

CONTEMPORARY WITCH -  
DRAMATIC TREATMENTS OF THE MEDEA MYTH

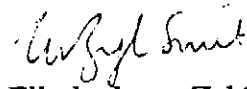
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I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not as a whole or in part been submitted to any other university for the purpose of obtaining a degree.



**Elizabeth van Zyl Smit**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**SECTION I**

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	Greek myth in later drama	1
	The development of the Medea myth	4
	Euripides' <i>Medea</i>	10
	Later versions of the Medea myth	19
	Comparative studies of Medea dramas	22
	The scope of the thesis	26

**SECTION II**      **SENECA'S MEDEA AND THE FRENCH MEDEA DRAMAS  
OF CORNEILLE, LONGEPIERRE AND ANOUILH**      **28**

<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>The <i>Medea</i> of Lucius Annaeus Seneca</b>	<b>29</b>
	Background	29
	The structure of the play	32
	The portrayal of Medea	45
	The portrayal of Jason and the relationship between Jason and Medea	50
	Creon and the minor characters	55
	The role of the chorus	58
	The <i>Medea</i> as a reflection of Seneca's world view	61
	Seneca's literary style	64
	Conclusion	69

<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>The <i>Médée</i> of Pierre Corneille</b>	
	From Seneca to Corneille	71
	Background	72
	The structure of the play	73
	The portrayal of Médée	80
	Jason and the relationship between Médée and Jason	83
	Créon and the minor characters	87
	Corneille's literary style	92
	Corneille's world view	97
	Conclusion	99

Chapter 4	<i>The Médée</i> of Longepierre	
	Background	102
	The structure of the drama	104
	The portrayal of Médée	109
	The depiction of Jason and the relationship between Jason and Médée	114
	Créon and the minor characters	116
	Longepierre's literary style in the <i>Médée</i>	119
	Conclusion	122
Chapter 5	Jean Anouilh's <i>Médée</i>	
	Background	124
	The structure of Anouilh's <i>Médée</i>	125
	The portrayal of Médée	134
	Jason	139
	Créon and the minor characters	142
	Anouilh's literary style	143
	Anouilh's world view as reflected in the <i>Médée</i>	148
	Conclusion	149
SECTION III	THE MEDEA-JASON STORY DRAMATIZED AS A TALE OF CONFLICTING CULTURES	151
Chapter 6	<i>Asie</i> by Henri-René Lenormand	
	Background	154
	The structure of the play	155
	The portrayal of the Medea figure - Katha Naham Moun	163
	The portrayal of the Jason figure - De Mezzana	165
	The Creon figure - De Listrac - and other minor characters	167
	<i>Asie</i> and the literary style of Lenormand	172
	Lenormand's play and contemporary society	176
Chapter 7	<i>The Wingless Victory</i> by Maxwell Anderson	
	Background	180
	The structure of the play	181
	The portrayal of the Medea figure - Oparre	192
	The Jason figure - Nathaniel McQuestion	195

	The Creon figure and other minor characters	198
	The literary style of <i>The Wingless Victory</i>	202
	Conclusion	205
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b><i>African Medea</i> by Jim Magnuson</b>	
	Background	206
	The structure of the play	207
	The portrayal of Medea	214
	The portrayal of Jason	216
	Governor Barretto and the minor characters	218
	The literary style of the <i>African Medea</i>	220
	Conclusion	223
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Problems in the Transposition of Mythic Material</b>	225
<b>SECTION IV</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	231
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>"The incensed hurt of women continues to find voice via <i>Medea</i>"</b>	231
	Further variations	231
	A Medea drama for our time	233
	Conclusion	240
<b>Appendix</b>	List of Medea dramas deriving from the myth as Euripides treated it in 431 B.C.	242
<b>Bibliography</b>	A. Texts of Medea dramas	245
	B. Books and articles	246

La fable grecque est pareille à la cruche de Philémon, qu'aucune soif ne vide, si l'on trinque avec Jupiter . . . Et le lait que ma soif y puise n'est point le même assurément que celui qu'y buvait Montaigne, je sais - et que la soif de Keats ou de Goethe n'était pas celle même de Racine ou de Chénier. D'autres viendront pareils à Nietzsche et dont une nouvelle exigence impatientera la lèvre enfiévrée. Mais celui qui, sans respect pour le Dieu, brise la cruche, sous prétexte d'en voir le fond et d'en éventer le miracle, n'a bientôt plus entre les mains que des tessons.

André Gide  
*Considérations sur la Mythologie Grecque*

147

SECTION I

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

There is no subject so hackneyed that it cannot be revitalized and given new meaning by an author with imagination and talent. The literary history of the witch-princess Medea abundantly illustrates this truism.

The study and analysis of a particular myth as it has been treated in different periods and in different literatures is one of the oldest branches of comparative literature. When the myth has found expression in one or more literary masterpieces, as is the case with the legend of Medea, this study becomes fascinating and rewarding. Although Medea has been portrayed in many different forms of art<sup>1</sup> and her story has been told in different literary genres, the purpose of this thesis is more confined in scope. It is intended to examine the way in which the Medea myth has been dramatized through the centuries - from the age of Euripides to twentieth-century Western literature. The focus will be widened to include other genres of literature when it seems that a particular Medea who appears there has influenced one, or more, of the Medea dramas, but the main emphasis will be on dramatic treatments of the Medea myth.

GREEK MYTH IN LATER DRAMA

The afterlife of the Medea myth is, of course, not unique. There are many other Greek myths which have been and remain popular with later writers. The important general question as to why later and even modern dramatists based

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1 For detailed information about Medea in different forms of art, see H. Hunger *Lexikon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie* 1959; L. Mallinger *Médée : Étude de Littérature Comparée* 1897 reprint 1971 and D. Mimoso-Ruiz *Médée antique et moderne* 1980.



and still base their plays on Greek myths has been investigated and discussed by scholars such as P.J. Conradie,<sup>2</sup> Manfred Fuhrmann,<sup>3</sup> Käte Hamburger<sup>4</sup> and Gilbert Highet.<sup>5</sup> Fuhrmann points out that the reworking of the same mythological material is not a modern phenomenon but an integral part of literary practice in classical Greece.<sup>6</sup> According to available evidence the story of Oedipus was the most popular. It was dramatized by at least eleven playwrights. Second came Thyestes with eight different versions and in the third place Medea with seven. Fuhrmann attributes the popularity of the Medea myth to the success of Euripides' tragedy. Of these ancient plays only a few have survived. For example, not one of the eight versions of *Thyestes* from classical Greece has come down to us and the only *Thyestes* play from the ancient world we have today is a Latin play by the Roman tragedian Lucius Annaeus Seneca. Seneca is also the author of a *Medea* tragedy which has survived to the present day.<sup>7</sup>

Fuhrmann distinguishes between modern drama based on ancient dramatic treatments of the same myths,<sup>8</sup> e.g. Anouilh's *Antigone* and the *Antigone* of Sophocles, or Mattias Braun's *Medea* and the *Medea* of Euripides, and modern dramas which simply use ancient myths as their subject matter, e.g. Anouilh's *Eurydice* or Jean Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*. The originality of the plays of the second category is not in dispute, because, although the material has been borrowed from Greek myth, it has been fashioned into something totally new - a drama for which there is no ancient equivalent. Is

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2 Niks is in sy tyd gesluit 1976; *The Treatment of Greek Myths in Modern French Drama* 1963.

3 "Mythos als Wiederholung in der Griechischen Tragödie und im Drama des 20. Jahrhunderts" in *Terror und Spiel: Probleme der Mythenrezeption* ed. M. Fuhrmann 1971 121-143.

4 *Von Sophokles zu Sartre : Griechische Dramenfiguren antik und modern* 1962.

5 *The Classical Tradition : Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* 1951 520-40.

6 *Loc. cit.* 121-3.

7 See ch. 2 for a discussion of Seneca's *Medea*.

8 *Loc. cit.* 129.

there any merit or purpose, however, in reworking an ancient drama to produce a modern one with almost the same characters and outline? Are the later plays in the first category not simply copies of the Greek masterpieces? No, not necessarily. As Fuhrmann has made clear with regard to Anouilh's *Antigone* which derives from Sophocles' *Antigone*: "Die radikalsten Änderungen begegnen, wie üblich, auf dem Felde der Charakterzeichnung und der Motivation, und man erkennt unschwer, daß sämtliche Varianten, die der moderne Autor angebracht hat, einer neuen Gesamtkonzeption dienen."<sup>9</sup> This is the heart of the matter - a new interpretation of the classical myth produced by the later author within the framework of the ancient story outline. As Highet maintains: "Most modern writers prefer to use the legends as the Greek poets did, making them carry moral and political significance *for a contemporary audience*."<sup>10</sup> Ancient Greek myths lend themselves well to this kind of reinterpretation. As has been said, the reshaping and retelling of these myths are as old as their oldest literary and other artistic traces.

In the past it has often been expedient to present controversial ideas by means of mythical stories and dramas, for instance during the German occupation of France in the Second World War when *Les Mouches* by Jean-Paul Sartre, based on the Orestes myth, and Anouilh's *Antigone* were written and produced. In other periods when no danger was attached to voicing ideas about resistance and change, authors nevertheless chose to work with mythic material because, in general, the myths are not only relatively simple in outline but also profoundly suggestive in content. Above all, they deal with eternal human problems such as love, war, courage, tyranny, fate and man's relationship to powers beyond his control. An examination of dramas from different periods based on a particular Greek myth will therefore be interesting, not only from the viewpoint of how the myth has been reinterpreted, but also of how the new treatment reflects the literary style and contemporary ideas of each individual author. This undoubtedly applies to the many dramas inspired by the Medea myth, as will be shown in this thesis by a detailed analysis of some of the most thought-provoking versions.

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9 *Loc. cit.* 131.

10 *Loc. cit.* 525 (my emphasis).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDEA MYTH

The original myth of Medea is unknown to us. By the time she first appeared in art she already had a long history, as indeed have all the figures in Greek myth who are known through representations in the figurative arts or are mentioned in works of literature. This is true of Homer's gods and heroes as well as of figures from earlier or later periods. Myth, as will be shown in more detail in this thesis, is the raw material of artists, and each author uses and shapes this material to achieve the object he desires.

In 1920 Karl Heinemann wrote:<sup>11</sup> "Medea strides through European poetry up to the present day as the murderess of her children." He added that it had been Euripides who had first given Medea that reputation in the tragedy named after her. Both these statements are true. Since 1920 a surprising number of new Medea dramas have appeared in different European languages<sup>12</sup> and, although they differ in many other aspects and details, the murder of Medea's children always forms the climax of the play. There has been some controversy about Euripides being the first to portray Medea as child murderess, with some scholars advancing the claim of Neophron of whose drama only fragments survive,<sup>13</sup> but there can be no question that it was Euripides' tragedy which influenced later dramatists and thus perpetuated the question of how a mother could degenerate to the point of killing her own children.

For the purposes of this study it is important not only to look at the dramatic treatments of the Medea myth in Western European literature, but also to establish how the myth used in different dramas came to acquire the partic-

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11 K. Heinemann *Die tragischen Gestalten der Griechen in der Weltliteratur* v. II 1 (my translation).

12 See the list of Medea dramas in the Appendix below.

13 See for example Karl Kerényi in his "Vorwort" to *Medea* ed. J. Schondorff 1963 21; and, in particular, for the Neophron controversy D.L. Page *Euripides Medea* 1967 xxx-xxxvi. A summary of the whole Neophron problem may be found in L. Séchan *Études sur la Tragédie grecque* 1926 Appendix VII 592-4.

ular elements which recur in the dramas. It will be suggested that the contents were decisively moulded in 431 B.C. by Euripides in his tragedy *Medea*. It is not the intention of this thesis to focus on the early variations and history of the *Medea* myth, but a short summary of the main elements will be useful for an understanding of the classical form of the myth.

The early variants of the *Medea* myth have been studied by many scholars, amongst others Léon Mallinger,<sup>14</sup> Louis Séchan,<sup>15</sup> D.L. Page<sup>16</sup> and Kurt von Fritz.<sup>17</sup> The following summary of the early evidence about *Medea* is drawn from their work and the ancient authorities cited there. D.J. Conacher also has an excellent account of Euripides' blending of the sometimes contradictory elements in the early tales.<sup>18</sup>

The tale of *Medea* contains many elements which are familiar from other Greek myths and are also to be found in the folktales and legends of other peoples. One of the older parts<sup>19</sup> of the story is that of the Greek hero, Jason, captain of the *Argo*, who has sailed across dangerous waters to a faraway, barbarous land, Colchis. He must discover and capture the Golden Fleece which lies carefully hidden and guarded there. This task is beset with such great difficulties that the hero cannot accomplish it on his own. He succeeds because he is helped by *Medea*, the daughter of King Aetes, who is hostile to him and his enterprise. *Medea* falls in love with the Greek hero and uses her powers of magic to assist him in carrying out his mission. There was an old connection with witchcraft and supernatural powers in *Medea*'s family. Aetes was the son of the Sun-god Helios and *Medea* thus the granddaughter of

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14 *Op. cit.*

15 in "La légende de Médée" *REG* 40 (1928) 234-310.

16 *Op. cit.*

17 In "Die Entwicklung der Jason-Medeasage und die *Medea* des Euripides" in his *Antike und Moderne Tragödie* 1962 322-429.

18 In *Euripidean Drama : Myth, Theme and Structure* 1967 183-7.

19 The story of the Argonauts goes back at least to the time of the composition of the *Odyssey* in which there are references to Jason's father, Aeson, and to Pelias his brother (*Od.* XI 254 ff.) as well as to the *Argo* (*Od.* XII 70).

the Sun. According to Homer,<sup>20</sup> Aeetes was the brother of the witch Circe. Medea does not only have ties of blood with Circe but also resembles her in having the resources of sorcery at her disposal. These resources are put to use to ensure the safety of the hero with whom she has fallen in love. A factor which is of some importance is that the goddess of love, Aphrodite, has charmed the witch-princess so that her love would bring her to betray her father and go to Jason's aid. This factor is still of some account in Euripides' play. In spite of Medea's betrayal of her father, this saga originally probably had a peaceful end and Medea returned with Jason to his fatherland Iolcus, and there they lived happily ever after.

This first part of the Medea-Jason story is told fully in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius who lived more than a century later than Euripides. Apollonius emphasizes the strength of Medea's love for Jason. This is a motif which surfaces again in many subsequent versions of the myth, including dramatic treatments.

At an early stage this simple tale was extended and elaborated by the account of further adventures of the successful hero. As in many such legends the adventures were dangerous missions prepared by a wicked relative, in this case Jason's uncle Pelias, who wished thus to rid himself of his rival to the throne. And so the end of the story changed.

On his safe return the hero naturally sought to avenge himself upon his wicked relative. The happy ending to the story would still be possible, only delayed, but in the case of Jason and Medea a very important twist was given to the story by Medea's use of her witchcraft. That Medea knew the art of rejuvenation was one of the early elements of the story. By means of this skill she restored to youth in some versions Jason's father, in other versions Jason himself. However, this ability of Medea's is incorporated into the scheme of vengeance with far-reaching consequences. She deceitfully promises to teach the daughters of Pelias her secret so that they may rejuvenate their ageing father, but, of course, misleads them so that he dies as a result of the treat-

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20 Od. X 137-8.

ment. Vengeance is attained but at the cost of Medea's reputation as a cruel witch becoming firmly established.<sup>21</sup>

Apparently unconnected with the Pelias story, another elaboration of the Medea-Jason saga developed. This branch of the legend was centred on the city-state of Corinth.<sup>22</sup> The tale goes that Medea's father Aeetes had been granted Corinth as a gift from his father, the Sun-god Helios. After various others had ruled the city as representatives of Aeetes, he made Medea its ruler. Through her, Jason then became king of Corinth. This version of the story must therefore predate any break in the good relationships within the family. The later elaboration that Medea killed her brother Absyrtus in order to facilitate her flight from Colchis with the Argonauts, is obviously excluded. Also excluded is the dishonourable flight from Iolcus as a result of Pelias' gruesome death. On the other hand, a significant detail of the Corinth-based story is that Medea was said to have concealed their children in the temple of Hera in an attempt to make them immortal. Jason surprised her in the process. The magic failed. The children died. Jason refused to forgive Medea and returned to Iolcus. Points relevant to Euripides' version are that for the first time Medea is responsible for the death of the children, although by accident, and that Jason leaves Medea because of the misadventure. This order of events was to be reversed by Euripides. Noteworthy too is that in this variation, as in the story concerning Pelias, Medea's magic is represented as bad magic which causes catastrophe.

The evil reputation accorded to Medea because of her magic powers is emphasized in two further versions of the pre-Euripidean myth centred in Corinth.<sup>23</sup> According to the first, the women of Corinth refused to be governed by a barbarian and witch and attempted to kill Medea and her children. In spite of seeking sanctuary at the altar of Hera, the children were killed. Jason plays no part in this story. The hostility of the Corinthian

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21 The tale of how Medea aided Jason and the Argonauts and returned with them was told by Pindar in his *Pythian Ode IV*. His account goes up to the death of Pelias.

