.
reference from similar myths but his representation of the character involved and the motive behind it is exceptional.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Gender Matters}

When Agamemnon forcefully takes Briseis away from Achilles (1.179-87), he is taking Achilles’ property. She is a spoil of war and Achilles has the right to do whatever he wishes with her as such; this would be no different than if Agamemnon stole a material spoil from Achilles such as gold or jewelry. When Medea agrees to help Jason in Colchis, she does so only if they make the agreement that they will be joined in union. This is done because she knows that by helping Jason, she is betraying her father and therefore must find a new means to live, Jason fills this role. Women are first provided for by their father and then, transferring households, their husbands, and Medea is merely establishing this when she makes plans with Jason. Although Jason is not her property, he is threatening her livelihood. Without him, she has no household to turn or return to. Achilles’ reaction to Agamemnon is comparable if not as extreme. Agamemnon has stolen one piece of property from Achilles but it is more that he does so in front of the army, shaming and enraging Achilles. Jason, by breaking his oath, does much the same to Medea, but the end results are more drastic because he is then taking everything away from her as well as shaming her.

In this instance, Euripides’ treatment of Medea’s gender becomes important because Medea is acting like Achilles, specifically a man dishonored, but she is not perceived as a man.

\textsuperscript{71} Page 1967, xxiv-xxv, n. 5. Denys Page posits that there is an undeniably similar myth which may have given Euripides the reason Medea would deliberately kill her children, the myth of Procne and Tereus.
The surrounding characters in the narrative still treat her as a woman, even if Medea breaks out of the typically feminine role as shown by Andromache.

While Medea’s situation is an entirely female situation, her reactions and her concerns are male.\(^72\) She would not be in her situation if she were not a woman but her concerns are based on a male idea of honor and reputation they have nothing to do with love or family. Her initial plans also fall within the male boundary; she imagines attacking her enemies with a sword but only declines that approach because she is more likely to be caught, opting for the use of poisons instead. Through the character, Euripides is analyzing her psychological thinking as the character herself. He understands that this particular character, though masculinized, has no knowledge of or skill in combat or weaponry her area of expertise, in every myth variation, is poison.

*Athens through Aegeus*

In Medea’s narrative, she travels to Athens where she remains for some time with Aegeus. In accounts preceding Euripides, she is an exile but has not deliberately killed her children. With the invention of the deliberate infanticide, Euripides incorporates a scene between her and Aegeus which works in two ways: it serves as a valuable plot point and expresses patriotism for Athens before the outbreak of war. Some scholars have commented on this scene as being out of place, but it very much fits into the plot because it provides Medea with an escape once she has completed her plans.\(^73\) Medea betrayed her father by helping Jason; now that he is

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\(^72\) Foley 1989, 62

\(^73\) Dunkle 1969; Dunkle argues that the Aegeus scene fits within the play structurally, Medea shares scenes first with Creon, then Aegeus, then Jason, and the scene between Aegeus and Medea falls almost exactly in the middle
choosing another woman over her and allowing Creon to exile her from the city, she has nowhere to go. In Athenian society, a woman typically has some type of male guardianship, be it father, husband, or other appointed guardian, possibly appointed by the woman’s father.\(^{74}\) In the case of a divorce, the woman would return to her father’s house along with her dowry. Returning to her father and homeland, however, is no longer an option for Medea and because she is in a foreign city, once Jason divorces her and Creon exiles her, she has nowhere else to go. The helplessness she feels in this situation is justified; even if she wanted to leave and was happy to be rid of Jason, she has nowhere to go. Aegeus provides a place for Medea after Corinth and male guardianship (723-30):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{σοῦ μὲν ἐλθούσης χθόνα,} \\
\text{πειράσομαι σου προξενεῖν δίκαιος ὤν.} \\
\text{τοσόνδε μέντοι σοι προσημαίνω, γυναί—} \\
\text{ἐκ τῆς ἡδονῆς μὲν γῆς σὺν τῇ ἁγίης} \\
\text{ἀυτὴ δὲ ἐάνπερ εἰς ἐμοὺς ἔλθῃς δόμους,} \\
\text{μενεῖς ἄσυλος κού σὲ μὴ μεθῶ} \\
\text{ἐκ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἀπαλλάσσου πόδα—} \\
\text{ἀναίτιος γὰρ καὶ} \\
\text{μεθύοντας εἶναι θέλω.}
\end{align*}\]

After you come from your land, I will try to act as your protector, acting justly. However, I will tell you this beforehand, woman: I do not wish to carry you from this land, but if you should come yourself to my home, you would remain safe and I would not release you to anyone. You must yourself release your foot from this land: for I wish to be faultless to my guest-friends.

He offers his complete protection, but she must find her own way to him he will not risk his guest-friendships at Corinth for her sake.

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lines of the play. My argument is that Euripides’ specific use of Aegeus serves two purposes: as a contrast with Jason and thus also as an idealized representation of Athens.\(^{74}\) McDermott 1989, 44. This is also true in Homeric society, where a woman was given a male “protector”; Keller 1902, 243.
It is likely that the audience would have felt these words a little more deeply given the timing of the play. Athens is on the brink of war with Sparta and the relationship with Corinth is one of the tipping points.75 Political unrest between the city-states is what prompted the Peloponnesian War and at the time of this play’s performance, war was very near in the future. Aegeus represents Athens and all the ideals that accompany the city-state.76 One cannot speculate as to what the audience would have thought but it is noteworthy that Medea has been commented as reflecting the thoughts of a Greek male,77 her adversary is the king of Corinth and her savior from her distress is the king of Athens. How much the audience, or playwright, is meant to associate a character from myth or in a play with a city cannot be answered, but that does not mean there is no association. Aegeus is not merely a citizen from Athens but the king and if Euripides did not make the associations clear from the character, the chorus goes on to praise Athens (824-32):

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PMENTEHIDAI TO PAILAIØN ØLBIOI
KAI THEØV PAIDES MAKARON, IERAS
CHYRAS APOROHTOU T' APO, FERBOMENOI
KLEINOTATAN SOFIAN, AIEI DIAD LAMPROTATOU
BAINONTES ABROUS AIETHROS, ENTHA PIOI ANNAS
ENNEA PIERIDAS MOUSAIS LEGOUSA
ZANTHAN ARMONIAN PHUTEUSAI.
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Descendants of ancient Erechtheus, blessed and children of the happy gods, from an unconquered sacred land, nourished on famous wisdom, always gracefully walking through the brightest sky, from there they say when the nine pure Pierides muses produced golden haired Harmony.