22 The earliest available evidence here is in the *Korinthiaka* of Eumelos who lived in the eighth century B.C.

23 These stories are to be found in a scholiast on Euripides *Med.* 264.

women towards Medea is in contrast to the sympathetic attitude towards the stranger adopted by the Euripidean chorus. There is no evidence of solidarity as women; in fact Medea is driven away.

According to the second version Medea killed Creon, the ruler of Corinth, and fled to Athens to escape the vengeance of the Corinthians. As she could not take her children along, she left them in the temple of Hera, hoping that Jason would look after them. Instead, Creon's relatives seized the children and put them to death, and then, in order to avoid the odium caused by the deed, spread the rumour that Medea had killed her own children. The circumstances under which Medea and Jason had come to Corinth in this version are not clear but Creon, and not Medea, is the ruler. She flees to Athens and not to Iolcus - suggesting that she and Jason had already come to Corinth as fugitives from Iolcus. Noteworthy is that Jason is not implicated in the murder of Creon, that he stays in Corinth and that he must be on good terms with the authorities. Again the hostile relations between Medea and the Corinthians are apparent.

It is striking how certain aspects of one version of the story are further developed in the next version and the two so combined as to form a coherent and plausible new tale. Thus the banning of Jason and Medea from Iolcus to Corinth flows naturally from Medea's treacherous act of vengeance upon Pelias. So too Medea and Jason are transferred from Iolcus to Corinth through the banning, although the story set in Corinth originally carried no trace of an enforced exile and had no connection with the Pelias episode.

Thus far did the saga develop before Euripides produced his tragedy. It is clear from this brief outline that the Medea figure became progressively more controversial as the tales in which she appeared became more involved. In the course of the development of the story many elements were added which did not correspond to the theme of the simple original tale. In fact the tales contained some contradictions by the time Euripides came to utilize them to create his Medea. There were therefore several options open to Euripides in his presentation of the tale. He masterfully selected and combined different elements, and probably added some of his own invention, to form a uniquely moving drama which must have had a shocking impact at its first performance.

This drama was to fascinate not only his contemporaries, but people of millenia to follow.

It is difficult to pinpoint all the details which were invented by Euripides, but it should be mentioned that there are some elements of the story which cannot with certainty be traced back to a source earlier than Euripides. Examples are the killing of Absyrtus, Medea's brother, in order to delay pursuit during the flight from Colchis and the destruction of Creon's daughter (Glauke/Creusa) by means of a poisoned garment and headdress sent to her by Medea. The traveller Pausanias tells of a Glauke fountain in Corinth into which Creon's daughter was said to have plunged in the hope of counteracting Medea's drugs.<sup>24</sup> There is no proof, however, that this tradition did not develop subsequent to the Euripides version. Further doubt exists about the originality of the relationship between Medea and Aigeus, the king of Athens. It is known that Euripides also wrote a tragedy with the title *Aigeus*, of which only fragments survive, and which depicts Aigeus and Medea as married and living in Athens.<sup>25</sup> In the chronology of the myth the action of this play follows the departure of Medea from Corinth but there is no definite evidence as to which of the two plays Euripides wrote first.

There is a later apocryphal tradition that the Corinthians bribed Euripides with five talents to remove the odium for the killing of Medea and Jason's children from them and to transfer it to Medea.<sup>26</sup> This story has found little credence except perhaps as support for the belief that Euripides was in fact the first to present Medea as killer of her children!

Euripides' adaptation of the myth proved to be so successful that he may be said to have created a new standard version of the Medea myth which was recognized and followed by all subsequent artists who made use of the myth. As Wolf-Hartmut Friedrich has written: "Was Euripides erst motivierend

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24 Pausanias *Description of Greece* (trans. and ed. W.H.S. Jones) 1918 II 3-6.

25 See Page *op. cit.* xxix.

26 Reported by Parmeniskos *≲ Med.* 9





durchsetzen mußte, ist später bereits Mythos geworden, bei dessen Zeugnis man sich beruhigen kann."<sup>27</sup>

### EURIPIDES' MEDEA

Before proceeding to the dramas which have been influenced by Euripides' *Medea*, it would be appropriate to examine the tragedy in order to delineate the basic structure of the myth as it was subsequently to be used as dramatic plot.

Euripides' drama is set in Corinth. The great adventures of the Argonauts, the capture of the Golden Fleece, Jason and Medea's flight from Colchis and their sojourn in Iolcus are all in the past. Jason and Medea have come to Corinth as fugitives with their two sons. Here Jason has married the daughter of the ruler Creon and rejected his wife Medea. At this point the action of the tragedy commences.

Medea and her Nurse bewail Jason's perfidious betrayal. Medea curses Jason and the house of Creon. Creon hears about her threats and commands her to leave Corinth immediately with her children. Medea pleads with Creon and succeeds in getting a day's delay in order to prepare her departure. The day granted to her she plans to use to avenge the injustice done her by Jason, Glauke and Creon. By chance Aigeus, the king of Athens, is travelling through Corinth and meets Medea. She persuades him to guarantee her a place of refuge in Athens. Then she prepares to execute her plan of revenge. She summons Jason and pretends that she will fall in with his plans and will leave. However, she would like the children to stay with him in Corinth. To ensure that his new wife and her father will be well-disposed to the children she wants to send them with gifts to their stepmother. Jason accompanies the children to his bride. The poisoned gifts consume Glauke and Creon with flames. Jason's bride and father-in-law have been killed, but now he is dealt an even harder blow. He goes to look for his children to protect them against the wrath of the Corinthians but finds them slaughtered by their mother. Jason

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27 In "Medea's Rache" in *Euripides* ed E-R Schwinge 1968 177-237 at 199.

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has therefore lost everyone and everything dear to him. As her final act of vengeance Medea refuses to give up the bodies of the children to Jason. She prophesies that Jason will meet his end unheroically by having his skull shattered by a timber from the *Argo's* hull. Medea triumphantly disappears from sight in a dragon-drawn chariot sent by the Sun.

Thus Euripides fused elements of the early legend with elements of his own invention to produce a gripping drama in which human problems are portrayed, although Medea's supernatural powers play a role too. It is generally accepted that Euripides was the first tragic poet to present the theme of Medea's vengeance provoked by Jason's infidelity.<sup>28</sup> That this version of the Medea myth - or, more precisely, of the part of the myth which has Corinth as its background - came to be accepted as the definitive and authoritative version is of great importance for this thesis. Van Stockum puts this clearly: "Und so ist diese erste geniale Dramatisierung des Medeamotivs sozusagen zum Prototyp geworden, auf das alle, buchstäblich alle, spätere Behandlungen - auch wo sie abweichen - direkt oder indirekt zurückgehen."<sup>29</sup> It will be shown that the later dramatizations of this part of the Medea legend are all structured around the core elements of Euripides' drama, often with fresh input from the old legends to add a new dimension or to highlight a particular characterization.

It is not intended to discuss Euripides' play in great detail. Many others have done so.<sup>30</sup> Inevitably there will be many references to particular aspects of Euripides' *Medea* when the later dramas are analysed. Yet it is necessary to keep certain salient aspects and themes of his definitive treatment in mind.

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28 See, for example, K. Kerényi "Vorwort" *loc. cit.* 19-20.

29 Th. C. van Stockum "Die Erstlingstragödien Corneilles und Racines und ihre antiken Vorbilder" in *NPh* 43 (1959) 2-16 at 6.

30 It is unnecessary to name all the scholars who have commented on Euripides' *Medea*. Apart from those to whom there have already been references, some interesting, fairly recent literary criticism of the play may be found in Pietro Pucci *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* 1980; P. Vellacott *Ironic Drama* 1975 106-14, B.M.W. Knox "The *Medea* of Euripides" in *Greek Tragedy* ed. E. Segal 1983 272-93 and E. Schliesinger "On Euripides' *Medea*" in the same book 294-310.

The action in Euripides' drama develops in different phases. In the first phase Medea's situation is shown and the growth of her determination to wreak vengeance delineated. Creon's order banishing her provides an obstacle to this aim but it is overcome. The great scene when Medea and Jason confront each other serves to show that the break between them is final and gives her desire for vengeance a fresh impetus. The central scene with Aigeus is pivotal. It shows Medea what form her vengeance should take and also assures her of a secure asylum. From this point she puts her plan into practice and causes the catastrophic ending.

Medea is the central figure in the play. She has not been drawn unsympathetically in spite of the fact that she is portrayed as the killer of her children. One of the most striking aspects of Euripides' drama is that he made Medea credible as a woman. She is not a witch, but because she is in an impossible situation, she is gradually driven to evil. Various characteristics make her a complex and intriguing figure. She is a stranger from a country with a different culture, yet she is accepted as a friend by the Corinthian women. The Nurse's description of Medea's distress and suffering in the prologue (20-35) fills the chorus of women of Corinth with concern. Like the Nurse they feel she has been wronged because she has been a loyal wife to Jason and now he has rejected her. Medea's first reaction is one of utter despair. She refuses to eat and to speak to her friends. She lies weeping and regrets having left her fatherland. Despite Medea's prostration the Nurse is uneasy and repeatedly warns that Medea is a formidable enemy (90-95, 106-10, 117-21). This fear creates a tense atmosphere and shows the contrast between the Nurse's perception of the situation and the chorus'. The Nurse knows Medea's past and has experienced her power while the chorus pities her as a stranger who has been unjustly treated as a wife. As Medea's laments grow wilder and she calls for death to Jason and his house, and death to the children of a hated mother (112-4), the anxiety of the Nurse and the chorus intensifies. Medea is not yet thinking of revenge at this stage, but feels that their family and everything which gave meaning to her life have been brutally destroyed. The violence of Medea's reaction to Jason's desertion shows how great her love for him was. The chorus wants to show Medea that it is on her side but also that her case is not unique (155-7). Other husbands also abandon their wives.

When Medea does appear (214) she is no longer weeping and wailing but self-possessed. In a clear and rational way she places her situation in perspective against that of women in general. The lot of women is unenviable, but her position is worse, since she has been abandoned in a foreign country where she has no blood relation to whom to turn. Therefore she asks the chorus to preserve secrecy about any plan of revenge she may form. Although in the first part of the speech she still speaks of her wish to die (226), at the end she is thinking about vengeance (259-63). The chorus shows its solidarity with Medea. Jason deserves to be punished as he has treated his wife with contempt. Despite the chorus' compassion for Medea it is evident that it underestimates her. Its ode (1081 ff.) shows that the idea it has of women includes the notion that women are less intelligent than men. This conviction marks the difference between Medea and ordinary women. She does not accept that women have limitations. She will not brook unjust treatment, but will use her energy and mental resources to resist it.

Her resourcefulness is demonstrated in the scene with Creon. His order of immediate banishment is a further bitter blow to Medea. Yet she dissimulates her true feelings so successfully that Creon, who fears that she may harm his daughter through her evil powers, relents and allows her a day's delay to make preparations for her and the children's exile. There is a strong contrast between Medea's apparent submission to Creon's order and her determination to wreak vengeance which is expressed in forceful terms after the meeting.

Medea's plan of vengeance at this stage (374-5) is to kill Creon, Glauke and Jason. Poison will be the surest means (385). However, in keeping with the emphasis on the human aspects of Medea, she needs a place of refuge after she has accomplished the act. In spite of the drastic nature of the action Medea plans, the chorus does not censure her (410-45), but regrets the loss of honour and the disregard for solemn oaths among the Greeks. This implicit attack on Jason immediately precedes his entry.

Jason's words add to the unfavourable picture of him built up in the minds of the audience by the remarks of the other characters. His attitude confirms this negative image. He shows no sign of remorse but speaks in a proud and egotistical way. He accuses Medea of having worsened her situation. Through

her behaviour she has spoilt his plan for her to stay in Corinth. She has therefore brought the sentence of exile upon herself but, nevertheless, he is prepared to assist her and the children financially. In this scene Medea does not hide her true feelings but reacts with outrage at Jason's brazenness. She reminds him of the sacrifices she made for him out of love. She has borne his children and been a loyal wife. He leaves her and the children with no home. Jason replies in an even more insulting and hardhearted way. Her love was inspired by Aphrodite and so gratitude for Medea's help is due to the goddess, not to Medea. On the contrary, Medea owes him gratitude for taking her away from her barbarous country and introducing her to life in Hellas where justice and laws exist. She has even become famous! Euripides shows the complete lack of communication between husband and wife in this scene. Each sees only one side to the past and the present history of their marriage. This is even more clearly shown by Jason's explanation of his motives for the new marriage. He claims that his main concern was for Medea and the children's interests. It was a stroke of luck for him, a homeless fugitive, to be able to marry the king's daughter. He did not marry her because he was tired of Medea, or in love with Glauke, or wanted more children, but to assure the future of his sons. It is hard to say whether Jason is to be understood as being hypocritical and insensitive here, or merely selfish and insensitive. His contempt for the female sex (573-5) is genuine and Medea makes use of this in their next meeting where she cleverly echoes his sentiments expressed in the first meeting. The ease with which she gulls Creon and Jason is partly due to their ingrained belief that women are inferior to men and their consequent underestimation of Medea.

The first meeting with Jason thus confirms Medea in her hatred of him. The chorus reaffirms its sympathy with Medea who is suffering because of excessive love turned to hate and who is now an exile. Further support for Medea arrives in the person of King Aigeus of Athens. He is shocked that Jason has abandoned Medea and taken another wife. This shows the reaction of an honourable man who, unlike Creon, is disinterested, and confirms Medea in the justness of her cause. On the further grounds that Creon has banished her, Medea appeals to Aigeus' pity. He offers her asylum in Athens. Medea promises to cure him of his sterility as a reward.

The combination of Aigeus' childlessness and Jason's concern for his children's future seems to be the cause of Medea's decision on the form her revenge should take. After Aigeus has departed with the good wishes of the chorus, Medea, certain of refuge, prepares to carry out her plan. She sets it out in detail (774 ff.): She will summon Jason, pretend to approve of his arrangements but propose that the children stay in Corinth. The children will carry poisoned gifts to the princess, ostensibly to win her love. Then she will kill the children (although it will be heartrending for her) because she cannot endure the laughter of her enemies (797). (This thought is later repeated (1049-50).) This will be the most effective punishment for Jason. He will be childless. His own children will be dead and he will have no children by his new bride because she will be dead too. The end of the drama reveals that this savage punishment of Jason was apt. He is a broken man and wishes that he had never had children (1413-4).

The chorus protests against such a wicked deed and warns that Medea will make herself most unhappy in this way. She evades the issue and sends the Nurse to fetch Jason. The Nurse and the chorus are sworn to secrecy, as women. Medea therefore uses the solidarity of women effectively against Jason who despises them (824). In 928 she again makes use of Jason's belief that women are weak in explaining away her tears at the contemplation of the terrible deed she is planning.

As the tension mounts the chorus sings about the glory of Athens. Such a fair city will not welcome a child-killer. It appeals to Medea not to kill her children and predicts that at the decisive moment she will not be able to carry out the deed. This ode anticipates Medea's inner conflict and throws into relief the horror of the action she is proposing.

At their second meeting Jason is as patronizing and self-important as at the first. Because Medea now finds his plans reasonable, he easily accepts her plea that the children should stay in Corinth. The words of both Jason and Medea are filled with ambiguity (e.g. 901-2, 920-1, 925) and dramatic irony. Medea's genuine emotion at the fate in store for the children interferes with her pretence of willingness to go into exile, but Jason does not suspect foul play and leaves, an unwitting accomplice in the murder of his new bride.

The chorus now has no hope that the children will live (976 ff.). Pity for the horror about to befall Glauke, Jason and Medea heightens the tension. Soon the Paidagogus returns with the news that the children have been reprieved from banishment. Medea's reaction is tearful. She uses ambiguous words about parting to explain her emotional reaction (1021 ff.). She admits that she will suffer even more than Jason. She is torn between her love for her children and the thought of the scorn of her enemies. Little details, such as her mention of the children's soft skin and sweet breath (1074-5), show how deeply she cares for them. She confesses that she fully understands the horror of the deed, yet her anger, her passion for revenge, is stronger (1079-80).

A shocked messenger brings the news of the horrific deaths of Glauke and Creon. In spite of his knowledge that Medea is guilty he does not attempt to arrest her but advises her to flee. His words also convey the initial sympathy of the ordinary people for Medea because of the treatment she has received (1136-40). The implication is that after Jason's betrayal of their marriage Medea enjoyed widespread support but that she is destroying this through the violence of her revenge.

Medea's reaction to the news of the deaths is that she must kill her children as quickly as possible, otherwise someone else will kill them in retribution. Her perverted reasoning leads her to the conviction that it is better that she who gave them birth, should also take their lives (1236-4). It is, however, also to be seen in the light of her punishment of Jason. He would suffer whoever killed the children. But Medea wants to demonstrate her vengeance for the unjust way in which he treated her.

As Medea goes off to carry out her monstrous deed, the chorus for the first time speaks out openly against her and suggests that she is a barbarian (1263-4), as Jason does after he learns about the murder (1329-32). The chorus debates whether it should go and help the children whose pathetic cries can be heard, but as an ominous silence falls they reflect that only once before was such an unspeakable act committed and that was by Ino who had been driven out of her mind.

Jason arrives in an attempt to save the children from retribution for Medea's murder of Creon and Glauke, but is met with the terrible news of the even more horrific crime she has perpetrated. Jason wants to kill Medea but she appears in a chariot sent by the Sun and taunts him from above. In a bitter outburst of guilt and hate Jason curses and reviles Medea. He insists upon her barbaric origin; no Greek woman would be capable of such monstrosity. At no point does Jason indicate that he is partly responsible for the catastrophe by having provoked Medea's rage for vengeance through the shabby way in which he abandoned their marriage. The closest he comes to realizing this is when he accuses her of murdering her children out of sexual jealousy (1348 and 1367). Medea admits that that was a contributing factor together with his ingratitude. She could not bear Jason to dishonour her marriage bed and laugh at her, nor could she bear Creon to think he could banish her with impunity.

Medea confesses that she is suffering the same pain she inflicted on Jason but finds it bearable as long as she can see him suffering (1362). As a final punishment she refuses to give up the children's bodies to Jason. She denies him the comfort of a last embrace. She intends to bury them in the precinct of Hera Akraia and institute an annual sacrifice to expiate the murder.<sup>31</sup> She herself realizes the murder was impious but is strong now and has no regrets because she can see that Jason is suffering as she intended.

As D.L. Page has written: "The fantastic conclusion of his [Euripides'] play - child-murder, dragon-chariot - is an end not an answer."<sup>32</sup> The power and fascination of the drama lie in the way the emotions of the characters are conveyed. Medea's love was so strong that when Jason betrayed it, it turned into implacable hatred. Jason's love (if indeed he ever felt genuine love for Medea, there are certainly no vestiges left in the play) has become self-love. He seeks blatantly to promote his own well-being. His love for his sons seems

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31 Thus Euripides links his play with the existing legend. Pausanias reports that he visited the tomb of Medea's children whose names were Mermerus and Pheres. He refers to yearly sacrifices to honour them until Corinth was laid waste by the Romans. However, he still attributes their death to the Corinthians as vengeance for the deathly gifts they took to Glauke. II 3, 6-7.

32 *Op. cit.* xiv



to be merely an extension of his self-love, but that it does have sincere undertones is shown in the closing scene. Between two such divergent characters there can be no easy solution, but the catastrophic ending is due to Medea's exceptional character. Although her past deeds and her barbaric origin are not unduly stressed in the drama, they are immediately evoked by Jason after the deed. The escape in the dragon-drawn chariot which was criticized by Aristotle may not flow logically from the action, but it is a splendid *coup de théâtre* and fits Medea's barbarous and supernatural connections which gain in emphasis towards the end of the play.

Euripides has created in Medea a character who grows and changes in the course of the play. She starts off in a state of total dejection, but is surrounded by sympathetic friends: the Nurse, the women of Corinth, Aigeus, the ordinary people (as the messenger later reveals) and also the audience. Yet Medea presents a false image of her relationship with Jason even to her friends when she pretends that she was taken from Colchis against her will and omits to mention why she has no relative to turn to. She is therefore able to twist reality to suit her ends as much as Jason is. This slyness on Medea's part is employed to good effect against Creon and in her second meeting with Jason, but she horrifies her friends with the extreme form her vengeance assumes. In spite of her abominable deed, Medea is triumphant at the end of the play. Jason, on the contrary, who has throughout the play been shown to be callous and self-centred, earns a measure of compassion because the punishment has been out of proportion to the crime.

According to Euripides' text the reasons Medea gives for killing the children are first, to punish Jason for his base betrayal of their marriage (this includes the motif of sexual jealousy which is rightly mentioned by all the characters (e.g. Medea 259-63, 623-5, 1355 and 1368, Creon in 286, Jason 567-73, 1348, 1367 and the chorus 1002-7, 1291-2)); secondly, to avoid the scorn of her enemies; and thirdly, after the deaths of Creon and Glauke, to prevent their supporters from killing her children in retribution. Euripides succeeds in showing how Medea, who really loves her children, by carrying out the form of revenge which is most painful to her, succumbs to her need to prove conclusively to Jason and her enemies that her nature will not allow anyone to treat her unjustly and get away with it. Although Medea's character has many

facets which come into play during the drama, her attitude to Jason is one of implacable hatred from the beginning to the end. This is also reflected in the superlative *κακίστος* with which she designates Jason to others (229 and 690), when addressing him she uses the even stronger form *ὦ Πυκκίστε* (465).

Euripides' drama has continued to fascinate critics, scholars and artists through more than two millennia. The purpose of this thesis is to examine in what ways he influenced later dramatists.

### LATER VERSIONS OF THE MEDEA MYTH

The Medea myth has certainly had a *produktive Rezeption* in the twenty-four centuries after Euripides. So Johan Boonen in the introduction to his *Medea* which was published in 1982<sup>33</sup> and which is the most recent variation of the drama I have been able to find, writes: "Met enig gebrek aan bescheidenheid heb ik aan de vijf en twintig Medea-versies er nog een toegevoegd - als ik goed ben ingelicht ± 35 jaar nadat Anouilh (1945 Frankryk) en Jeffers (1946 Amerika) hun Medea lieten verschijnen." Boonen's count is, not surprisingly, not correct. There does not seem to be any one source which lists all the known Medea dramas. I have compiled a list, from various sources, of all the Medea dramas based on the events which Euripides set in Corinth and which thus treat the same part of the myth as Euripides. Dramas which deal with the earlier part of the legend, such as the first two parts of Franz Grillparzer's trilogy *Das Goldene Vließ*, *Der Gastfreund* and *Die Argonauten*, are therefore omitted, as are plays based on events subsequent to Corinth such as Friedrich Klinger's *Medea auf dem Kaukasos*. This list is to be found as an appendix.<sup>34</sup> There are probably more dramas which should be included but of which I am not aware. So, for example, the 1986 Edinburgh Festival Programme advertised a Japanese *Medea* which, according to reports, dealt with the part of the myth in question. This shows that the Medea legend has spread beyond the confines of Western-European and Anglo-American literature.

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33 J. Boonen *Medea* 1982.

34 See Appendix below.

According to available information it would seem as if Boonen's version is the sixty-sixth rather than the twenty-sixth! Apart from the Medea dramas set in Corinth, there are also numerous operas which deal with this part of the myth.<sup>35</sup> The best known of the operas is probably that of Cherubini. Maria Callas, who made the role of this operatic Medea famous, also has the title role in a complex and ambitious film made in 1970 by Pier Paolo Pasolini.<sup>36</sup> As is to be expected in the twentieth century, where the cinema has become one of the most challenging and dynamic forms of creative art, a number of films about Medea have also been made.<sup>37</sup> One of the most successful is undeniably Jules Dassin's *Cri de femmes* (distributed in the English-speaking world as *A Dream of Passion*) where there is a violent confrontation between the myth, represented by the actress Maya playing the title role in Euripides' *Medea*, and the brute reality, the Medea who makes news headlines, represented by the young American mother in Athens who has killed her children to punish her unfaithful husband. However, as the criteria for analysing a film differ from those for analysing a drama, the films have not been considered in the comparative study.

Some later dramatists (and also novelists and film directors) who choose to rework ancient Greek drama, keep to the ancient conventions. Thus they preserve the names of the characters and geographical locations. Examples of such dramas are Racine's *Phèdre* and Anouilh's *Antigone*. Others transpose the myth to a contemporary setting and alter the names of the characters but still tell essentially the same story. This category is represented by such well-known modern dramas as the American playwright Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* where Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy is transferred to the nineteenth-century New England family, the Mannons, or *Les Mouches* by Jean-Paul Sartre.

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35 See Mallinger *op. cit.* and Mimoso-Ruiz *op. cit.* for examples.

36 For a discussion of Pasolini's *Medea*, see Stephen Snyder *Pier Paolo Pasolini* 1980, and Mimoso-Ruiz *op. cit. passim*.

37 See Mimoso-Ruiz *op. cit.* for films based on the Medea story.

The Medea drama has been adapted in both these ways. The large majority of later treatments belong to the first category - even so recent a version as that of Johan Boonen - but a number of twentieth-century *Medeas* fall into the second category. Examples are Maxwell Anderson's play<sup>38</sup> *The Wingless Victory* which is set in Salem in 1800. The Jason figure is Nathaniel McQuestion who returns after a number of years aboard his own ship. He brings back as his wife Oparre, a Malay princess and their two children. The family are received with hostility and suspicion by the narrow-minded professedly Christian inhabitants of the town. Nathaniel is acceptable as long as his dark wife and children leave. The drama works to its inevitable conclusion. The emphasis on racial difference in *The Wingless Victory* is to be seen in other modern Medea plays as well. For instance H.R. Lenormand's *Asie*<sup>39</sup> has as its background France's colonial past. The Medea figure is an Asian princess, Katha Naham Moun, who has two children by de Mezzana, a French colonist. *African Medea* by Jim Magnuson<sup>40</sup> is set in a Portuguese colony in West Africa. The governor Barretto takes the role of Creon, Jason is a Portuguese adventurer and Medea, Aegeus (the African king Adago) and the chorus are all black Africans.

In addition to the topical twentieth-century issue of racial prejudice, the equally contentious issue of abortion is brought to the fore in some of the recent *Medeas*. So in Csokor's *Medea Postbellica*, which is set in the Balkans after the Second World War, Peter's (Jason) tame acceptance of an easy life with Dora (Creusa) provokes his lover Anna (Medea) into aborting his child she is carrying. The substitution of abortion for the killing of the children also features in Dassin's film where the actress Maya confesses that she too has been a Medea in real life.

Analysis of the different dramas will show these and other differences between the ancient and modern dramas in greater detail. Various combinations of Medea dramas have been analysed from a comparative perspective. A short

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38 In *Medea : Myth and Dramatic Form* ed. Sanderson and Zimmerman 1967.

39 In *Théâtre complet* v. IX 1938.

40 In *New American Plays* ed. William M. Hoffman v. IV 1971.

overview of these studies is necessary in order to clarify the object of this thesis.

### COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MEDEA DRAMAS

One of the most comprehensive accounts of the Medea myth in literature is Léon Mallinger's *Médée: Étude de littérature comparée*. In this work the Medea legend is traced in all its literary forms from the earliest pre-Euripidean to nineteenth-century West-European versions. It also contains an appendix on the Medea figure in art and music. Because of the all-embracing nature of the work the dramas are not analysed in depth, but short summaries are given and also value judgements which often seem gratuitous as they are insufficiently substantiated. Mallinger is much concerned with proving that Euripides' tragedy is the "best" and that Seneca's tragedy, for example, is "bad" and this leads him to facile generalizations and emotional praise or condemnation. He has high praise for Ovid's *Medea* which is no longer extant. Mallinger's book was published at the end of the nineteenth century and therefore is somewhat dated. However, it remains valuable as a work of reference rather than as a source of thorough critical investigation.

In "La Légende de Médée"<sup>41</sup> Louis Séchan deals with the Medea myth as it manifested itself before Euripides' tragedy and then also with Euripides' treatment of the myth. There is some discussion of the plays of Seneca and Corneille and brief references to those of Grillparzer and Catulle Mendès.

Far more detailed is the analysis of later Medea dramas in Kurt von Fritz's "Die Entwicklung der Jason - Medeasage und die *Medea* des Euripides".<sup>42</sup> Von Fritz details the pre-Euripidean stories concerning Medea, has an interesting reading of Euripides' tragedy and shorter discussions of the Medea-figure in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, and in the dramas of Seneca, Corneille (to whom he is surprisingly and not convincingly sympathetic) and

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41 *Loc. cit.*

42 *Loc. cit.*

Longepierre, the opera of Cherubini, the trilogy *Das Goldene Vließ* by the Austrian poet Grillparzer and Jean Anouilh's "pièce noire" *Médée*. Von Fritz's work is erratic. Some parts are very useful and contain interesting insights but often his commentary seems unconnected with the texts. He compares Grillparzer and Anouilh at some length although there is not much common ground between them, while he neglects to point out obvious parallels between Anouilh and Seneca.

In an excellent study titled "Medeas Rache",<sup>43</sup> Wolf-Hartmut Friedrich has chosen the dramas, "from Grillparzer to Euripides", which are to be read and compared with the original. He concentrates on the *Handlung*, the dramatic action in the plays, from a number of thematic angles, such as: infanticide in Attic tragedy, the banning of Medea's children, the children and the attack on the rival, the motivation behind the sending of the gifts, the different motivations for killing the children, Medea's degree of responsibility, Medea as an earthly or higher being, the Sun's granddaughter returns home, and "Medea fiam" - Medea's full potential as sorceress and descendent of the Sun-god.

Although Friedrich's discussion is interesting and valuable it is by no means exhaustive. Important questions such as the relationship between Medea and Jason are hardly touched upon. Most striking in this study is the way in which consideration of later dramas throws light upon the original.

In a doctoral thesis entitled *Medea-Dramen der Weltliteratur*,<sup>44</sup> Achim Block examines the tragedies of Euripides, Seneca (with an appendix on Corneille as if his drama were a mere offshoot of Seneca's), the two Medea dramas of Klinger, and Grillparzer's *Das Goldene Vließ*. Klinger's second drama is subsequent to the events in Corinth according to the chronology of the myth and the first two parts of Grillparzer's trilogy prior to them. Block has a short section on Anouilh's *Médée* too. In discussing the dramas Block concentrates on the motivation for the killing of the children as he regards this as the central issue.

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43 *Loc. cit.*

44 Göttingen 1957

Other critics have concentrated on the line of influence from Euripides to Seneca through to Corneille. So Van Stockum examined how Corneille in his *Médée* borrows from both Euripides and Seneca in "Die Erstlingstragödien Corneilles und Racines und ihre antiken Vorbilder".<sup>45</sup> André Stegmann in two articles<sup>46</sup> dealt with the relationship between Seneca's and Corneille's Medea dramas and with the general influence of Seneca on Corneille. In this regard he concentrated on the latter's *Médée* and *Oedipe*. Stegmann's disregard of Euripides is a weakness shared by John C. Lapp in his article "Anouilh's *Médée*: A Debt to Seneca".<sup>47</sup> Far more perceptive is the excellent article by C. Rambaux, "Le mythe de Médée d'Euripide à Anouilh ou l'originalité psychologique de la Médée de Sénèque".<sup>48</sup> Here the dramas of Euripides, Seneca, Corneille and Anouilh are analysed and compared.

In two publications Christiane Wanke has made a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Medea dramas of Seneca and Corneille. In her doctoral thesis, *Seneca, Lucan, Corneille - Studien zum Manierismus der Römischen Kaiserzeit und der Französischen Klassik*,<sup>49</sup> she deals with the literary style of the authors as well as with their handling of the myth. In an essay on Seneca's influence on French literature in a book with the title *Der Einfluss Senecas auf das Europäische Drama*<sup>50</sup> she also touches upon the *Médée* of La Péruse<sup>51</sup> and examines in some detail the similarly titled play by Jean Anouilh.<sup>52</sup> Another chapter in the same work is by Wolf-Lüder Liebermann and

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45 In *NPh* 43 (1959) 2-16.

46 (i) André Stegmann "La Médée de Corneille" in *Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le Théâtre de la Renaissance* ed. Jean Jacquot 1964 113-126.

(ii) André Steegmann [sic] "Seneca and Corneille" in *Roman Drama* ed. T.A. Dorey and D.R. Dudley 1965 161-92.

47 "Anouilh's *Médée*: A Debt to Seneca" in *Modern Language Notes* 69 (1954) 183-7.

48 *Latomus* 31 (1972) 1010-36.

49 Freiburg i. Br. 1962.

50 Ed. E. Lefèvre 1978.

51 *Loc. cit.* 186-7.

52 *Loc. cit.* 221-6.

deals with the Latin author's influence on German literature. Here the Medea dramas of F.M. Klinger,<sup>53</sup> F. Grillparzer,<sup>54</sup> F.W. Gotter<sup>55</sup> and Mattias Braun<sup>56</sup> are briefly discussed and similarities to and divergences from the Senecan drama mentioned. Van Stockum in another article, "Grillparzer's Medea-Trilogie *Das Goldene Vließ* (1818-1820) und ihre Antiken Vorbilder",<sup>57</sup> cites as influences on Grillparzer not only Euripides and Seneca but also Corneille, Gotter, Klinger's two Medea dramas, Cherubini's opera and the *Argonautica* epics of Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius Flaccus.

Werner Kleinhardt's doctoral dissertation, *Medea-Originalität und Variation in der Darstellung einer Rache*,<sup>58</sup> compares the way in which Medea's thirst for vengeance is depicted by Euripides, Seneca, Corneille, Grillparzer, Jahnn and Anouilh. However, he leaves many other aspects of the plays unexplored. He mentions that it would be interesting to examine whether the different plays show "ein verändertes Weltbild"<sup>59</sup> but regrets that this falls outside the scope of his work.