75 Kagan 1969, 23. Kagan explains that Corinth became an increasingly important ally to Sparta, one which even if there was no advantage to Sparta for helping them, they could not be ignored. As tension escalated between Athens and Corinth, Sparta was then compelled to intervene.
76 Murray 1946, 59. In discussing Pericles’ call for patriotic plays, Murray points out the seemingly out of place lines from the Chorus about Athens and the ideals Athens represents.
77 Lawrence 1997, 49.
Aegeus is contrasted with Jason, he calls what Jason has done ἔργον αἰσχιστόν, a shameful deed. They come to an arrangement in which she promises to help him conceive a child if he will provide her with somewhere to go. To ensure that Aegeus keeps his word, Medea wants him to swear an oath. At first Aegeus questions her, because she is not satisfied with his word, but she explains her fears and he concedes to her request. His concession, he explains, is partly for her προμηθίαν, foresight, in her reasoning and because it strengthens his position as her male guardian. Dunkle argues that Aegeus’ reasoning is in fact self-interest and therefore his moral character is weakened, however, it is not Aegeus who proposes the oath and only accepts it once Medea persuades him to do so. In this instance, Euripides is revealing two things, Medea’s prowess in rhetoric and manipulation and the importance of oaths. A broken oath is what prompted the plot of his play. Jason has proven himself to be untrustworthy and αἰσχιστόν (shameful), as Jason’s foil, Aegeus’ character and actions are meant to contrast with Jason’s. This means that his oath to Medea also contrasts with Jason’s.

As the representation of Athens, Aegeus embodies the ideals of an Athenian citizen; he is wise, honorable, and champions the weak. He offers his protection to Medea on the condition that she must find her own way to Athens. This is a curious statement because he is saying that he will protect her no matter what happens once she is in Athens, but he cannot risk his alliances by taking her out of Corinth. In his commentary on Medea, Donald Mastronarde remarks that taking Medea with him out of Corinth would be too public of a gesture, thereby offending Creon too much. As a literary device, Aegeus rescuing Medea from her plight would

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78 According to Mastronarde, Aegeus uses the word μῶν to imply incredulity, note for line 733, 292.
79 Mastronarde 2002, 283. Examining the commentary for lines 663-823.
80 Mastronarde 2002, 292. Examining the commentary for line 730.
cut the play much shorter and since Euripides above all utilizes the thought processes of his characters, this is a reasonable reaction for Aegeus. Given the time period of the play, however, and what Aegeus represents, it is noteworthy to consider the subtext that may be present.81 The character representing Athens, choosing to honor political relationships but also recognizing maltreatment, offers his help if only they will come into the character’s domain on their own. This is not unlike the very foundation of the Delian League, in which weaker city-states turned to Athens for aid and leadership.82 Euripides held an idealistic view of Athens and even in this play, the chorus enters praising Athens as ὀλβοι (blessed), so that although the true motives of Athenian leadership and power in the Delian League may have been less than honorable, the idealized view remained.83

Medea as Concubine

The characters belong to the age of heroes but there are aspects of the play in which Athenian law and society seep through. The age of heroes is one of the ages established by Hesiod in his Works and Days that, in essence, establishes a timeline or history of the world before contemporary man.84 The time of her myth, is far removed from the time of Euripides but just as with Aegeus and the looming war, there are aspects of the play that reflect Euripides’ society. The most notable of which regards the collapsed marriage between Medea and Jason. The audience is not present for the marriage between Jason and Medea but the serious

81 Storey 1989, 17. Euripides’ play Andromache is seen as “violent attack on the Spartan mind” and the entire play has political subtext.
83 Murray 1946, throughout his book, Euripides and His Age, especially in chapter IV, Murray discusses Euripides’ extreme patriotism to Athens and the idealized characteristics of what Athens was meant to stand for.
84 Hesiod, Works and Days, 160-170.
treatment in dialogue about him breaking his oath is evidence that there must have been a marriage, or something comparable to it. There is no formal divorce in the play, from the audience’s perspective Jason doesn’t even really approach Medea about it and Creon only gives her time to gather her things after she supplicates him. From a modern perspective, the lack of an event is odd but in Athenian society, often divorces occurred merely from the husband dismissing his wife and sending her and her dowry back to her paternal household. Dismissed wives may feel some anger, shame or even sadness at this, but their obligation in society and to their husbands, even former, was to go quietly. Medea is unlike the typical wife, however, because she is a foreigner. Her foreignness is not emphasized as much as it could be but there is one line in particular in which it is apparent and reveals something about Athenian society in the 5th century. Jason explains himself to Medea, that he could not say no to the opportunity of marrying the daughter of the king, for both his, Medea’s, and their children’s sake. Although Medea is also the daughter of a king, she has betrayed her father for Jason, leaving her without the stability of the kingdom. Jason goes on to say that if she had not behaved as she did, she could have stayed; the point he is making is that if Medea had not reacted as she did, she could remain in Corinth as Jason’s concubine. Even as a concubine she would have had rights and because she is a foreigner, she is not considered a citizen in the audience’s eyes, therefore, Jason would have every right to have a citizen wife and a non-citizen concubine. Euripides
masculinization of Medea means that she does not follow a subservient model typical of female roles so she does not go quietly. Jason’s speech is noteworthy because alludes to this Athenian law even though it completely contrasts with Medea’s characterization.