In *Medea Myth and Dramatic Form*, J.L. Sanderson and E. Zimmerman have brought together five Medea dramas: those of Euripides, Seneca, Anouilh, Robinson Jeffers and Maxwell Anderson. The Greek, Latin and French plays are published in English translation. Part I of the book contains a summary of the Medea myth. Part II consists of the plays, each with a short biographical account of the dramatist, while Part III contains articles previously published elsewhere, such as Kitto's essay on Euripides' *Medea* and Lapp's commentary on Anouilh's play mentioned above. This volume is obviously intended as a handbook for students, for each play is followed by "study aids", i.e. questions

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53 *Loc. cit.* 434.

54 *Loc. cit.* 435.

55 *Loc. cit.* 436.

56 *Loc. cit.* 443-5.

57 *NPh* 47-8 (1963-4) 120-5.

58 Hamburg 1962.

59 *Op. cit.* 5.



prompting the reader to a closer scrutiny of the text and inviting him to compare certain aspects of the different plays and the handling of the myth.

More sophisticated and comprehensive is *Médée antique et moderne*, a recent study by Duarte Mimoso-Ruiz. He does not limit his criticism to drama but includes, like Mallinger, all manifestations of the Medea myth. However, he concentrates on the more modern versions in painting, drama (where he often refers to specific productions), and especially film. The greatest value of this study, apart from the information about a number of comparatively unknown treatments of the Medea myth it contains, is the astute commentary on the changing social and political worlds reflected in the more recent treatments of the myth.

#### THE SCOPE OF THE THESIS

In spite of the comparative scholarship which has hitherto been completed on the treatment of the Medea myth in literature and the arts, there is still room for a contribution on the handling of the Medea story in drama. Thus the aim of this thesis is to investigate how authors in different periods have presented in dramatic form the myth which they inherited from Euripides. At the same time each drama will be situated in its own context and the characteristic features of each author's style examined. Attention will also be paid to contemporary social and political influences surrounding the play.

The large number of dramatic treatments of this myth unfortunately makes it impossible to investigate all the plays, even if they were all accessible. Therefore it has been necessary to choose a number of the dramas. The selection has depended on several factors. First, some of the dramas are both of crucial importance in the line of influence and intrinsically interesting works of literature. Secondly, there are groups of dramas which are interrelated, in various ways, and they may profitably be considered together, i.e. with closer reference to each other than to the rest of the Medea plays. Thirdly, some of the dramas were written in periods which are of significance in literary history and again are intrinsically interesting. It is self-evident that with such a

wealth of dramas about Medea there are some which do not deserve critical analysis. Nevertheless, where possible, references will also be made to some of the dramas which are not considered in detail.

With all these factors in mind the following plan is to be adopted. In Section II the plays of Seneca, Corneille, Longepierre and Anouilh are to be discussed. Seneca's tragedy was, after Euripides', certainly the most influential and is of considerable interest for its own sake. The plays of Corneille, Longepierre and Anouilh are direct descendants of Seneca's with, in the case of Corneille, fresh input from Euripides' *Medea*, while Longepierre is indebted to his Greek, Latin and French predecessors. These plays are witnesses to vibrant periods in the history of French dramatic literature. In fact, Seneca, Corneille and Anouilh are three of the great names in the history of drama.

Section III will be devoted to another group of dramas. They are *Asie*, *The Wingless Victory* and *African Medea* which fall into the category of plays where the classical names have (mostly) been changed and the geographical locations altered, but the basic outline of the myth preserved. They also have in common the themes of imperialist and colonialist forces meeting primitive cultures.

In the conclusion the 1982 *Medea* by the Flemish author Johan Boonen will be considered. The play is a thought-provoking new interpretation of the myth.

In the playwright's words: "Mijn Medea is een stuk over onze beschaving- die cerebraal is, waarin de cerebraliteit beslist voor de hele mens."<sup>60</sup> The conflict between emotion and reason which is the theme of the play is one of the eternal elements of the human condition, and the way in which it is resolved in this version of the Medea myth is relevant to our time and illustrates once more the infinite adaptability of Greek myths.

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60 *Op. cit.* 6.

SECTION II

SENECA'S *MEDEA*  
AND THE FRENCH *MEDEA* DRAMAS  
OF CORNEILLE, LONGEPIERRE AND ANOUILH

Seneca's tragedy *Medea* was undoubtedly influenced by the *Medea* of Euripides. Yet, in its own right, it served as a source of inspiration to subsequent dramatists, especially the Frenchmen Corneille, Longepierre and Anouilh.<sup>1</sup> Seneca's *Medea* will therefore be discussed first in this section, followed by the three other dramas in chronological order.

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1 Also to others such as Jean Vauthier *Medea* 1967.

CHAPTER 2  
THE *MEDEA* OF LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA

BACKGROUND

The circumstances and the date of the first production of Euripides' *Medea* are known to us. It was created for the Great Dionysia Festival in Athens in the spring of 431 B.C. where it came third in the competition in spite of its subsequent great popularity and widespread influence. In contrast to these facts about the Greek drama, the first appearance of the second eldest *Medea* drama to have been preserved to modern times is shrouded in mystery. This is the *Medea* by the Roman philosopher, statesman and tragedian, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (1 B.C. - 65 A.D.). Although Seneca's biography is fairly well documented, and in spite of his having written "voluminously and in the first person",<sup>1</sup> extraordinarily little is known about Seneca the man, about his political career and his private life. One result of this is the inability of scholars to date most of Seneca's works with certainty or precision. The periods in his eventful life in which it is generally considered most likely that he wrote the tragedies are as a young man before the start of his public career, at the time of his exile in Corsica (41 - 49 A.D.) or in his last years when he had retired from public life.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no certain proof of any date for the *Medea* and, in fact, the uncertainty regarding the circumstances in which these Latin tragedies were written is so great that it is a most controversial question whether they

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1 Miriam T. Griffin *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* 1976 1.

2 For recent discussions on the dating of Senecan tragedy see R.J. Tarrant *Seneca's Thyestes* 1985 10-13 and E. Fantham *Troades* 1982 9-14 and the references cited there. J.D. Bishop *Seneca's Daggered Stylus: Political Code in the Tragedies* 1985 who dates the tragedies as having been written in Seneca's last years as resistance to, and an attack on, Nero's government, is unconvincing.

were ever produced at all or even intended for production.<sup>3</sup> This thorny issue need not be investigated in depth. For the purposes of this thesis it suffices that there exists a text of the tragedy *Medea* by Seneca which indeed resembles a conventional text for dramatic production and which could be, and has been, produced on stage without any major problems.<sup>4</sup>

In reading Seneca's plays it should be remembered that the background against which they were written was very different from that against which Greek tragedy was created. Instead of being performed before all the citizens of a closely knit city state at a religious festival where issues of cardinal importance in a democratic society could be aired, Seneca's plays probably had a limited circulation or audience. In fact the imperial court at the heart of the vast heterogeneous empire was suspicious of any overt discussion of current events or of what could be interpreted as criticism of government, as the events recorded in Tacitus' *Annales* amply testify. Seneca himself experienced and witnessed the consequences of the actions of tyrannical rulers who often seemed to act only out of concern for the preservation of their own power. Important too is that for Seneca and for the Romans the myths which carry the stories of the tragedies were not part of their own living traditions. On the other hand, Euripides' manipulation and moulding of the elements of the myth still had an almost organic connection with Greek customs and beliefs, as the linking at the end of his *Medea* (1379-81) to the prevailing custom of sacrifice

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3 Scholars may be grouped into three factions on this question: a) Those who maintain that the tragedies were composed for the theatre. b) Those who believe that they were written for recitation by the author and/or actor(s) and not to be publicly staged. c) Those who think that they were meant for private circulation and study. Group a) is represented by L. Herrmann in *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* 1924 and supported more recently amongst others by B. Walker *CPh* 64 (1969) 183-7 in her review of O. Zwierlein *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* 1966. Zwierlein *op. cit.* makes the strongest case for group b) but has been criticized by, amongst others, E. Lefèvre in his review in *Gnomon* 40 (1968) 782-9. Lefèvre believes that the dramas were written for private reading but does not regard it as impossible to stage them. W.M. Calder III in "The Size of the Chorus in Seneca's *Agamemmon*" *CPh* 70 (1975) 32-5 also refutes Zwierlein on some points in this regard. After a discussion of the various schools of thought Pantham *Troades* 34-9 comes out in support of c). Another recent overview of the different approaches is to be found in Tarrant *Thyestes* 13-15.

4 See B. Walker's review of Zwierlein's *op. cit.* in *CPh* 64 (1969) 183-7 for examples of modern performances of Seneca's *Medea*.

to Medea's children in the precinct of Hera Akraia in Corinth shows. Seneca's treatment of the myth is wholly self-conscious and literary.<sup>5</sup> In first-century Rome the Greek myths were no longer alive as in Euripides' Athens. Seneca appropriates them as part of his literary inheritance, as poetry,<sup>6</sup> as many other Roman writers did with the Greek myths.

As far as dramatic treatments of the Medea myth are concerned we do not have the earlier Latin versions of Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius and Ovid which we know existed. It is therefore impossible to say in what way and to what extent their adaptations are reflected in Seneca's drama, if at all. However, because of the high reputation Ovid's *Medea* enjoyed in antiquity, and because of the many Ovidian echoes in Senecan drama, some scholars have tended to ascribe most differences between Euripides' play and Seneca's to the influence of this lost tragedy. This approach seems misplaced and futile.<sup>7</sup> Here it is proposed to discuss Seneca's *Medea* as a drama in its own right with the full knowledge that it inevitably reflects aspects of the rich Latin poetical tradition that preceded it - Ovid, yes, but also Vergil, Horace and many others. The main aspects of Seneca's originality as well as his debt to Euripides and the Latin poets have been succinctly summarized by Stefan Walter:

"Seneca's 'Medea' ist nicht, wie es die ennianische vermutlich noch war, eine mehr oder weniger freie Uebertragung des griechischen Originals, in die sich gewollt oder ungewollt des öfteren römische Tönungen hineinstehlen, nein, sie ist nicht eine latinisierte euripideische 'Medea', sondern das neue Stück eines kaiserzeitlichen Römers über die euripideische 'Medea', ein neues und (im tieferen Sinne) originales Stück mit neuen oder verstärkten Motivationen und Zielen und demnach auch andern sprachlichen und

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- 5 For a provocative discussion of the differences between Senecan and Greek tragedy, see Charles Segal *Language and Desire in Seneca's Phaedra* 1986 3-17.
- 6 Cf. W. Barner's comparison of Seneca's and Lessing's use of myth: "Seneca wie Lessing rezipieren den heroischen Mythos in nicht-mehr mythischer Zeit, beide rezipieren ihn als 'Spiel' als 'Poesie'..." *Produktive Rezeption : Lessing und die Tragödien Senecas* 1973 95.
- 7 Cf., for instance, W.H. Friedrich "Medeas Rache" *loc. cit.* at 8-9, 18-19 and L. Mallinger *Médée : Étude de Littérature comparée* 1897 140. The prejudice inherent in such laudations of Ovid at Seneca's expense is shown up and criticized by M. Rozelaar *Seneca* 1976 558.

dramatischen Darstellungsmitteln, bedingt einerseits durch die weitgehende Verschiedenartigkeit der historisch-politischen und kulturellen Voraussetzungen, andererseits durch die spätestens in der Augusteerzeit erreichte Eigenständigkeit und Mündigkeit der lateinischen Dichtersprache."<sup>8</sup>

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The basic plot of Seneca's play is very similar to that of Euripides. It is also set in Corinth where Medea is deserted by Jason in favour of marriage with the daughter of Creon, here called Creusa, not Glauke. This betrayal leads to Medea's vengeance on those whom she believes have wronged her. The plot of Seneca's tragedy is simpler than that of Euripides. The omission of Aigeus as a *dramatis persona* contributes to the rigorous structure and prevents attention being diverted from the central theme. The absence of the Paidagogus does not have a noteworthy effect on the development of the dramatic action, but is one of the factors which contribute to giving Seneca's play a different atmosphere to that of Euripides. The chorus of Corinthians is hostile towards Medea, they call her "fugitiva" (115),<sup>9</sup> but they accept Jason as a fellow Greek and are warmly disposed to the new couple.<sup>10</sup>

From the prologue, spoken by her, Medea dominates the scene in Seneca's drama.<sup>11</sup> She is constantly in focus during the episodes, because even when she is not speaking or on stage, she is the subject of discussion, directly or

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8 S. Walter *Interpretationen zum Römischen in Senecas Tragödien* 1975 4.

9 All references are to and quotations from the *Medea* text of Seneca ed. C.D.N. Costa 1973.

10 As often in Senecan tragedy it is not clear how the chorus is constituted. They may be male or female Corinthians. Hostility to the protagonist is also a common feature in the Senecan chorus.

11 Cf. R.W. Tobin on the "monocentricity" of Senecan drama: "the peculiar structure in which everything and everyone capable of detracting interest from the main figure is ruthlessly subordinated, so that the protagonist stands alone at the center of attention" in "Tragedy and Catastrophe in Seneca's theatre" *CJ* 61 (1966) 70.

indirectly. In the prologue Medea reacts to her abandonment by Jason with bitter wrath and an avowed determination to wreak vengeance on Creon, his daughter and Jason (17 ff.). Here already it becomes clear how a later playwright may utilize the familiarity of his audience with the drama of Euripides to create dramatic irony. While Medea wants death for Creon and his daughter, she prays that Jason may live - but as an exile - and she sketches the unhappy condition vividly:

per urbes erret ignotas egens  
exul pavens invisus incerti laris,  
iam notus hospes limen alienum expetat;

20

The audience is aware that Jason's new marriage entails for Medea the further blow of banishment. She will only be told by Creon in brutal terms in the first episode. Euripides also uses the banishment of Medea to create suspense by means of dramatic irony. The Paidagogus confides the news to the Nurse in the prologue so that Euripides' audience is as aware of the second blow about to befall Medea as Seneca's audience is, although this knowledge has come in different ways.

In the prologue Medea has no clear idea about the form her vengeance should take. In addition to exile for Jason, she wishes that he may one day long for her as his wife again, and, as the crowning misfortune:

liberos similes patri  
similesque matri - parta iam, parta ultio est:  
peperi.

25

Many scholars take this striking pun as an indication that Medea already refers to the killing of the children as the form of vengeance she plans. However, as Gregor Maurach shows in his excellent article, "Jason und Medea bei Seneca",<sup>12</sup> these words should be understood in their context. Medea wishes that their children should be similar to their parents. That physical resemblance is meant,

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12 In *Senecas Tragödien* ed. E. Lefèvre 1972 292-320 at 292-3, cf. also Volker Wurnig *Gestaltung und Funktion von Gefühlsdarstellungen in den Tragödien Senecas* 1982 123-5.



as Costa thinks possible,<sup>13</sup> seems out of the question. In this context it refers rather to the characters of the parents. Medea wishes the children to be like her, therefore probably embodying all her characteristics of cruelty and passion, and, like Jason, betrayers and deserters. It must be kept in mind that she is cursing Jason and hoping that he will suffer as he is making her suffer. These words are uttered in hot anger, as the disjointed syntax indicates. However, these words have meaning also in a dimension of which Medea is not aware. The audience knows what form the eventual vengeance will take, but Medea herself does not yet know in what awful way her children will embody her revenge.<sup>14</sup> Thus, again, Seneca makes use of his audience's familiarity with Euripides' version of the myth to create dramatic irony. This adds to the ominous undertone produced by the sinister summoning of the gods in the opening words.

The prologue thus shows Medea in a state of passionate wrath. Her ideas about the form of her revenge are not yet coherent but they threaten to involve cosmic forces (32-6). She refers to her past deeds and is conscious of her power to repeat them although they are "nefas" (44) and "scelera" (50). Her superhuman powers and descent from Sol are brought to the fore, thus introducing the bonds Medea has with the supernatural.

The contrast in tone between the prologues of Euripides' and Seneca's dramas is marked. While ordinary people like the Paidagogus and the Nurse talk at an intimate, gossipy level which gives an atmosphere of realism to what in many respects is a family drama, Seneca's characters, like Medea, do not indulge in domestic conversation.

The parade is in the form of an epithalamium for the nuptials of Jason and Creusa. At the opening of Euripides' tragedy the new marriage has already been contracted (17-19), but Seneca uses the sound of the marriage hymn as a

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13 *Op. cit.* 65.

14 Similarly the lines:  
haec virgo feci; gravior exurgat dolor:  
maiora iam me scelera post partus decent (49-50)  
are filled with dramatic irony.

technique to confront Medea not only with the rumour of Jason's betrayal but with the actual evidence.<sup>15</sup>

Medea responds with menaces related to her proven prowess in evil (120-134), but as her thoughts turn to her past misdeeds ("scelera" 129) she sums up the motivating force behind these bloody deeds. It was love, not anger, that drove her:

funestum impie  
quam saepe fudi sanguinem - et nullum scelus  
irata feci: saevit infelix amor. 135

Her love for Jason is called "infelix" (unhappy), both because of the destruction it caused and because, in spite of it, she has lost him.