Conclusions

The Medea moves between the real world and the world of epic. Medea is in no way an ordinary woman but, just as in the play, a gender bias from the real world imposes itself on her character. She is a threatening character because she does not abide by the norms society puts into place and she is dangerous because she is autonomous. The oath addressed in the opening lines established the mood of the play for the audience; Jason broke an agreed upon oath, dismissing Medea, something that an Athenian male can understand as it was comparable to their customs. Medea’s belief that she is Jason’s equal and capable of male ἀρετή, fuels her anger and forces her to retaliate. Her retaliation, as invented by Euripides, serves to hurt Jason the most, shock the audience, but most importantly, as the ultimate break from her restraining boundaries.

Euripides often focuses on marginal characters, especially women, giving them a voice and shattering, within the play, the social norms that surround them. His style fuels the plot of the play which in turn adapts the characterization of Medea to it. By molding her and giving her a new and distinct motive, Euripides represents Medea with traits typically found in male heroes. This new characterization has deeper implications than as an unusual plot device. Medea is a powerful female figure from myth made even more autonomous because of Euripides’ new representation of her however she also crosses a moral boundary by killing her
enemies but also her children. Although she does not kill her children out of malicious intent towards them, their death at her calculated hand carries a negatively charged weight. This act becomes so closely associated with her myth that it affects later characterizations of her. One such characterization is that of Seneca’s *Medea*. Seneca composes his play with very minor variations to Euripides’ drama but the most notable one is how he chooses to represent the title character. Certain significant attitudes reflecting Roman society influence Seneca’s play and representation of Medea. Seneca is by no means the only Roman author to choose a play centered around Medea but it is specifically his choice of scenes and distinct representation of Medea that makes his work most suited as a comparison to Euripides’. The following chapter will explore his representation of Medea primarily in relation to the attitudes of Roman society.
Chapter 3: Seneca’s Medea

Euripides’ alteration of Medea’s character had far reaching effects, even outside of Athens. As a playwright, Euripides was very influential, and his influence can be seen on later authors as well as in artistic depictions in vase paintings. His use of the deliberate infanticide laid the grounds for her character to undergo a shift in representation based on Roman views surrounding women. Romans valued reproduction, primarily of male offspring, and were very critical of powerful women. Medea not only acts autonomously, but because of this, chooses to kill her two male children.

In Rome, between the time of Euripides and Seneca, Roman attitudes toward powerful women were often negative with the perception that they posed a threat to the male dominated society. In correlation, witches and witchcraft steadily became dangerous and predatory things where they were once seen as defensive. Seneca’s representation of Medea is reflective of Roman attitude towards the other; this includes, foreigners, women, and witches, all of which Medea embodies. Where Euripides imprinted his own, unmistakable style onto the character, Seneca’s style is less prominent than his Roman social and cultural attitudes. These attitudes shaped his representation of Medea, emphasizing her supernatural qualities and traits tied to wicked women.

Euripides’ Influence

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90 Allen 2001, 72.
91 Stratton 2007. In her book, Stratton refers to unrespectable women or those perceived as such, with the catch-all adjective ‘wicked’ which I have employed here with its same function: any woman who utilizes or embodies traits which run contrary to what is expected or considered proper of them.
Roman tragedians writing about Medea were heavily influenced by Euripides. Ennius is said to have gone so far as to have essentially translated Euripides’ *Medea* into Latin, and his influence did not stop with literature. It is prominent in vase paintings as well, especially Southern Italy, where scenes were painted that can only be found in his plays. Euripides’ use of invention in his plays creates a problem when studying the myth he is writing about. Regarding the myth of Medea, his play is the first known instance of Medea purposefully killing her children, but after him, there is no deviation from his invention. In discussing the divinity of goddesses in various cultures, Joan O’Brien notes that some goddesses may have undergone a demotion in their divinity because of priests pirating their narrative and reassigning the goddess’ prerogatives to gods, resulting in a demoted status as goddesses. This effected their status and representation just as Euripides’ alteration of Medea’s narrative does.

Unlike Ennius, Seneca does not translate Euripides’ plays word for word but there is a close relationship between them. Bernard Knox credits Euripides’ popularity in later times specifically to Seneca’s adaptation of his plays. Where they differ is due to differences in culture and style, and their respective *Medeas* express this well because each play uses almost identical scenes aside from a few specific scenes. Where Euripides incorporates the Aegeus scene as a nod to Athens, among other reasons, Seneca, writing for a Roman audience, has no

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92 Cowan 2010, 42.
93 Allen 2001, 72. Allen discusses scenes found on vases that were most likely invented by Euripides for his play *Antiope*. This means that not only did Athenian drama influence Roman art and literature, but specifically Euripides. Allen also mentions in note 32 the influence his *Medea* may have had.
95 Although this is not the only instance of invention in his plays, and it may not have been his intention to alter her narrative as he did, the infanticide became something too shocking to forget and would become an essential part of her myth.
96 Cowan 2010, 42.
97 Knox 1985, 339.
need of this scene which he omits. Instead he adds a scene in which Medea, preparing her poisons, must fly around the known world acquiring the necessary herbs. This scene expresses Seneca’s emphatic representation of Medea as a witch. The circumstances remain the same in each play but the representation of the characters differs greatly and the differing scenes attest to this.

**Medea’s Dramatized Witchcraft as Model for Seneca’s Style**

Where Euripides sought to build tension as his characters mentally worked through their dilemmas, Seneca slams his audience with dramatic emotion at the start. She is all anger and revenge, from the moment she begins the play with her first monologue to the final scene. There is no character development; the only thing that develops is her final plan to exact her revenge, something she decided she would be getting from the start. Seneca’s Medea wants the audience to know she is a force to be reckoned with, so much so that its repetitiveness feels like pride. She recounts her past crimes graphically (132-6):

\[
\text{patri sparsumque ponto corpus et Peliae senis}
\text{decocta aeno membra: funestum impie}
\text{quam saepe fudi sanguinem—et nullum scelus}
\text{irata feci; suasit infelix amor.}
\]

Sprinkling his body (her brother) on the sea for [my] father and the old limbs of Pelias were boiled in bronze: many times, I impiously shed fatal blood, and I did nothing wicked in anger: unhappy love urged [me].