It gradually becomes apparent that she still loves him. She attempts to exculpate him and place all the blame on Creon, who should suffer a terrible punishment (137-49). Seneca's motif of Medea's love for Jason still persisting gives a new dramatic tension to his tragedy. Until Medea is finally convinced, in the scene with Jason (515-28), that there is no hope of a future with him, it still seems possible that the catastrophe may be averted. Only then does she begin to clarify and set into motion her plan of revenge. Medea's continuing love is a new element in Seneca's drama. In the tragedy of Euripides Medea's love for Jason has been replaced by wrath.

The Nurse tries to calm Medea. Although she is Medea's only ally and confidante, the tone of the conversation between them is highly impersonal. This heightens the impression of Medea's isolation. The Nurse tries to dissuade Medea from taking any action by pointing out that she has no resources left:

Abiere Colchi, coniugis nulla est fides  
nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi. 165

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15 The motif of Medea hearing the marriage hymn of Jason and his new bride already occurs in Ovid *Her.* XII 137-44.

However, this merely prompts Medea to proclaim herself as limitlessly resourceful:

Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides  
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina.

166

The dialogue between Medea and the Nurse thus does not advance the dramatic action but serves mainly to reveal Medea's character and determination to a greater extent.

Creon arrives surrounded by attendants (188-90) to protect himself against Medea. This public display of fear of her is intended to reinforce the validity of the grounds on which she has been banished, "liberet fines metu" (185) and "libera cives metu" (270). In addition, Acastus, son of Pelias, is threatening reprisals if the murderers of his father are not extradited (256-65). Jason will be pardoned if his case is separated from Medea's because he was not the actual perpetrator (262-5). Creon's real fear of Medea is indicated too by the fact that he actually wanted to put her to death (183-4). Whereas in the Greek play Creon fears Medea's powers of magic as a source of danger to himself and his daughter, the arguments of Seneca's Creon against Medea's continued stay in Corinth are more forceful since they are both personal and political. He believes she is endangering the safety of the state.

However, Medea also has better grounds for asking for a short delay before she goes into exile because in the Latin drama the children are to stay in Corinth (144-5, 288-90) and she pretends that she wants to use the time to take leave of her children. This Senecan innovation is thus dramatically fruitful as it forces Creon, who, driven by his fear, acts like a tyrant but yet does not want to appear one, to allow Medea the day's grace. Creon's con-

cession is thus better justified than in the Euripidean play<sup>16</sup> where Medea merely asks for the delay to prepare for her exile.<sup>17</sup>

The dramatic purpose of the scene with Creon is to secure the time needed by Medea to complete her vengeance. Yet, another important aspect of the drama is revealed in this scene, namely that Medea is the victim of broken faith, broken, not only by Jason, who abandoned her, but also by Creon who, in banishing her, fails to fulfil his duty to protect suppliants (222-5, 246-8). This generates sympathy for Medea who, in spite of the injustice she has suffered, has not lost her love for her husband (235, 246, 273), but even seems prepared to give up her thoughts of vengeance (249-51). At the end of this scene Medea is still torn between her feelings as a woman and the superhuman, witch-like figure she assumes when she finally decides there is no way other than revenge. At this point it is not clear in which way Medea is going to react. Considerable dramatic suspense is thus created.

When Medea does appear again she does not speak at first but her behaviour is described by the concerned Nurse who compares her to a maenad (383) in her frenzy. In Medea's soliloquy which follows (397 ff.) she again expresses a passionate resolve to exact vengeance. At one moment her wrath threatens to destroy the universe, but at the next she is still trying to explain Jason's conduct. It seems that the thirst for vengeance is gaining force at the end of the scene as the Nurse vainly tries to restrain her. Then Jason enters for the first time. He does not immediately notice Medea and the Nurse. Thus

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16 Cf. W.H. Friedrich *loc. cit.* 187 for a detailed discussion of this aspect in the Greek and Latin tragedy respectively.

17 Euripides' Medea is banished with the children (273) and Jason has no intention of taking them away from her. If Jason's words (446-63) are to be understood at their face value, he originally intended Medea and the children to stay on in Corinth but she made this arrangement impossible by her threatening behaviour. The idea of leaving the children in Corinth is introduced later by Medea, not by Jason or Creon. She uses it as a stratagem in her plan of vengeance (935-75). She pretends that she wants her sons to stay in Corinth in Jason's care and suggests that Jason persuade his new wife to win her father over to the idea. Medea will help in this arrangement by sending the children with gifts to their new stepmother to gain her favour and persuade her to intercede on their behalf. This appears so logical to Jason that he is completely taken in. Medea therefore uses the children as instruments of the first part of her vengeance before finally sacrificing them to complete the vengeance.

Seneca has both Medea and Jason explaining their feelings independently before he brings them together in the great scene of confrontation (447-579).

Jason's short soliloquy (431-46) does not show him as a happy bridegroom:

O dura fata semper et sortem asperam, 431  
cum saevit et cum parcit ex aequo malam!

He sets out his dilemma in simple terms. If he wanted to be faithful to his wife, as she deserved, he would have to forfeit his life. If he does not wish to die, he must break his faith to her. He has chosen the latter course not out of fear ("timor" 437), but out of fearful love for his children ("trepida pietas" 438) because he believes the death of the children would follow that of the parents. Jason therefore wants to see himself not as a perfidious husband who has betrayed his wife, but as a concerned father who has taken the steps necessary to preserve his children's lives. He hopes that Medea may be persuaded to see matters in this light too and not be more concerned about her marriage rights than about her children.

This meeting is the only one between Jason and Medea before the catastrophe. From the beginning Medea takes the initiative. She confronts Jason with an emotional tirade in which, like Euripides' Medea, she reminds him

of their shared past and all she has done for him.<sup>18</sup> By means of passionate entreaties, bitter reproaches ("ingratum caput" 465) and repeated vivid references to the past (451-8, 466-76), she tries to appeal to his sense of justice. In accordance with Jason's rationalized view of his actions which recognizes the merits of his wife ("meritis coniugis" 435) but has chosen to save his children, he offers his intercession with Creon which saved Medea's life as a kind of *quid pro quo* (490-1), but Medea, who has already been told about this by Creon retorts sarcastically:

Poenam putabam: munus, ut video, est fuga.

492

As Maurach has pointed out<sup>19</sup> the chief desire of Jason in this scene is to be rid of Medea as quickly as possible (cf. 493, 514, 530 and his rapid departure 567-9) since he has already cut himself off from her mentally. There is no positive response to her appeal to his love and loyalty. When Medea finally realizes that the Jason she loved does not exist any more and that there is no hope for any future together, she wildly calls on Jupiter to destroy the guilty

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18 It is interesting to note that Seneca's *Medea* refers to the past with all its crimes far more often than Euripides' *Medea* who once mentions her brother (167), twice Pelias (486 and 504, indirectly), and twice her father (166, 483). In the Latin tragedy, without taking into account the last two scenes where Medea kills the children, she mentions Pelias three times (133, 276, 476), her father five times (118, 130-3, 239, 277, 488) and Absyrtus six times (47-8, 131-3, 278, 452, 473, 487-8). This presence of the past is a symptom of her troubled conscience. She says repeatedly that the old crimes make everything permissible (41-2, 129, 563-4, 936) even the slaying of innocents, because Absyrtus was innocent. The only justification for the crimes was that they were committed out of love for Jason (118-20, 135-6, 142 "munus", 233-5 "mihi", 449 "pro te", 488, 560-1); indirectly these crimes served the Greeks because she saved the lives of the Argonauts (228 "munus", 235 vobis"). Yet the Greeks in the person of Creon, accuse Medea (in Euripides Creon only mentions that she is clever and skilled in wrongdoing (285)) but Seneca's Creon accuses her in his first words (179) and a further five times, sometimes generally (193, 266-8) and sometimes specifically (197, 201, 258-61). Jason does not accuse Medea but he abandons her, in both plays, in spite of all she has done for him. Medea feels herself guilty (246) but she insists that the Greeks should share the guilt since they have benefited more from the crimes than she has (226 ff.), and especially Jason (275 ff.). She recognizes that she deserves to be punished (461-2, 465), but she will not allow Jason to deny his guilt (497-9) and responsibility and allow her to bear all the guilt (500 ff.). The past loses its meaning if she is abandoned in this way.

19 Cf. *loc. cit.* 300-308 for his detailed analysis of the *Medea*-Jason scene.

one of the two of them (531-7). Jason tries to calm her with an offer of practical help (538-9), but the vehemence of his refusal of Medea's request that the children be allowed to accompany her, shows her the way in which she can make him suffer:

bene est, tenetur, vulneri patuit locus. 550

Quick-wittedly she asks to see the children for a last time:

suprema certe liceat abeuntem loqui 551  
mandata, liceat ultimum amplexum dare:

These words are filled with dramatic irony the impact of which Medea now begins to realize. Jason is easily taken in by Medea's sudden repentance and leaves with a platitude, "miserias lenit quies" (559), which shows his complete lack of understanding of the profound emotional trauma Medea is undergoing. Instead of these few lines (551-7), Euripides' *Medea* needs the whole of the fourth episode (866-975) to trick Jason. She has to pretend that she wants the children to stay in Corinth so that she may have a motive for sending the poisoned gifts to Glauke. She persuades Jason to accompany the children and thus makes him an unwitting accomplice in the destruction of his bride and father-in-law. Seneca's Jason is not involved in the handing over of the gifts.

The end of the scene between Jason and Medea leaves Medea without any illusions about Jason. Her love has found no echo and from now she is set on vengeance. She realizes that she has little room for manoeuvre because she is feared by everyone (564-5), but she consciously assumes the *Medea* role and gives crisp instructions to the Nurse about the implementation of the plan of revenge. Certain presents are to be taken by her sons to the bride, but first these gifts must be treated with magic drugs. Medea and the Nurse prepare to invoke Hecate, patroness of witches, as the scene ends.

The choral ode about the violence of the anger and hatred of a rejected wife (euphemistically called "coniunx viduata" 581) places both Medea's fury and the danger facing Jason in a new perspective.

The next episode has no parallel in the tragedy of Euripides. His third episode shows Medea's meeting with Aigeus and therefore confirms Medea in her resolve to exact vengeance because she is now sure of a place of refuge. Furthermore Aigeus' distress at his childlessness provides Medea with the idea for the second part of her revenge. In Seneca's drama Medea has already, from Jason's own words and actions, discovered that his love for his children is a vulnerable spot. The extreme passion which rules her does not allow her to reflect on the need for a place of asylum. The Aigeus episode also minimizes the witch-like aspects of Euripides' Medea. She is human and needs the help of other people. The self-sufficiency of Seneca's Medea is another aspect of her isolation and of the domination of the superhuman in her after the decisive meeting with Jason. Apart from the scene with Aigeus detracting from the unity of action, the link with Athens it provides, as is brilliantly conveyed in the third choral ode in praise of Athens, would not serve the same function in the Roman empire. The centre of Seneca's world was Rome.

Seneca's third episode is instead almost entirely occupied by the preparations of Medea's drugs. Euripides, surprisingly, if Medea's pre-history in myth is taken into account, does not stress unduly Medea's interest in and connection with magical powers.<sup>20</sup> Seneca does so in great detail. The audience is plunged into an atmosphere where the supernatural rules. Medea's control of this strange environment is evidence that the human side of her has been suppressed by the superhuman. She is shown as a witch and her power strongly emphasized.

Medea's incantation links up with her invocation of the gods in the prologue. However, ominously, this time only the gods of the underworld are summoned to the new nuptials (743). In carrying out and recounting different

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20 Cf. J.E. Lowe *Magic in Greek and Latin Literature* 1929: "Medea is, without question, the queen of witches of all ages" 67. "In Euripides the magic element is more suppressed and we have no picture of Medea engaged in any rite or incantation. She is the wronged woman, but not the wronged enchantress. In Seneca's tragedy, however, we realise the magic power of Medea from the very beginning" 79. W.H. Friedrich *loc. cit.* comments on the many elements of magic and the supernatural in the legend of Medea and Jason and then adds: "Von ihren Zaubereien wird also mit gutem Grund viel Aufhebens gemacht - nur nicht von Euripides!" 216.



ritual acts Medea slashes herself so that her own blood flows on to the altar - a macabre rehearsal for her later slaughter of the children:

assuesce, manus,  
stringere ferrum carosque pati  
posse cruores

808

This shows that although she is now preparing the first part of her vengeance, the second part is also very much on her mind. She explains that the reason why she is calling on Hecate again, as so often before, is Jason (812-16). Thereby she makes clear that her hate is now forcing her to act as her love once did.

The long scene (180 verses) ends with Medea giving certain practical directions to Hecate: that Creusa's robe ("vestes" 817) be poisoned so that it appears and feels normal but will cause her to be consumed by fire. Here Medea gives a short description (836-9) of the terrible effects the magic garment will have. There is no long, detailed messenger speech later as in Euripides.

Medea receives a signal that Hecate has heard her prayers and thereupon acts in a decisive way. She instructs the Nurse to call the children so that they may carry the gifts to the bride. The only motivation for the action Medea gives is that they may so win over their stepmother. There is no necessity to persuade Jason, who is not present, of the appropriateness of the action as in Euripides' play where the handing over of the gifts has to be convincingly motivated. As Friedrich has pointed out,<sup>21</sup> it is no problem to Seneca and his public that Medea sends presents to her rival. After Euripides' drama it was an accepted part of the story.

The chorus is not, like the chorus of Euripides, in Medea's confidence, but it senses danger. Commenting on her unrestrained bearing it asks in amazement: "quis credat exulem?" (857). It fears the worst and while it is praying for an end to the day a messenger arrives with the news that all is lost:

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21 W.H. Friedrich *loc. cit.* 197.

Periere cuncta, concidit regni status.  
nata atque genitor cinere permixto iacent.

879

The messenger does not give a detailed description of the catastrophe.<sup>22</sup> All the attention is riveted on Medea as she, after an initial reaction of joy (893-4), becomes the victim of a renewed inner conflict between her wrath as wronged wife and her maternal love. The decisive argument is "pereant patris, periere matri" (950-1). (In Euripides' drama Medea is decisively influenced by the thought of the scorn of her enemies.) In the Latin play she kills the children to punish Jason and because she has persuaded herself that they are no longer hers.<sup>23</sup> From the traumatizing moment when she disowns her children, Medea seems to become progressively deranged, and she kills the first child while experiencing a hallucinatory vision of a horde of Furies approaching her and among them the shade of her brother<sup>24</sup> whom she murdered (958-71). Seneca therefore introduces a new element, namely that Medea kills the first child as atonement for the murder of her brother and to punish herself for her past action.<sup>25</sup> This accords with the importance she attaches to her past throughout the play.

Medea seems to regain her senses after the deed, hears people approaching and ascends to the roof of the house. Jason appears, intent on capturing and punishing Medea for the gruesome murder of Creon and his daughter, but he is

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22 Long messenger speeches are not unknown in Senecan tragedy, cf. *Tro.* 168-202, *Phae.* 1000-114, but here Seneca probably "does not wish to halt the gathering momentum of the play, now moving towards the greater climax of the killing of the children which marks Medea's completed revenge" C.D.N. Costa *op. cit.* 150.

23 This idea recurs - cf. 921-2, 924-5, 934-5 and 997-8 where, after she has already killed the first child she tauntingly tells Jason to build his sons a funeral pyre and a tomb:

Congere extremum tuis  
natis, Jason, funus ac tumulum strue.

24 Hosidius Geta's Vergilian cento has the *umbra Absyrti* as a *dramatis persona*.

25 Cf. C. Rambaux "Le mythe de Médée d'Euripide à Anouilh ou l'originalité psychologique de la Médée de Sénèque" *Latomus* 31 (1972) 1010-36 at 1021-2.

taunted from above by Medea. She kills the second child as a direct and deliberate punishment of Jason:

Hac qua recusas, qua doles, ferrum exigam. 1006

Her mocking words leave no room to doubt that this killing is her retaliation for his betrayal of their marriage:

i nunc, superbe, virginum thalamos pete,  
relinque matres. 1007

She throws down the bodies of the children to Jason with a last taunt:

recipe iam natos, parens; 1024

The drama ends with Medea soaring away to an unknown destination in a dragon-drawn chariot sent by her ancestor the Sun. This parody of an apotheosis leaves Jason alone. In bitter impotence he shouts after her to testify that wherever she goes there are no gods.

The changes Seneca has made to the basic outline of the dramatic action as conceived by Euripides, including the omission of Aigeus and the Paidagogus and the changed attitude of the chorus, therefore tend to concentrate the action and to focus even more on the isolated figure of the protagonist. She is shown in high wrath in the prologue as a result of the rumour of Jason's perfidy, but, when the marriage hymn confirms this, her passionate resolve to wreak vengeance nevertheless allows a glimpse of her continuing love for Jason. It is this Senecan innovation which is responsible for the suspense about the outcome of the dramatic action until the end of her encounter with Jason. Medea's love for Jason is also the trait which represents her womanly nature. Her total self-reliance, in the face of general hostility and without a refuge, would tend to dehumanize her, especially seen in conjunction with her control of superhuman powers. Her banishment by Creon is based on political and personal grounds, while the granting of a delay follows easily from the alteration that the children are to stay in Corinth.

The encounter between Medea and Jason is pivotal. Once she has learnt that there is no hope for their future together she determines on vengeance and even perceives the form it may take. At the end of the scene she is already putting her preparations into effect. The compression of this part of the dramatic action allows Seneca to dwell at length on Medea's association with the powers of witchcraft. This forms an important part of the portrayal of her character.

The changes made by Seneca in the dénouement of the tragedy stem partly from his Medea's preoccupation with past guilt. The murder of the second child in front of Jason and the savage taunts she directs at him convey her hatred because of his betrayal of her love. Unlike Euripides' Medea she does not concede pain or grief at her monstrous deed but departs in triumph because she believes she has eradicated her association with Jason by removing all visible signs of it.

Seneca's altered conception of the Medea figure and the relationship between Medea and Jason is therefore largely responsible for the changes he has made to the structure of the drama.

#### THE PORTRAYAL OF MEDEA

Already in the prologue it is clear that Seneca's Medea is a very different figure from the one who can be heard wailing and exclaiming disjointedly behind the scenes in Euripides' prologue. Seneca's Medea does not exhibit the womanly weakness sometimes apparent in her Greek counterpart (cf. "pelle femineos metus" 42). Euripides' Medea initially wants to die, but she finds support in the sympathetic friendship of the Corinthian women and the realization that all women share a common lot. The Medea of Seneca has only her old Nurse as confidante and she provides little comfort.

The reason for this difference is to be found in the different characters the two authors wished to depict. Euripides' Medea empathizes with the ordinary Greek women. Perhaps the unfairness of the female lot in Greece is

even clearer to her because she is a foreigner. She shows her solidarity with ordinary women in the justly famous speech in the first episode, especially 230-51. Consequently she has earned the friendship and compassion of the local women. Seneca's *Medea*, on the other hand, is hated and feared by the ordinary people. She is not only a stranger but has a reputation as an evil-doer. This results in her isolation.

In spite of her self-sufficiency, *Medea* exhibits one very human trait - her love for Jason. Seneca very effectively portrays the strength of this emotion by showing how, despite her rage and grief at being abandoned by Jason, she still tries to find excuses for his conduct and tries to blame Creon. The decisive encounter with Jason gives her the opportunity of testing whether Jason still reciprocates her love in any way. However, to *Medea*'s emotional language and attempts to re-establish the old bond of intimacy between them, he offers only wounding retorts (e.g. 496, 513) or timid evasions (e.g. 518-9, 530).

In spite of Jason's discouraging attitude, *Medea* persists in trying to challenge him into undertaking one of the great adventures for which they are famous. Maurach rightly suggests<sup>26</sup> that the meaning of "sit praemium Jason" (518) is twofold. On the superficial level *Medea* wants to win the contest against Creon in order to get Jason back on her side, but on the deeper level she wants as reward the real Jason, the Argonaut and hero,<sup>27</sup> the man with whom she fell in love and for whom she committed so many crimes. Jason's reaction, "cedo defessus malis" (518), shows that he no longer has the heart for such a struggle. *Medea* realizes that the Jason she loved does not exist any more. He has grown weary of the constant struggle. His fear of Creon and Acastus (521, 525-6, 529) and his refusal to believe that *Medea* can once again

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26 *Loc. cit.* 305 ftnt 17.

27 Cf. the chorus who call *Medea* and the Golden Fleece the reward ("pretium") of the voyage of the *Argo* (360-3).

save them, show that he has severed his links with their joint past. Medea, however, wants to remain true to her mythological reputation.<sup>28</sup>

This is an aspect of Seneca's *Medea* which could not exist in Euripides' tragedy, namely the conscious assumption of the *Medea* role as it became known through the Greek tragedy.<sup>29</sup> There are numerous instances<sup>30</sup> where she plays the part to stiffen her own resolution or to impress others with her power. Initially, as a defiant response to the Nurse's attempts to dissuade her from trying to exact retribution because she is without allies, she proclaims "Medea superest" (166) and "Medea . . . fiam" (171), while when she is trying to screw up her courage to carry out the murder she tells herself "Medea nunc sum" (910). This tension between Medea and the role she wants to play to the hilt adds a new dimension to the character of the protagonist.

In keeping with the emphasis on Medea's awareness of her past,<sup>31</sup> her descent from the Sun god and her supernatural powers are stressed as early as the prologue (28-36). The emphasis on the witch-like aspect of Medea is most marked in the incantation scene. The effect of Medea's communication with and control over supernatural forces is to show that her human side may be suppressed. This anticipates the result of her inner conflict about the fate of the children where, at the decisive moment, a hallucinatory vision forces her to kill her son as atonement for the slaying of her brother. Friedrich<sup>32</sup> rightly feels that this depiction diminishes the impact of the deed as it takes part of the initiative away from Medea. It seems that she no longer controls her own actions. Euripides shows Medea, fully conscious of the enormity of the deed,

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28 In this conception of the difference between Medea and Jason at this crisis in their lives lies the germ of Anouilh's conception of the characters of his *Médée* and Jason. See the discussion of Anouilh's *Médée* below.

29 Cf. A. Block, *Medea-Dramen der Weltliteratur* 1957, on the subject of Seneca's *Medea*: "Medea meint seit Euripides die Frau, die ihrer Rache alles, selbst die eigenen Kinder opfert" 130. Helen Fyfe, "An analysis of Seneca's *Medea*" *Ramus* 12 (1983) 77-93, also mentions Medea's "mythologizing of herself", 80 and 83.

30 Cf. 171, 517, 524, 566-7, 910.

31 See ftnt 18 above.

32 *Loc. cit.* 212.

nevertheless carrying it out. In modern terms Seneca's *Medea* would perhaps be described as having diminished responsibility because she was no longer a free agent but acting under duress. In the ancient world, however, the crime would be regarded as equally heinous, whether she committed it consciously or under duress.

The reversal of her nature as mother in killing her own children is foreshadowed by another manifestation of *Medea's* power to overturn the laws of nature, namely that the fire caused by her gifts to Creusa is not extinguished, but fed, by water.

However, attributing the entire motivation of *Medea* for killing the children to the supernatural side of her would have made her a one-dimensional character. That this horrific deed is the second part of her vengeance against Jason is made clear by Seneca. Immediately after the news of the accomplishment of her design to kill Creon and his daughter, she becomes the victim of a renewed inner conflict. She realizes that only by fulfilling her plan can she prove that her love for Jason is completely destroyed. At first this plan is not expressly formulated, but gradually it becomes apparent that it concerns the children. She uses the sophistical argument that as Jason has cut himself off from her, the children are no longer hers and should pay the penalty for their father's crimes. As her maternal love struggles against this rationalization she stifles her emotion by the decisive words "pereant patris, periere matri" (950-1). In the Latin drama *Medea* wants to kill her children to punish Jason and because she has persuaded herself that they are no longer hers. The psychological stress she is suffering is captured in the delusion, sprung from her guilty conscience, that the killing of the first child is actually in atonement for the murder of her brother. Nevertheless, this act enables her to face Jason triumphantly:

Iam iam recepi sceptra germanum patrem,  
spoliumque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent;  
rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit.

982

These words must be understood as a symbolic expression of her victory over Jason. She feels that by her action she has destroyed her bond with Jason and therefore has regained all that she sacrificed when she fell in love with him

and helped him to achieve his goals: her royal status, her brother, her father, the Golden Fleece and even her virginity. She has thus liberated herself from her sexual subjection to Jason.<sup>33</sup>

Before she kills the second child there is a moment of hesitation where her wrath recedes and she feels regret and shame at her action (989), but involuntarily the human Medea loses ground to the superhuman figure, who, especially in the presence of Jason, actually rejoices in the situation. Jason is compelled to watch helplessly as she slays the second child as an explicit retaliation for his infidelity (1006-8).

The total severance of her sexual connection with Jason, expressed in "rapta virginitas redit" (984) and in the killing of the two children, is underlined by her cry that if she were carrying a foetus in her womb which would constitute a pledge (of her love for Jason) she would cut it out (1012-13). Yet, while seeking to destroy all signs of her sexual bond with Jason, Medea paradoxically has to use her role as mother to accomplish this.

Medea's words to Jason now consciously recall the words she used in their confrontation scene. There he was "ingratum caput" (466) and here still "ingrate" (1021). This is the reason he has been punished. Mockingly she asks him, "coniugem agnoscis tuam?" implying that he has underestimated her and has made no effort to find out her feelings. With "sic fugere soleo", which she uses to point out the dragon-drawn chariot, her earlier appeal to Jason, expressed in "pro te solebam fugere" (449), "innocens mecum fuge" (524) and even "redde fugienti sua" (489), is recalled. He spurned her reconciliatory offer and is now cut off from her - all he has left are the ruins of both his marriages. To make this even more explicit Medea throws down the bodies of the children to Jason with a last taunt: "recipe iam natos, parens" (1024). Medea's abandonment of Jason and the children's bodies is the outward sign both of her complete triumph and of his utter destruction. She could not take the children with her as, even dead, they are tokens of her marriage to Jason. Kleinhardt's view, that Jason is to be allowed to bury his children because he

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33 These lines recall the earlier  
tibi patria cessit, tibi pater, frater, pudor  
hac dote nupsi.



has suffered enough and is not as bad as Euripides' Jason,<sup>34</sup> is completely off the mark. All traces of Medea's life with Jason must be left behind so that she may return to her state of wholeness before she met him. She is, of course, suffering from a delusion.

Medea's anger has distorted her perceptions. Seneca does show her as *ferox invictaque*, the qualities most necessary to portray Medea, according to Horace in his *Ars Poetica* (123). She creates catastrophe and disorder in the external world. She is aware of the destruction she causes around her, but unconscious of the disorder within herself. On one level then, Seneca's Medea shows the destructive effects of the emotion of *ira*, wrath, not only on the victims of the acts inspired by wrath, but on the perpetrator of the acts of wrath.

#### THE PORTRAYAL OF JASON AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JASON AND MEDEA

There has been a tendency on the part of some critics to view Seneca's Jason sympathetically. Von Fritz,<sup>35</sup> Friedrich<sup>36</sup> and especially Lawall,<sup>37</sup> who even goes as far as comparing his dilemma with that of Aeneas' abandonment of Dido, all find him a sincere, though somewhat ineffectual figure. This view has rightly been criticized by, amongst others, Maurach,<sup>38</sup> and Helen Fyfe.<sup>39</sup> Henry and Walker<sup>40</sup> find him a vague and ill-defined figure. Many of these judge-

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34 *Op. cit.* 55.

35 *Loc. cit.* 377-80.

36 *Loc. cit.* 190-2.

37 G. Lawall "Seneca's *Medea* : The Elusive Triumph of Civilization" in *Arktouros* ed. G.W. Bowerstock *et al.* 1979 419-26 at 423-4.

38 *Loc. cit.* at 300-7.

39 *Loc. cit.* 83 and 92.

40 D. Henry and B. Walker "Loss of Identity: *Medea Superest?*" *CPh* 62 (1967) 169-81 at 169-70.

ments have perhaps been influenced unduly by conscious, or unconscious but implicit, comparison with Euripides' Jason. Rambaux seems to be closer to the truth when she speaks about Seneca portraying a couple and showing both Medea and Jason influenced by their marriage, while Euripides shows the effects of Jason's actions on Medea, but little reciprocal change in Jason who is therefore more of a catalyst.<sup>41</sup> While this criticism of Euripides' Jason is perhaps oversimplified it does hold good for Seneca's Jason. A short study of the role of Jason in Seneca's *Medea* and also of the Medea-Jason relationship in the play will make this clear.

It has already been said that Seneca's chorus is hostile to Medea. The corollary that it should therefore be well-disposed towards Jason need not necessarily follow, but it does. The enthusiasm which it feels for his new marriage (102-6) and the congratulations offered him on being rid of Medea show that it accepts him as a fellow human being and is in contrast to its loathing and distrust of Medea. It does not condemn his infidelity as Euripides' chorus does, but, throughout the play, prays for his safety and wellbeing (cf. also 595-9 and 668-9).

However, in spite of the chorus' positive image of Jason as a hero (82-9), it portrays him as a timid and reluctant husband to Medea:

effrenae solitus pectora coniugis  
invita trepidus prendere dextera ... 103

This impression of Jason not always living up to the image of a hero is heightened by Medea when her love for him struggles to excuse his behaviour:

Quid tamen Iason potuit, alieni arbitri  
iurisque factus? 137

Her first reaction is:

debut ferro obvium  
offere pectus 138

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41 *Loc. cit.* 1025-7.

and significantly that is the role he has chosen not to play. As he explains later (434-6), he was quite conscious that he should die to show his loyalty according to Medea's deserts, but he chose life in Corinth, with Creon as his father-in-law and his children to love rather than heroic death. This choice is of fundamental importance in understanding the character of Jason because it signifies that he no longer subscribes to heroic gestures. He wants a peaceful and secure life. Medea at this stage still finds it possible to excuse Jason and place all the blame on Creon because her human side, her love for Jason, still hopes for a reconciliation (140-6). Medea's spark of hope that Jason may still reconsider has the effect of lessening the audience's prejudice against him. This is reinforced by Creon's announcement that he would have had her executed if it had not been for Jason's entreaties. Creon claims that by choosing Jason as his son-in-law he has proved that he is neither a violent tyrant nor a haughty ruler because Jason is an exile "et afflictum et gravi/terrore pavidum" (255-6). Again the impression is that Jason is not much of a hero. His fearfulness seems to approach the dimensions of cowardice and it does seem plausible that Creon has been the moving force behind the new marriage. Medea's appeal to Creon to give Jason back to her (272-3) reinforces the impression that Jason cannot act of his own volition; first Medea controlled him (233-6), now Creon.

Important for an analysis of Jason's character are the two monologues, first of Medea, then of Jason, before their scene of confrontation. Medea again tries to understand Jason's conduct: "Timuit Creontem ac bella Thessalici ducis?" (415). Again her reaction is significant: "amor timere neminem verus potest" (416). Medea cannot conceive of a love which is not as strong as hers. At the same time she does have an understanding of Jason's real character, as "timuit" (415) and the bitter oxymoron, "extimuit ferox" (419), suggest. The irony evident here, the hero, "ferox", not having the courage to speak to his wife, anticipates Jason's uncomfortable attitude throughout their confrontation scene and reinforces the impression already given of Jason as a coward.

Jason's own entrance shortly afterwards allows him to reveal his position. Von Fritz has pointed out that this short monologue is critical in the interpretation of Jason's character because he reveals his own thoughts and feelings without regard to others, in other words, without trying to convince or bluff

anyone else, "so daß ein Interpretationenproblem wie dasjenige bei Euripides nicht entstehen kann".<sup>42</sup> In this scene Jason justifies his decision to abandon Medea and to enter into the new marriage as the only way in which he could preserve his children's lives. It was not fear (of death) that overcame his loyalty to Medea but "trepida pietas".<sup>43</sup> Yet it is hard to agree with Von Fritz that Jason is not being hypocritical here "nicht einmal in dem Sinne, daß Jason sich selbst zu belügen versucht".<sup>44</sup> It is noteworthy that Jason nowhere makes mention of any love he has or has had for Medea. He hardly ever uses her name but refers to her in some oblique way, here "coniugis" (435) (although he is now married to Creusa there is no doubt that this refers to Medea) and "ipsam" (441) and further just by pronouns implicit in the verb endings. This reluctance to use Medea's name, which is maintained throughout the play (with one exception (496) where, although Jason is addressing her, he uses the third person: "Medea amores obicit?"), conveys Jason's aversion to Medea and the psychological distance he wants to maintain from her. Ironically he uses the same adjective *ferox* (442) of her as she used of him (419) but, whereas she negated its value by "extimuit", he reinforces its meaning: "ferox est corde nec patiens iugi". This contrast shows up the basic difference in the characters of Seneca's Medea and Jason. She is still prepared to live the heroic life up to the hilt, but he has grown timid and weary. The gulf between them is also illustrated by Jason's belief that Medea will be more concerned for the children's welfare than for her marriage rights. He does, however, accurately interpret her emotions when he catches sight of her:

atque ecce, viso memet exiluit, furit,  
fert odia prae se: totus in vultu est dolor.

445

In the light of Jason's subsequent conduct it is hard to accept that he is not purposely deluding himself in this monologue. It is fear which keeps him from acting, but he does not want to admit, even to himself, that he is a coward, so he shelters behind a façade of *pietas*.

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42 *Loc. cit.* 378.