Medea’s admission of having done none of the crimes in anger is both terrifying and immediately instructive to the audience of her capability to inflict harm. This and her supernatural background are two things Seneca emphasizes more than anything else in his
Medea. She does not shy away from her past crimes, she is proud of them and continuously
offers them to the audience. This rhetoric is used repeatedly, almost in a patterned way, stating
past crimes and ending with a phrase implying how much more harm she can now inflict. This
rhetoric is especially common before Medea begins to act out her revenge. Seneca uses two
long and detailed monologues to describe the beginning of her revenge. The first belongs to the
nurse, recounting to the audience what Medea has done to prepare until Medea takes over the
scene and begins her supplication. These scenes evoke the supernatural by emphasizing
Medea’s witch-like qualities (675-81):

namque ut attonito gradu
evasit et penetrare funestam attigit,
totas opes effundit et quicquid diu
etiam ipsa timuit promit atque omnem explicat
turbam malorum, arcana secreta abdita,
et triste laeva congregans sacrum manu
pestes vocat

For now she goes forth with a terrified pace and touches her deadly sanctuary
pouring out all of her resources and she brings forth what even she herself for a
long time feared, and she uncoils all the turmoil of evils, the concealed secret
mysteries, and mournfully congregating at the altar, with her left hand she calls
the plagues.

These lines are loaded with mystical words and carry with them a morbid impression. Her
deadly sanctuary, penetrare funestam, is reminiscent of a cemetery, the seamless location for
the rites she will perform. She has gathered her magical herbs and now she calls upon the gods
of the underworld, Chaos and Dis, and primarily Hecate. These gods are chthonic deities
although in earlier times their associations were less malevolent, they have since acquired
negative or even evil connotations. Invoking a prayer is done with the right hand, when Jason
and Medea swear an oath to one another it is with their right hand.\textsuperscript{98} Here, Medea is using her left hand, laeva, implying a perversion to the traditional way because she is invoking chthonic deities for evil purposes.\textsuperscript{99}

Euripides neglected gender boundaries in his representation of Medea simultaneously minimizing her supernatural qualities. When Medea gives the infamous robe covered in poison as the murder weapon for Jason’s new wife, Medea does not prepare the robe in any way or collect poisons to use. She tells Jason (954-5):

\begin{quote}
κεκτημένη τε κόσμον ὅν ποθ’ Ἡλιος
πατρὸς πατὴρ δίδωσιν ἐκγόνοισιν οἷς.
\end{quote}

She [the princess] is also acquiring a dress which my grandfather Helios gave to his descendants.

Medea seems to imply the garment was given to her already doused in the lethal liquid.

Euripides may have chosen to ignore Medea’s supernatural elements so that there was no distraction from his representation of the character. In contrast, Seneca incorporates her supernatural background as the focal point of her character.

\textit{Sorcery vs. Femininity}

Hecate is a very prominent goddess in Seneca’s play. She is associated with witchcraft which seems the most obvious reason for her prominence and association with Medea; however, she is also associated with the moon and the goddess Selene who is Helios’ sister, making her

\textsuperscript{99} In chapter 3 I discuss the gradual shift chthonic deities, specifically Hecate, undergo throughout time. Hecate is representative of this shift in that not only is she a chthonic goddess but she is also female and goddess of witchcraft. I discuss how her role as the symbol of death in the cycle of life came to be seen negatively, as oppose to a necessary stage.
Medea’s great aunt. She is not the only famous witch Medea has a connection with, Circe, who is also known for her magical herbs and incantations, is also Medea’s aunt. Although Hesiod does not allude to her mystical qualities, Pindar does in his Pythian 4, where she helps Jason overcome tasks by providing herbs to protect him. Even so, Medea is not represented at the same supernatural level as Seneca represents her when he surrounds her with gods and ghosts from the underworld.

Where Euripides masculinizes Medea to help her achieve what she does, Seneca de-feminizes her and there is a distinct difference. Euripides transforms Medea into a woman who possesses heroic male traits but still perceived as a woman and the disadvantages that go along with it. Seneca, on the other hand, subtracts any respectable femininity she may have had but instead of replacing it with masculine traits, he replaces it with contemptible femininity, including sorcery. Feminine symbols, weaving or handmaidens, mark the realm the character is portrayed in; removing these symbols de-feminizes the character. Medea is never associated with any of these symbols in Euripides’ representation of her because he pushes her into a male realm thus muting any necessity for female symbols. In contrast, Seneca not only de-feminizes her character by maintaining her disobedient, outspoken and competitive nature seen previously, but also replaces her masculine notions of honor and virtue with foreignness and witchcraft which is ultimately reflective of his society and its notions of both women and witches.

_Wicked Women_
There is a correlation in Roman society between wicked women and witches that comes to a head with Medea. She embodies every aspect of the things to be avoided by respectable women but to understand this, one must understand what Roman society did and did not find respectable. In Roman society, if women were not subject to their fathers, they were subject to their husbands but often, even if they were married, still could be subject to their fathers over husbands.\(^\text{100}\) Women had some type of male guardianship for life with the reasoning that they could not be trusted to be in their own control and must be looked after.\(^\text{101}\) Interestingly, this is also why women were not allowed to drink wine. The reasons given for this differ, but the result is the same, a means of controlling women.\(^\text{102}\) It is in this control that women’s roles are shaped, and through the fear of losing that control, that women are either persecuted severely or considered most wicked.

*Respectable Women*

The traits for a respectable Roman woman is not dissimilar from the Greeks and they often coincide. She, above all, should be obedient and loyal and completely subservient to the household and either her father or husband.\(^\text{103}\) Many of the notable women in Roman history or legend are linked to a political event but almost nothing is recorded of their lives and this is

\(^{100}\) Cantarella 1987, 121.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 122. This is also similar to Greek culture.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 118. The reasons why range from the idea that wine has abortive qualities to the fear that wine will induce adulteress behavior. The law forbidding women from drinking wine was apparently so serious that there is a case of a woman being beaten to death for breaking it (118 quoted from Varro, Val. Max. 6.3.9).

\(^{103}\) Lefkowitz 2005, 183. An excerpt from Plutarch’s *Moralia* says that a wife shouldn’t have friends of her own but be content with her husband’s friends instead. This is an example of how much a wife’s life is dependent on her husband, that the opinion is she needs nothing of her own, even friends.
telling because ideally, women were not meant to be spoken of.\textsuperscript{104} A popular story about the wife, Marcia, of Cato the Younger which tells of her exemplary feminine behavior and obedience to her husband. Marcia was Cato’s exemplary wife and Hortensus, an orator who did not have children, asked Cato if he could have Marcia in order to have children. Cato agreed to this and whatever Marcia’s true thoughts or feelings, she “accepted his decision without protest.”\textsuperscript{105} A model woman would be true to her husband, faithful at all costs, but she is also obedient and the part “without protest” is equally important as the acceptance itself.\textsuperscript{106} A similar story from a funerary inscription dated to the end of the Republic is about a wife who does not shy away from selfless sacrifice for her husband. First, she sells her jewels so that he may avoid political persecution and then, because they are childless, she offers him a divorce so that he can have an heir. The husband refuses but it is less out of love than the unknown of what type of woman he might marry after her.\textsuperscript{107} The common theme to these models of feminine behavior is quiet obedience and understanding the importance of childbearing even at a cost to themselves.

\textit{Importance of Procreation}

\textsuperscript{104} Cantarella 1987, 129. There is a recurrent theme in Greece and Rome that women are a nuisance but necessary and the hardship is on men who must deal with them. Hesiod relates them to the drones who remain at home while men are the hardworking bees, a fragment from Rome in 131bc also refers to them as a necessary nuisance. Women’s Life, 25 & 103 respectively.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 130. There is a Roman term, univira, indicating a woman had only one man in her entire life. The story about Marcia is paradoxical because by obeying her husband she also breaks the ideal of having had only one husband.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 133.
The Romans put a steep value on childbirth, so much so that there are laws rewarding those who have children and punishing those that do not. A woman’s primary obligation was to produce children but in Rome there seems to also have been a special emphasis on procreation in general. Under the Emperor Augustus laws were established rewarding women for how many children they bore, the more children, the more rights or rewards they obtained. Even before this, however, there was a law which punished those who exposed male offspring or first-born daughters because they were acting against the entire Roman population’s best interest. These laws collectively emphasize the importance Romans placed on child-bearing which will aid in understanding the reception of Euripides’ *Medea* and his alteration of having her kill her own healthy, male children.

**Respectable Women Obey**

The idealized Roman women serving as models to emulate sacrifice almost all of their own will so, naturally, not all women could follow such a high standard of respectability and there are plenty of examples from Rome of those who do not. There is a theme against these kinds of women, especially women who are outspoken or with aims at politics, in which men oppose them by slandering their respectability. Sexual promiscuity, outspokenness, disobedience, to

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108 There is a law punishing men who do not marry for the reason that they are expected to produce children. Lefkowitz 2005, 103; taken from a fragment, Fr. 6 Malcovati.
109 Ibid., n.122.
110 Cantarella 1987, 116. In a later section, she discusses in greater detail the persistent issue of exposure and the problems that went with it, 135-6.
111 Cato and Cicero have long speeches, bordering on rants, against women that simply attack their character more than anything else. Cantarella 1987, 74-5. Stratton 2007, 76-77; Cicero even calls the woman he is slandering a “Palatine Medea”.
name a few, were common traits either employed by or associated with ‘wicked women’.\textsuperscript{112} Importantly, the Roman traits to be admired were the same for both men and women but in different ways, unlike the Greek concept of όρετή, in which masculine and feminine όρετή contrasted with one another. Obedience, loyalty both to family and Rome, were characteristics for both men and women. Men were still seen as the aggressors in the relationship however, and the quiet obedience a woman ideally had cannot be stressed enough. The prohibition of alcohol for women was done to control them but limiting their wealth was another way to control women as well. Several laws were passed, especially during wartime, that limited the amount of wealth women could acquire or limit her showing off.\textsuperscript{113} In an excerpt Martial says: “Uxorem quare locupletem ducere nolim,/Quaeritis? Uxori nubere nolo meae. Are you asking why I don’t wish to fetch a rich wife? I don’t want to marry a husband.” Martial is jesting that having a rich wife is unappealing because her wealth makes her unruly and therefore not subordinate to him, and what good Roman wants that? The word he uses, nubere, implies that he would be taking the feminine role in the marriage. Women are not meant to overstep the boundary between masculine and feminine roles and when they do it counts against them and their character.

In Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, Creon chastises Medea for overstepping this boundary (266-8):

\begin{quote}
tu, tu malorum machinatrix facinorum,\newline
 cui feminae nequitia ad \textit{audenda omnia,} \newline
\textit{robur virile est, nulla famae memoria}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{112} See note 91.
\textsuperscript{113} Cantarella 1987, 74-5. Cato was a big proponent for keeping the laws limiting women’s wealth and the showcasing of it. His speech arguing against repealing the law is what note 19 is referring to. The lex Oppia, prohibiting women from wearing too much jewelry and the lex Voconia, put a limit to how much women could inherit, 126-7.
You, you inventress of evil deeds, who has the wickedness of a woman toward
daring all [and] manly strength, [but] no consideration for reputation.

This Medea is impulsive (audenda omnia) and acts without considering how her actions will
affect her reputation (nulla famae memoria) she seeks only revenge (malorum machinatrix).
The word machinatrix, inventress, is significant because it is the only instance this feminine
form is used and encompasses Medea seamlessly.114 Her name, tricks, cunning, and the name
used to accuse her, inventress, come together poetically.

Here, she is not masculinized but rather de-feminized and stripped away of the traits
that would make her respectable. The notion that she should be more mindful of her
reputation must also be noted because it is this which possesses Euripides’ Medea entirely.
What Creon is actually saying to her is that she must be mindful of the Roman idea for
reputation, which would be to not cause the trouble she is causing.