43 Acastus' threat to attack the murderers of his father does make it more credible that Jason does have the children's interests at heart. This sentiment strains credulity in the drama of Euripides.

44 *Loc. cit.* 378.

The confrontation scene between Jason and Medea has been discussed above, but deserves mention here again. Jason's conduct in this encounter provides the turning point in the drama. Although he has a vague sense of obligation to Medea (435), he considers that he has discharged this obligation by interceding with Creon on her behalf. The overriding desire of Jason is that Medea should leave Corinth and leave him in peace (494-5, 506-7, and 530). His barely polite responses are, however, sometimes charged with hostility and insult, e.g. as she jealously taunts him with wanting her gone because he prefers Creusa, he replies "Medea amores obicit?" (496). It is grossly lacking in sensitivity on Jason's part to reproach Medea implicitly with having rashly fallen in love since this love caused her to sacrifice so much to him. He refuses to admit that he shares the responsibility for the crimes she committed for his sake (497-503). He further shows an utter lack of regard for Medea's feelings by picturing Creusa as a source of strength and succour to Medea's children (509). Jason's refusal to give up the children to Medea, in response to her request that they accompany her, is typical of his selfishness. The self-righteous parade he makes of his *pietas* in his refusal (544-9) therefore not surprisingly gives Medea a target for her revenge. He unquestioningly accepts Medea's sudden reversal of mood (551-7) and agrees to her seeing the children for a last time because it fits in well with what he has been trying to accomplish, viz. that Medea should leave as quietly as possible.

Jason's attitude in this scene makes it clear to Medea that their past together, which has such a predominant place in her life, has been deliberately discounted by him. He plans a future with no reminders of his life with her, except the children, whom he heartlessly claims as his own so that she will have no one with whom to share her exile. This Jason may not be as cynical as Euripides' hero, who expects Medea to be pleased by the way he has arranged matters and callously ascribes her love to the influence of Aphrodite, but, despite recognizing her merits in words, in his actions he too is monstrously cold and selfish. He has grown cowardly and tired of the adventurous life with Medea. He now wishes to shelter under Creon's protection and start a new life. Yet he refuses to acknowledge this openly and dresses up his decision in the guise of *pietas*, pretending that he chose this alternative only to save his children. That he does really love his children makes this choice

morally more justifiable but it does not mean that Jason is not hypocritical even towards himself.<sup>45</sup> Rambaux's comment, "Il ne sait pas garder la bonne conscience dans la trahison comme le Jason d'Euripide", is very apt.<sup>46</sup>

Jason is roused to action by the death of Creon and Creusa and comes with an armed band to capture Medea. Faltering, after having killed the first child, she regains strength from the fact that Jason is present and can therefore experience the punishment at first hand, in other words can watch her killing their second child. Jason is provoked to emotive action by this atrocity and, ironically, now appeals to their communal past (1002-5) in a bid to save his son. Medea prolongs his agony so that he begs her to kill him. Thus Jason is now pleading for the death (1005, 1014-18) he earlier tried to avoid (431 ff.). Medea therefore at the end has Jason completely at her mercy. He is left crushed and helpless as she soars away victoriously.

Jason who had forced Medea into inhuman isolation has now lost everything. In his despair he blasphemously shouts after Medea to testify that there are no gods where she goes. The irony of these words, however, is that the play has shown that only Medea's gods have reacted to her prayers. The chorus' prayers for Jason and Creusa have not been fulfilled. Jason, despite his experiences, is suffering from a delusion.<sup>47</sup>

#### CREON AND THE MINOR CHARACTERS

In Seneca's *Medea* it is Creon who has arranged the marriage between Jason and Creusa. Because Seneca's Jason is a passive character it is fitting that he

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45 Cf. G. Maurach *loc. cit.* 305-7.

46 *Loc. cit.* 1026.

47 J. Dingel *Seneca und die Dichtung* 1974 108 ff. interprets Jason's final words as right because the gods in the drama who support Medea are not real gods. H. Fyfe *loc. cit.* 91 interprets Jason's words as evidence that he never learns, because, according to her interpretation, the gods in the drama represent the natural order in the world and Medea's role is as "nature's instrument of punishment for civilization's breach of the *foedera mundi* in the Argonautic voyage" (93).

should fall in with Creon's wishes rather than take the initiative. Creon's situation is different to that in Euripides' play in that the presence of Medea and Jason in Corinth has provoked the threat of an attack by Acastus, son of Pelias. Creon thus decides that Medea must be eliminated ("abolere" 183) because he is confident that Jason is not guilty of the murder of Pelias (262-5). In spite of Creon's evident fear of Medea (179-86, 290, 294-5) he has allowed Jason to persuade him to spare her life and has changed her sentence to exile.

The meeting between Creon and Medea shows that Creon does not regard Medea as a fellow human being. He refers to her as "pessimam luem" (183) and calls her "monstrumque saevum horribile" (191). This attitude epitomizes the mistrust of the Corinthians and emphasizes Medea's isolation from other people; here also symbolized physically by a cordon of guards separating Creon from Medea (188).

Medea charges Creon with injustice for having sentenced her to exile without hearing her side of the case. (It has been remarked that this scene has many similarities to a court case.<sup>48</sup> This is also reflected in the choice of words and expressions: "crimen", "culpa", "causa", "innocens", "iudicas", "cognosce", "parte inaudita altera", "auditus supplicium tulit" and many more.) Creon dismisses this accusation and insists on his right as king to be obeyed: "Aequum atque iniquum regis imperium feras" (195). A statement such as this which reveals a tyrannical ruler expecting blind obedience is hard to reconcile with Lawall's judgement: "Creon is prompted by honourable motives: he has acted as a responsible statesman, with genuine concern for humanity and goodness."<sup>49</sup> Creon has no convincing reason for making a distinction between the guilt of Medea and the guilt of Jason for the murder of Pelias, as Medea points out (272-80). Creon and Jason will not acknowledge Jason's complicity because they do not agree with Medea's definition of criminal and moral responsibility. Creon unscrupulously ignores Medea's rights as Jason's wife, just as Jason does himself. It seems the true reason he wants Jason as his son-in-law is to ensure a continuation of his line, as his reaction to Medea's plea that

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48 Cf. Jo-Ann Shelton "Seneca's *Medea* as Mannerist Literature" *Poetica* 11 (1979) 38-82 at 60; and for an analysis of the Creon-Medea scene in terms of Roman legal practice, see S. Walter *op. cit.* 57-9.

49 *Loc. cit.* 421.

he should not be prejudiced against the children shows: "hos paterno ut genitor excipiam sinu" (284).

Despite Creon's continued mistrust of Medea, he grants her the day's delay to take leave of her children (290-5). Seneca's Creon thus appears as a blustering man who, in spite of his proclaimed fear of Medea, underestimates her. First he withdraws the death sentence and then allows her a day's grace. He, like Jason, has no understanding of how great Medea's chagrin is as a result of their disregard of her rights. Equally he, like Jason, does not have an adequate conception of Medea's power. He is not a total tyrant but wants the reputation of a strong ruler.

The Nurse in Seneca's play has a larger role than in the Greek tragedy but, in Jo-Ann Shelton's words, "she functions not really as a character in her own right but as a dramatic device to help reveal Medea's thought processes".<sup>50</sup> She is the only character who is sympathetically disposed to Medea, but, because of her role in raising doubts or expressing fears that Medea herself may have had, but which are put into the mouth of the Nurse, only to be dismissed by Medea, she does not represent a figure of true human comfort for the isolated protagonist, e.g.

N: Spes nulla rebus monstrat afflictis viam. 162

M: Qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil.

Medea does not confide any feeling of despair or hopelessness to her Nurse but she is a foil in whose presence Medea's strength and determination are shown (164-76).

The Nurse also serves to intensify the expectation of disaster by her descriptions of Medea's conduct and her linking the signs of her behaviour to the past (382-96), especially:

non facile secum versat aut medium scelus; 393  
se vincet: irae novimus veteris notas.

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50 *Loc. cit.* 58.



This is true also of the great scene where Medea's magic preparations are described by the Nurse (670-739), e.g.:

vidi furem saepe et aggressam deos, 673  
caelum trahentem: maius his, maius parat  
Medea monstrum.

The Nurse serves as Medea's assistant in the actual carrying out of the revenge on Creon and Creusa (568-78, 843-4).

The changed role of the Nurse in Seneca's play is a result of Seneca's conception of Medea. His protagonist is so self-reliant that she does not need the comfort of a motherly figure.

As is clear from the above, the other characters do not detract from the overriding importance of Medea. The roles of Jason, Creon and the Nurse all contribute to making Medea the focus of attention.

## THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS

There are important differences between the functions of the chorus in the Attic tragedy and in the tragedies of Seneca.<sup>51</sup> In Attic tragedy, as for instance in Euripides' *Medea*, the chorus constitutes a dramatic personality whose words and interactions with other characters influence the development of the plot (cf. Euripides' *Medea* 173-83). At other times it comments on the words and actions of the characters. At 1275 Euripides' chorus almost takes action to try to save Medea's children. Generally, like the Corinthian women, the chorus is sympathetic to the problems of the protagonist. Because of its roles as character and commentator it is an integral part of the play.

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51 For a full discussion of the Senecan chorus, see H.V. Canter *Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca* 1925 31-55.

In formal structure Seneca's chorus seems to resemble the Attic chorus. Its odes in lyric metres separate the episodes. Yet often, as in his *Medea*, it is not clear how the chorus is constituted. It is not always apparent when the chorus should be present, as its entrances are seldom noted by other characters and it often does not seem to be aware of the import of the dramatic action. Consequently it cannot, like Euripides' chorus, interpret the words or actions of the characters. Seneca's chorus, with the exception of the parode where the marriage-hymn constitutes an element of the action of the play, stands removed from the action of the plot and therefore the odes seem to interrupt the smooth development of the play. Yet it cannot be said that the choral odes bear no relation to the play. Their function is to contribute to the development of certain themes. The chorus also represents the viewpoint of ordinary people who are not personally involved in Medea's struggle for justice and self-realization. They fear a disturbance of their orderly existence and their pronouncements indirectly criticize Medea's attitude and action.

The second ode (307-79) of the chorus, after the meeting between Medea and Creon and Medea's ostensible submission to the will of Creon, deals with the well-known theme of the voyage of the *Argo* which brought an end to the golden age. Euripides' *Medea* opens with the Nurse lamenting the voyage as a cause of evil (1-15). Her sympathy with Medea's plight makes her view the contact made possible by the *Argo* as disastrous. Seneca's chorus, however, cites the voyage of the *Argo* as a source of disorder because after all the dangers and hardships its only reward, apart from the Golden Fleece, was Medea, whom they regard as more dangerous than the sea (360-3). In the previous dialogue with Creon, Medea claimed that she deserved the gratitude of the Greeks for bringing the Argonauts safely back. The choral ode thus opens up another perspective on Medea's interpretation of the voyage of the *Argo* and reinforces Creon's position in the debate. He saw Medea as a threat. The chorus shares his fear. (That the chorus is prejudiced is, of course, true. It does not acknowledge that Medea was indispensable in the *Argo's* safe return.) That the fear is justified is underlined in the scene following the choral ode by Medea's words: "sternam et evertam omnia" (414); "invadam deos/et cuncta quatiam" (424-5) and "mecum omnia abeant" (428). However, in the last part of the ode (364 ff.) Seneca's chorus sees the results of the voyage in a more positive light. Although many initial hardships had to be undergone in joining

separated lands, progress has been made (319-20, 364-74) and a prospect of the continuing taming of nature by man has been opened (374-9). This optimistic conclusion of the ode which suggests man's ever-growing mastery of the sea is however contradicted by the third ode which follows the pivotal encounter between Medea and Jason. This ode appropriately commences with the theme of the fury of a rejected wife. The theme then progresses to the rage of the sea against those who have tried to tame it and significantly recounts how the Argonauts, whom Medea claimed to have saved (225-38), lost their lives, all except Jason. The chorus therefore demonstrates of what little worth Medea's claim to gratitude is and, even while it is praying that Jason be spared, predicts unwittingly that an awful punishment lies in store for him (668-9). Their theme is "exigit poenas mare provocatum" (616). Medea has likened herself to the elemental force of nature:

Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides  
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina.

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Thus it is clear that in the context the chorus' prayer for the safety of Jason applies not only to the wrath of the sea but also to the wrath of Medea. Lawall<sup>52</sup> suggests that by including Pelias (664-8) on the list of those punished by the anger of Neptune, Seneca is showing that Medea has already served as an agent of Neptune and will do so again in punishing Jason.

The second and third odes therefore complement each other. Both deal with the theme of disorder provoked by the voyage of the *Argo* and both provide a counterpoint to Medea's claims. She is seen as a force who may throw the world into turmoil.

In the last choral ode (849-78) there is direct commentary on the action of the play. Medea's wild behaviour is evidence that she has not accepted her role as exile and the chorus is afraid. It prays that the day may end before a disaster occurs. This prayer is in direct contrast to the wish expressed in the marriage hymn (71-4) that the evening may come quickly so that the newly married couple may know happiness. The atmosphere of the drama has changed

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52 *Loc. cit.* 425.

so much that the chorus, which does not know what Medea is planning, senses danger. Its prayer is, ironically, the prelude to the catastrophe.

Seneca's chorus thus does not advance the development of the plot (although it does elicit a brief description of the deaths of Creon and Creusa in a short dialogue with the messenger (881-7)). It contributes to the development of certain themes in the tragedy and conveys the atmosphere in Corinth. By expressing the fears and hopes of ordinary people it places the action of the play in a different perspective.

#### THE *MEDEA* AS A REFLECTION OF SENECA'S WORLD VIEW

Seneca is known not only as the author of the only extant Latin tragedies but also as a Stoic philosopher. In such works as *Quaestiones Naturales*, *De Ira* and *De Clementia* he expounds Stoic doctrine in the spheres of physics and ethics. His *Epistulae ad Lucilium* form a systematic programme of instruction in the Stoic philosophy. Almost inevitably scholars have sought to link the two branches of literary activity and to prove that the tragedies, too, were intended by Seneca to carry a Stoic message,<sup>53</sup> although his prose works do not give the slightest hint that he was also a tragic poet. An absolutist Stoic interpretation of the dramas has been criticized and the prevailing opinion is that, although there are elements of Stoicism reflected in the tragedies, it is impossible to accept them as documents aimed principally at converting the audience or

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53 The most extreme supporter of this view is B. Marti in "Seneca's Tragedies. A new interpretation" *TAPhA* 76 (1945) 216-45. She argues that Seneca intended the dramas to be read in the order presented in Ms. E. The series therefore begins with *Hercules Furens* and ends with *Hercules Oetaeus* - the apotheosis of the "patron saint" of Stoicism. According to Marti the *Medea* and the *Phaedra* provide exemplars for a treatise of the passions. Another prolific proponent of this school of thought is Norman T. Pratt jr. in i.a. "The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama" *TAPhA* 79 (1948) 1-11; "Major Systems of Figurative Language in Senecan Melodrama" *TAPhA* 94 (1963) 199-234; and, most recently, *Seneca's Drama* 1983.

readers to Seneca's view of the benefits of Stoicism.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, some recent critics advance a radically different view, namely that Seneca did not intend the tragedies to reflect a Stoic world view at all but had poetic and aesthetic considerations in mind.<sup>55</sup>

Seneca's *Medea* does not obviously appear to be a Stoic drama. Indeed it is generally accepted that this play, if interpreted from a Stoic viewpoint, must be seen as a counter-example of the way a Stoic philosopher should pursue. *Medea's* wrath and its portrayal by the Nurse (382-96) have often been likened by scholars to Seneca's description of the pathology of extreme anger in his treatise *De Ira*. According to the Stoic doctrine, *Medea*, by allowing her wrath to take complete possession of her and pursuing the impulses it provokes to the end, acts in direct opposition to the principles of Stoicism. The victory which she exultantly celebrates at the end of the drama is a Pyrrhic one.

The most sophisticated analysis of Seneca's *Medea* as a Stoic drama is undoubtedly the essay of Gregor Maurach.<sup>56</sup> He points out that in terms of Stoic doctrine *Medea's* triumph is really a total defeat because what she has struggled to achieve, to be "*Medea*", is a denial of human nature. In this way she becomes an unnatural mother. Maurach does, however, make clear that *Medea's* character is not simple and that her guilt is attributable to various causes. She has a wild character and is under continual pressure because of her past. She does not regret her past crimes and so her inner struggle is not aimed at changing herself. At the decisive moment, when the shade of her brother demands retribution, she has no inner strength to resist the unnatural urge. Her guilt is therefore human weakness. All people are open to the

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54 For a comprehensive recent account of the different approaches of scholars to this question see E. Lefèvre "Die philosophische Bedeutung der Seneca-Tragödie am Beispiel des 'Thyestes'" ANRW ii 32 (1985) 1263-6.