A Self-Governing Woman is a Dangerous Thing

Women’s independence in any way, financially, politically, sexually, was perceived as a threat
to the male population and therefore dangerous; this attitude does not change even under the
empire.115 Several satirists, Martial and Juvenal among them, have many things we would now
consider negative to say about women, especially those with independence or a mind of their
own. Juvenal, at the end of his sixth satire, says that those women who act impulsively, cannot

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114 Coasta 1973, 96, n.266.
115 Cantarella 1987, 147.
help it, the women that he cannot tolerate is the calculating woman.116 In the binaries between men and women, men are the rational, women the irrational, so for a woman to be hysterical or passionate is expected. In this way, Medea’s foreignness is emphasized in Seneca; no Roman woman would be expected to act as she does but Medea is not Roman, and unlike Euripides, Seneca does not mask her foreignness.

Religion as an Outlet

Harsh restrictions and the pressure of having high expectations to live by, left some women seeking outlets and one outlet was found through religion. Being a part of secret rituals or rites was a frowned upon pastime but it grew in popularity and initially, certain rites were initially only performed by women.117 Many of these rituals were meant to be secretive, however, because of this, the imaginations of those not involved were naturally carried away and assumptions were made that what was really happening was either sexually deviant behavior or outright evil.118 No doubt there was overlap in people’s minds between secret rites and magic and witchcraft. A slow transition happens in the perception of witchcraft between the way the Greeks viewed it and the Romans came to view it. Kimberly Stratton argues that the Greeks held a defensive attitude with witchcraft while the Romans held a predatory view of it.119 What this means is that those, especially in Greek drama or myth, who practiced witchcraft, did so defensively, using it as either a defense to an affront or attack, or as a means

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116 Juvenal, Satire VI, 642-661. “Illam ego non tulerim, quae conputat et scelus ingens sana facit; I would not tolerate that woman who calculates and rationally commits a great crime.” 651-2.
117 Cantarella 1987, 127.
118 Lefkowitz 2005, 294.
119 Stratton 2007, 71. This chapter from her book takes on the Roman viewpoint of witches and witchcraft in general and the shift it takes from Greek thought.
to restore whatever was lost to them. Euripides’ Medea uses potions to kill Glauke, the princess Jason means to marry, as a way of responding to an attack on her marriage and to restore her honor. What Stratton observes is the development of the ‘night-witch’, the grotesque and predatory figure that a contemporary reader may relate to the villainous witches of today.\textsuperscript{120} A negative and dangerous connotation comes to be associated with witches and the use of magic.

The use of magic gradually became employed to give women an increasing amount of agency. In Vergil’s eighth \textit{Eclogue}, a young woman uses magic to win the affections of a young man. As she becomes the pursuer, he the pursued, she also becomes more masculine, taking on the masculine role, while he becomes effeminate.\textsuperscript{121} Using magic gives women agency and breaks them out of their submissive roles this, however, threatens the male’s dominant roles. In male Roman thought, there was no way for men and women to be equal there would always be one more dominant than the other.\textsuperscript{122} Magic gave women power in literature but in reality, women with power were threatening and thus reality contaminated literature. Women who employed witchcraft became wicked and witchcraft gradually took on a darker narrative with darker associations.

\textit{Medea’s Relationship to Witchcraft}

The mythological character Medea has ties in one way or another to magic or witchcraft which gives her agency. When Euripides alters her narrative and has her purposefully kill her children,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Ibid., 72.
\item[121] Ibid., 79-80.
\item[122] Martial and Cato each remark on this. Martial concludes his jest Women, Sex, and Magic, ; Pandora’s Daughters, 144-5.
\end{footnotes}
she severs her final ties to the mortal realm and ascends on a chariot drawn by dragons. There is compelling evidence to support Euripides’ retelling of Medea as though she were a tragic hero, masculinizing her and shocking his audience with a dramatic psychological retelling of her myth.\textsuperscript{123} A Roman man reading his play may find it difficult to ignore her characteristics that would be most striking. She is an independent, foreign woman with magical capabilities who took her own children’s life. After establishing the standards for what a respectable Roman would be and the perception of women who practice witchcraft, Medea’s character, in raw form, is the personification of what a respectable woman should not be.

\textit{Cultural Bias Skews Perception}

As a dramatist, and Roman man, Seneca brings together the worst of the qualities associated with her but does so with eyes shaped by his society. He heightens her role as a witch and murderess, he increases her passion and hysteria, and he also, significantly, changes the other characters. His Medea takes on the role as witch, evoking darker, chthonic deities. She is predatory, proud of her past crimes and those that she plans to commit. Her character enters the stage passionate and hysterical, and true to Seneca’s style, never descends from that emotional state.\textsuperscript{124} A significant change from Euripides’ play, other than Medea’s demeanor, is that the chorus is not sympathetic towards her which can easily be seen as a reflection of Seneca’s representation of her.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] Bongie 1977. This is also discussed further in chapter 4.
\item[124] Costa 1973, 5.
\end{footnotes}
Euripides does not emphasize her magical qualities, nor does he emphasize her past crimes. He does this strategically, focusing only on the crimes she commits in the play to emphasize her motivations, which he fabricated.\textsuperscript{125} There are variations in her myth regarding her past crimes, all done for Jason’s sake. In some accounts, Medea kills her brother, a grown man, because he is pursuing her and Jason. In other accounts, her brother becomes a child whom she kills and gruesomely cuts up his body to force their father to stop his pursuit to collect the pieces. As Euripides’ goal is for the audience initially to sympathize with Medea, however much they can, it is reasonable that he would choose to omit this. Seneca does not omit this, however, and additionally Medea boasts about them, bringing them up repeatedly to the audience so that there is no possibility they will forget.\textsuperscript{126}

Seneca pushes Medea over the boundary separating her from priestess to witch. In Roman society at this time, Seneca’s representation makes sense. She embodies the characteristics Romans found unappealing or dangerous, so it is natural she would be seen more villainously than in previous depictions. Roman society seems to have created a cultural lens through which Medea was seen.\textsuperscript{127} Euripides’ style manipulates the character Medea into a masculinized version of herself. What gets lost in the transition from Euripides’ depiction of her to a Roman audience is the subtle connections between her character and male characters from epic. To a Roman audience, thus Seneca as well, Medea is no more than a wicked woman with supernatural capabilities. Euripides downplays her supernatural or divine background but

\textsuperscript{125} Ohlander 1989, 200.
\textsuperscript{126} I refer to lines 132-6 as discussed above.
\textsuperscript{127} McElduff 2013, 12. This book discusses translation theory, the page cited discusses the society and culture of the translator as factors in an altered or affected translation. Although Seneca’s play is not a translation, it is from this idea that I believe Seneca’s social background played an immense role in his retelling of the Medea myth.
it is the main focus for Seneca because of its associations with wicked women and from a Roman perspective, Medea embodies every aspect of wickedness. She is a woman with knowledge of poisons and utilizes them to become a murderess, she is also a foreigner, outspoken and disobedient, making her the exemplum of what a respectable woman should not be. In this way, Seneca’s representation of Medea becomes more of a reflection on Roman society than on the myth itself.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

Over time, Medea’s myth changes, from the archaic period to the Roman, and therefore also the modern perception of the myth. This affects Medea’s myth itself but it also shows how myth can be manipulated and by showing the changes done to one myth, it shows the potential that something similar has been done or could have been done to other myths.

Medea’s place in multiple subgroups within myth—her status as divine, her gender, her role as a wife and mother— affect her representation but also how she is perceived. Euripides reduces her divine status until the very end of his play but stresses her role as a mother, dramatizing her choice to vengefully kill her children. This in turn, especially from a Roman perspective, casts Medea in a certain light that she did not have before Euripides. She is now not only a murderess but a mother who plans out and executes the murder of her own children. To a Roman audience, who value marriage for the sake of producing children, primarily male children, this is an atrocious act. That Seneca maintains the infanticide and alters her characterization as more malevolent shows not only his perception of her but how she will come to be perceived after him.

Medea is a powerful and outspoken figure in myth and in her depictions. She uses her skills to accomplish countless tasks, giving her an undeniable presence in myth. The characteristics associated with her, however, are the same that would be rejected for the everyday woman in Greek and Roman culture. Euripides and Seneca give her a will of her own, making her disobedient to her father and her husband.
There is no myth that exists without variation and almost every myth about Medea has several variations. The differences themselves can be significant individually or as a whole, offering insight into the culture which produced them. It is the characterization of Medea that becomes important in focusing on her representation, not just a variation of her myth.

Euripides, as far as is known, invents aspects of her myth but in doing so, he also assigns her a unique characterization, she becomes distraught at the prospect of looking foolish and takes actions she believes will solve that, no matter the cost. In previous versions of the myth, Medea’s children die but not purposefully by her; Euripides’ propensity to shock his audience mingled with the children’s death make it easy for his alteration of the myth, though seemingly slight, creates a big impact of the myth in general. This crime cannot be defended as her other crimes, done in the name for Jason or for a greater purpose. This crime brands her as far worse than a scorned lover with ambitions of revenge.

Euripides’ popularity among readers in later generations made this version of the myth common and although Seneca did not copy his play scene for scene, he was influenced by it and maintained much of the plot. His changes to the plot and characterizations reflect the attitudes Roman society would have reading this story. A Roman man reading about a foreign woman, disobeying her father and husband, committing a terrible crime, one only reserved for the father of the household, and even then there were criticisms, with ties to witchcraft, cannot but see her as a morally corrupt and dangerous figure, even if she is mythical. His flair for the dramatic, as Euripides’ flair for shock, sets a new tone of the play but she remains a product of

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the prejudices Romans had toward foreigners, women with power, child murderers, and witches.

While this myth can act as an insight into the society which produces or changes it, it shows the flexibility and manipulation of myth as a whole. Myths are stories that do not need to be the same for every generation, or even region, but by comparing the marked differences, one is able to decipher social norms or attitudes regarding certain issues within that society. Although Hesiod, one of the earliest accounts of Medea, catalogues her as a goddess, by the time Seneca is writing about her, she has virtually lost her divinity and is represented as a powerful witch but no more. This representation carries a negative connotation within his society, something that is apparent throughout Seneca’s play. Goddesses are allowed to act outside the social norms restricted to mortal women.129 In the fragment describing the beauty contest between Medea and Thetis, Medea can treat and curse Idomeneus as she pleases because she is a goddess in that respect.130 The fact that Medea is chastised in Euripides’ and Seneca’s plays by both Jason and Creon for causing trouble is evidence enough of her status as a mortal woman. The playwrights maintain her relationship to divine figures, which aids the plot of her revenge, but she is clearly not a figure to be respected and, until she commits her horrific crimes, not taken seriously as a threat because she is seen as merely a woman. Even after her crimes are committed, there is only horror shown to her, rather than any realization that as a semi-divine figure, she was more than capable of asserting herself as the granddaughter of the sun god. This is contrasted with Greek male heroes from myth who are

130 Fr. Gr. Hist Athenodorus of Eretria. From chapter 1, Medea and Thetis choose Idomeneus to judge who is the most beautiful.
often not morally good figures.\textsuperscript{131} These heroes are capable of committing equally atrocious crimes, to their kinsmen or to women in general whose roles are usually reserved as the passive victims.\textsuperscript{132} Medea has shattered this traditional role assigned to her sex and chooses instead to act like a male hero by simply acting, not passively letting circumstances roll over her.

Medea is vilified, not for what she has done but because she steps outside the boundaries of her gender. If she was truly meant to be punished for her crimes, divine intervention would make it so.\textsuperscript{133} Her gender and divine background work hand in hand to give Medea a unique standing in myth that both allows for and disallows for certain behavior. As a woman, it is not acceptable for her to have agency and act against her male counterparts but because she is semi-divine, these rules are bent.

As far as is known, Euripides altered Medea’s myth with an enormous impact, influencing later representations of her.\textsuperscript{134} Seneca picking up the same scenes with his own interpretation and representation of Medea further impacted her narrative, emphasizing and exploiting characteristics about her that would have lasting effects. These two playwrights each show a way in which myth can be manipulated whether purposefully or not. Euripides essentially hijacks Medea’s myth to conform to his personal style and desire to shock his

\textsuperscript{131} Lyons 1997, 67.
\textsuperscript{132} Lyons 1997, 67, n. 103. Lyons describes “women as passive victims of male lust” but it is not just through lust, it is also by being the mothers, wives, or sisters of victims. Their lack of agency ensures their passivity but often the female characters with agency are vilified as with Medea and Clytemnestra or Helen. Nancy Rabinowitz in “Greek Culture: A Rape Culture?” discusses the prevalence of rape in myth and argues that it normalizes it. She also brings up the differences between marriage and rape; women do not have a choice in whom they marry and they are not in a position to give or deny consent to their spouses. In this way, even marriage is something that women must passively accept. That Medea consented to the marriage or union with Jason to leave Colchis is significant and could, arguably, foretell her absence of passivity when the union is broken.
\textsuperscript{133} Kovacs 1993. His article “Zeus in Euripides' Medea” argues that Zeus is a background figure throughout the play, subtle but also consciously on Medea’s side that Jason broke his oath and thus is justifiably punishable.
\textsuperscript{134} O’Brien 1983, 41. O’Brien discusses a concept called “priestly piracy” in which the demotion of goddesses is explained by priests changing myths and statuses of goddesses.
audience, thus altering the story to fit this. Seneca, although not changing the plot in any way, presents a Medea filtered through the biases and prejudices in which a Roman audience would perceive her. Whether this was done purposefully for dramatic effect or unintentionally, a byproduct of reading her character through a Roman lens, is unknown. The gradual shift in her characterization and representation in myth remains the same, regardless of intention. Knowing the author’s intentions would explain why she is portrayed in certain ways over others but it would not change the shift nor what it means for myth as a whole.

There is no reason to think Medea was a special case, in respect to variations and playwrights’ manipulation of myths. What makes her unique is the shift her myth undergoes, from only brief mentionings about her in Hesiod to becoming a murderess witch in Roman times. Her myths seem confused because she belongs to so many subcategories in myth: woman, semi-divine, sorceress, wife, mother. Her obvious agency also affects her myths; she is not a passive contender, even in the beginning of her myth does she disobey her father to aid Jason, who would not have been successful if not for her.\footnote{In Apollonius Rhodes’ \textit{Argonautica}, Hera, who wants Jason to succeed, persuades Aphrodite to make Medea fall in love with Jason so that she’ll help him and because of this, she disobey her father, Aeetes. According to Diodorus Siculus, Medea was already in the habit of disobeying her parents (Hecate and Aeetes). She fled from them, fearing some sort of punishment, and found a mutually beneficial relationship with Jason in which she would help him, as the other stories go, and he would take her with him. Most sources credit Medea’s help as the reason Jason succeeded, however, some vase paintings do not show Medea with Jason at all (NY 34.11.7, Vojatzi 1982.118 no. 59), Athena is there instead, and Hesiod does not mention her help, only that Jason married her and took her with him.} Her agency seems to have been present even in archaic versions of her myth and given her divine heritage, it leaves a theory open that she may belong to a category of the faded goddess myth.\footnote{Larson 1995, 79 & 180, n. 13.} The faded goddess myth
is the idea that a goddess gets identified with a human heroine, thus diluting her status. This might explain the relationship between Hecate and Medea.

There is a parallel example to be found in examining the shift that happens to Medea’s myth over time and a shift and decline that happens to Hecate. Hecate’s associations to the supernatural take on increasingly negative connotations and she loses some of her standing as a goddess. Around the second millennium, there is a gradual decline in the reverence and power for chthonic deities, such as Hecate. These shifts in perception for figures from myth or deities, help to understand variations in specific myths or character transformations. Euripides may have invented plot points that influenced later perceptions, but it is also the gradual shifts in perception that accumulated a negative perception towards aspects of Medea’s character, specifically her supernatural associations. Understanding this, one can proceed to study myth and its organic nature; there is no pure form of myth because it is fluid and everchanging, adapting and reacting to new times, regions, and cultures. Medea’s myth as organic and everchanging may be obvious, especially comparing Euripides’ and Seneca’s versions, but she should be taken as a model for the potential that other myths be treated in a similar fashion.

Medea’s complexity as a character allow authors to manipulate her character at their leisure. She is many-sided and any playwright may choose to emphasize one over another, and often, they do. In this way, her myth can be a model for analyzing the culture she is reimagined through. Euripides, writing before the Peloponnesian War and using his distinct style, gives his

137 O’Brien 1983, 44.
audience an inventive spin with an emphasis in an epic portrayal through Medea.\textsuperscript{138} Seneca, in contrast, chooses to emphasize her supernatural elements and casts her in a dark, villainous light which is appropriate given the natural predisposition a Roman reader would have toward a character like her. These are radically different representations but meant to be for the same character and, hypothetically, the same time, which is significant when studying myth.\textsuperscript{139} Medea’s myth becomes a model for all myth; it shows how strong a bond a society has to their myths and they reflect the attitudes and values of its culture.\textsuperscript{140} When studying myth, these factors must be considered, both to gain a full understanding of the myth in question, but also to understand how myth might undergo changes. In the case of Medea, her gender and associations with the supernatural created a negative shift in her representation but by understanding this shift, one can recognize it when studying her, just as the same process can be done for myth as a whole.

\textsuperscript{138} Medea is compared to a tragic hero and I discuss this in my second chapter. She is given characteristics reminiscent of a tragic hero and especially one from epic.

\textsuperscript{139} Each playwright chose the same scenes for their plays, hence the hypothetical same time of the character’s life.

\textsuperscript{140} Here, I am grouping plays, fragments and all else collectively when I use the term myth.
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