55 See K. Heldmann *Untersuchungen zu den Tragödien Senecas* 1974; W.-L. Liebermann *Studien zu Senecas Tragödien* 1974 and especially J. Dingel *op. cit.* 1974; also recently A.E. Douglas' review of Fantham's *Troades* CR 35 (1985) 33-4. R.J. Tarrant *Thyestes* 1985 advocates the middle way: "He [Seneca] was exploiting the emotional directness of dramatic poetry to make his audiences feel the appalling consequences of passion, that the shock and revulsion aroused by his most effective scenes were meant to be the stimulus to moral awareness and growth" 24-5.

56 *Loc. cit.*, especially 309-19.

passions and therefore share the guilt of human weakness. Against the criticism that Medea is not to be seen as a human but as a demonical being, Maurach cites Medea's love for Jason as the factor which makes her credible as a human being. In her the good qualities such as loyalty and love struggle with what Seneca calls "antiqua Erinys" (953) - her inclination to evil which needs treachery, magic and murder.

From the Stoic perspective Jason's suffering is not to be seen as an undeserved stroke of fate. Although the curse on the Argonauts does play a role, Jason himself assumed responsibility when he approved Medea's earlier deeds. Now he has become weak, has no insight into the nature of events and people and follows the line of least resistance. He has lost himself.

Maurach's sensitive and penetrating analysis shows that it is possible to make a good case for a Stoic interpretation of Seneca's *Medea*. He does, however, leave unanswered questions as to why Medea should sometimes utter thoughts which are more appropriate to a Stoic *sapiens*, e.g. "Qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil" (163) and "Fortuna opes auferre, non animum potest" (176). These epigrams are in response to the Nurse's attempts to point out to Medea how hopeless her situation is and express Medea's determination not to give in to despair.

Another aspect of Seneca's world view which deserves mention is that of the Roman who lived in an empire governed by autocratic rulers. Seneca himself, as the pages of Tacitus' *Annales* reveal,<sup>57</sup> experienced at first hand exile, and later betrayal and death in the ruling family. Nevertheless, it would be speculation to try to see these experiences mirrored in the tragedies, especially as the dating is so uncertain. The best and most thorough study of specifically Roman elements in Seneca's tragedies is the work of Stefan Walter, *Interpretationen zum Römischen in Senecas Tragödien*,<sup>58</sup> in which he examines the tragedies both from the point of view of the changed "local colour" in the Roman dramas (for instance the omission by Seneca of the links with Athens and Medea's institution of a sacrificial ritual for her children in Corinth) and

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57 Tac. *Ann* XII - XV *passim*.

58 *Op. cit.*

from the perspective of more abstract elements like Roman religious, legal, political and everyday customs as well as Roman thought. This aspect of Seneca's *Medea* cannot be investigated in depth here but a short extract from the second choral ode shows that these verses bear a distinct Roman world view, not least in the reference to "ultima Thule":

terminus omnis motus et urbes 369  
muros terra posuere nova;  
nil qua fuerat sede reliquit  
pervius orbis: Indus gelidum  
potat Araxen, Albin Persae

Rhenumque bibunt - venient annis 375  
saecula seris, quibus Oceanus  
vincula rerum laxet et ingens  
pateat tellus Tethysque novos  
detegat orbis nec sit terris  
ultima Thule.

It is tempting to agree with Costa that Seneca is here speaking *in propria persona* and that these lines reflect a first-century Roman's view of the continuing expansion of the empire.

### SENECA'S LITERARY STYLE

Seneca's writings date from the period known as Silver Latin. They display the marked features of this style which in prose is in contrast to the balanced periodic sentences of Cicero and Livy, and in poetry to the restrained harmony of Vergil and Horace. Senecan tragedy has often been denounced as "rhetorical", implying that it suffers from being too heavily influenced by the training in the schools intended to equip young Romans to take part in the public life of the law courts and the senate. Instead of applying the results of this study to obtain an effect of seemingly artless simplicity, Seneca, especially in his dramas, seems to revel in displaying all the tricks of the schools.

To anyone studying Seneca's *Medea*, it becomes evident that the literary style of the tragedy is an integral part of the means the poet employs to create his version of the horrific revenge of Medea. From the outset Medea's great tirade which forms the prologue, sets the tone for the drama. Her hatred and frenzy are apparent in the repeated apostrophe of the gods and primeval forces (1-18, 32-4), her self-apostrophe (40-3, 51-2, 54), repeated rhetorical questions (26-31), asyndeton ("egens exul pavens invisus incerti laris" (20-1) and "effera ignota horrida tremenda" (45-6)), hyperbole, "manibus excutiam faces caeloque lucem" (27-8) and anaphora ("nunc, nunc adeste . . . adeste" (13-16) and "quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus" (55)). Stylistic features such as these abound in the set speeches which are a mark of the *Medea* as of Senecan tragedy in general. Although such lengthy monologues make for static drama, the psychological features of the characters are strongly delineated.

Relief from the risk of monotony inherent in such long speeches is provided by stichomythia, the rapid exchange of remarks between characters in lines or half-lines, which often abound in *sententiae*, epigrams expressing universal truths. In the following exchanges between Medea and the Nurse, a scornful turn is given to a well-known proverb, "fortes fortuna iuvat". This clever rhetorical touch points up Medea's defiance:

M: Fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit.  
N: Tunc est probanda, si locum virtus habet.  
M: Numquam potest non esse virtuti locus.  
N: Spes nulla rebus monstrat afflictis viam.  
M: Qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil. 159-63

This kind of conversation, which tends towards epigrammatic utterance, is highly depersonalizing and shows that even from her Nurse, Medea does not receive human comfort.

In the scene between Medea and Jason, for instance, the stichomythia is a good vehicle for the cut and thrust of their argument, especially where half-lines occur, e.g.:

J: Medea amores obicit?  
M: Et caedem et dolos. 496



or

J: Alta extimesco scepra.  
M: Ne cupias vide. 529

Medea's quick retorts here show how she consistently turns Jason's words against him. This is highlighted by the grammatical interdependence of their words.

Another stylistic device used with good effect is antithesis. For instance, when Medea is torn between mother-love and her thirst for vengeance,

occidant, non sunt mei;  
pereant, mei sunt 934-5

her conflict is well captured by the antithesis. Similarly in

ira pietatem fugat  
iramque pietas - cede pietati, dolor 943-4

the antithesis of the words represents her battling emotions. This figure is reinforced by the apostrophe of the personified passion *dolor* and the polyp-ton "pietatem . . . pietas . . . pietati".

Contrast in tone also serves to convey Medea's strongly fluctuating emotions. As she struggles with her desire to create chaos in order to express her raging hatred at the wrongs inflicted on her, she makes use of a string of adynata,

quae ferarum immanitas,  
quae Scylla, quae Charybdis Ausonium mare  
Siculumque sorbens quaeve anhelantem premens  
Titana tantis Aetna fervebit minis?  
non rapidus amnis, non procellosum mare  
Pontusve coro saevus aut vis ignium  
adiuta flatu possit inhibere impetum  
irasque nostras:

which ends in the climax,

sternam et evertam omnia . 407-14

Yet, in the next line, she is advancing a rational argument which could explain Jason's behaviour:

Timuit Creontem ac bella Thessalici ducis? 415

only to refute it immediately by means of a *sententia*:

amor timere neminem verus potest. 416

Then she gradually gives way to her anger again, until her monologue ends in a second hyperbolic climax:

invadam deos  
et cuncta quatiam. 424-5

Mention should also be made of the themes of *Medea's ira* and *furor* at Jason's heartless betrayal. These cause her *dolor*. These three emotions<sup>59</sup> run like a leitmotif through the tragedy and culminate in her sacrificing her second child to her *dolor*, thus assuaging her anger and grief and ensuring her triumph over Jason. The climax of these emotions coincides with the murder of her second son before the eyes of Jason. She apostrophizes her *dolor*:

Perfruere lento scelere, ne propera, dolor, 1016

Once the deed has been done, she says she had no more that she could offer her grief:

plura non habui, dolor, quae tibi litarem. 1019-20

As Lefèvre has pointed out,<sup>60</sup> *Medea* seems to be sacrificing the children to a

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59 Cf. 51-2, 139, 155, 203, 406, 414, 553, 556, 902, 907, 914, 916, 927, 930, 943-4, 951, 953, 989 and the Nurse's identification of these emotions in *Medea* in 381, 386, 392 and 394.

60 E. Lefèvre "A cult without god or the unfreedom of freedom in Senecan Tragedies" *CJ* 77 (1981) 35.

higher power. If the children are the offering, the god is *dolor* "which dwells in the hearts of men". This shows that Medea has perverted the sacral and worships a human passion.

An aspect of Seneca's drama which frequently meets with unfavourable criticism is his predilection for scenes of violence or scenes which disgust. Parts of his *Thyestes* and his *Phaedra* could certainly be described as nauseating.<sup>61</sup> In the *Medea* Seneca does, contrary to Horace's injunction, "ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet",<sup>62</sup> show Medea killing her children on stage. Yet, while H.D.F. Kitto has rightly pointed out that Euripides' *Medea* contains many revolting aspects, not least the detailed description of the horrible deaths of Glauke and Creon,<sup>63</sup> others, notably Henry and Walker,<sup>64</sup> have remarked upon the desire of Seneca to "distance and minimize the effect" of the killing. Seneca draws attention to the mental disintegration of Medea; not to the physical destruction of the children. Similarly, the deaths of Creon and Creusa are described briefly and in far less horrific detail than by Euripides.

Together with scholarly interest in Senecan tragedy as drama in its own right, there has developed, especially in the last fifty years, and increasingly during the last decade, an awareness that Seneca's style should also be judged on its own merits.<sup>65</sup> This realization has brought about a fundamental re-assessment of what Seneca tried to achieve. It has been shown that he was consciously and intentionally innovative in his style. Nowadays the accepted view is that his style is "mannerist" or "baroque", rather than merely the negatively intended "rhetorical". Jo-Ann Shelton's words are helpful in understanding this style: "Mannerist artists sought to achieve novelty through

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61 The best discussion of this aspect of Senecan tragedy is by M. Fuhrmann "Die Funktion Grausiger und Ekelhafter Motive in der Lateinischen Dichtung" in *Die Nicht Mehr Schönen Künste* ed. H.R. Jauss 1968 45-50.

62 *Ars Poetica* 185.

63 *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* 3 ed. 1966 190-202.

64 *Loc. cit.* 171.

65 See especially: E. Lefèvre "Seneca als moderner Dichter" in *Senecas Tragödien* ed. E. Lefèvre 1972 1-9; C. Wanke *op. cit.* 1962; J.-A. Shelton *loc. cit.*; E. Fantham *op. cit.* 1982 19-34 and especially 92-102 on Senecan syntax and diction, and C. Segal *op. cit.* 1986.

exaggeration, overabundance of detail and startling distortion of Classical unity and proportion."<sup>66</sup>

Seneca's style in the tragedies should be judged in terms of his background and as an honest attempt to give new meaning to myths which had been used as material by many artists before him.

### CONCLUSION

While preserving the core elements of Euripides' drama, Seneca's *Medea* thus provides a different interpretation of the suffering and vengeance of Medea caused by her rejection by Jason. She is tormented not only by his ingratitude for the crimes she committed on his behalf in the past, but by her love for Jason which still seeks to win him back. Jason's abandonment of Medea deprives her of any human friend or ally to turn to for help and comfort. She is under sentence of banishment but even in Corinth she is hated and feared.

The full realization that Jason cannot be won back to their adventurous life of the past snaps the last thread joining Medea to the acceptance of a normal law-abiding human existence and she once again becomes the Medea of legend - the superhuman figure who does not hesitate to commit atrocities for the sake of her driving passion. This passion, which was *amor* in the past, has now become *ira*, but she also suffers from *dolor*. Her *ira* drives her to new deeds of horror in order to assuage her *dolor*. So dominant is the superhuman side of her nature that her feelings as a mother are suppressed and rationalized: the children are no longer hers but Jason's and Creusa's. By killing them she will be punishing Jason for his present misdeed and also for her past crimes committed for his sake and she will prove that she still retains her old powers. So potent is the field of delusion she builds up around the killing of the children that she even claims that by destroying this evidence of the physical bond between herself and Jason she is cancelling her whole life with him - she regains her fatherland and her virginity. Her triumphant departure

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66 *Loc. cit.* 41.

at the end of the drama rounds off the portrayal of this Medea as a super-human being, as a witch, who leaves human society for an unknown destination. As the distinguished Senecan scholar Pierre Grimal has written, it is not easy to draw a moral from a Senecan tragedy:

La leçon morale à tirer de chaque aventure n'est jamais simple ni claire. Il serait parfois naïf d'en chercher une. Quelle est, par exemple, la "morale" de *Médée*? Que la vie bourgeoise, et un mariage entouré de toutes les cérémonies ordinaires l'emporte de beaucoup sur une union romantique conclue au mépris de l'autorité paternelle? Conclusion dérisoire à la plus atroce de toutes les tragédies."<sup>67</sup>

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67 "Les Tragédies de Sénèque" in *Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le Théâtre de la Renaissance* ed. J. Jacquot 1964 1-10 at 5.

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CHAPTER 3  
THE *MÉDÉE* OF PIERRE CORNEILLE  
"Médée, toute méchante qu'elle est"

FROM SENECA TO CORNEILLE

In the centuries separating Seneca and the classical French dramatist, Pierre Corneille, a number of dramas based on the Medea myth were written.<sup>1</sup> One of the most curious as a literary phenomenon is the *Medea* of Hosidius Geta.<sup>2</sup> The 461 lines of this work consist entirely of a pastiche of Vergilian verses. It is thus interesting rather for its quaintness than for its literary merit or significance. The sixteenth-century French *Medea* tragedy by La Péruse is still modelled on that of Seneca.<sup>3</sup> The seventeenth century, however, saw the birth of classical French tragedy. Significantly, one of the documents which best illustrates the transition from the Greek and Latin tradition to the distinctly French form, is Corneille's innovative treatment of ancient models in his first tragedy, *Médée*.<sup>4</sup>

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1 See the Appendix below.

2 *Medea Cento Vergilianus* ed. Rosa Lamacchia 1981.

3 Cf. A. de Leyssac *Pierre Corneille Médée Tragédie* 1978 26: "Que l'on prenne entre autres exemples la *Médée* de la Péruse parue en 1553: le moyen d'approche ne varie guère de celui de Sénèque . . ." and C. Wanke in *loc. cit. Der Einfluß Senecas* 196. She writes about 16th-century French dramatists: "Aber keinem dieser Autoren gelingt es, Seneca so aufzunehmen und zu transformieren, daß etwas Neues, Eigenständiges daraus wird. Diese Leistung sollte erst Corneille vorbehalten bleiben." Voltaire judges Corneille's *Médée*: "[C]ette pièce est un chef-d'oeuvre en comparaison de presque tous les ouvrages dramatiques qui la précèdent." *The Complete Works of Voltaire v. LIV Commentaires sur Corneille II* 1975 12.

4 So Th. C. van Stockum remarks in "Die Erstlingstragödien Corneilles und Racines und ihre antiken Vorbilder" *NPh* 43 (1959) 2-16 that the importance of Corneille's *Médée* in the study of the development of Corneille's dramatic style is in inverse proportion to its literary merit. Similarly A. Stegmann concludes: "Pour l'histoire de la pensée de Corneille, *Médée* est une date plus importante que *Le Cid*" in his chapter "La *Médée* de Corneille" in *Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le Théâtre de la Renaissance* ed. J. Jacquot 1964 126.

## BACKGROUND

Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) was born at Rouen. He belonged to a bourgeois family and was educated in his native town at a Jesuit college. Although he trained as a lawyer, his passion for poetry and the theatre determined the direction his life would take. In 1629 he obtained his first success as a dramatist with the comedy *Mélite* produced in Paris. Corneille continued to please audiences with a number of new comedies and even provoked the interest of Cardinal Richelieu who approached him in 1633 to become one of a group of five authors chosen to write plays based on the cardinal's ideas. This association did not appeal to Corneille and did not last long.

As a change from his comedies which all have complicated plots where obstacles separating lovers are eventually overcome, thus ensuring a happy ending, Corneille tried his hand at a tragi-comedy, *Clitandre*, in 1631. This play too had a measure of success. Thus Corneille's name was not totally unknown when he presented his first tragedy, *Médée*, in 1635. In a study of different dramatic treatments of the Medea myth this drama is of particular interest, especially as the author himself explains his method of composition in the *Examen* on the *Médée*. In this short commentary on the drama Corneille discusses this early tragedy with some degree of detachment as the *Examen* was written twenty-five years after the play. Corneille clearly states that he used both Euripides and Seneca as sources of inspiration.

Corneille's *Médée* has been studied by a number of scholars. There has been a strong tendency to overemphasize Seneca's influence on Corneille at the risk of ignoring Euripides' role.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there are scholars who have tried to point out the respective spheres of influence of the Greek and the

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5 Cf., for example, R. Brasillach *Corneille* 1961 92; A. Stegmann *loc. cit.* and *L'Héroïsme Cornélien* v. II 1968 130; C. Wanke *loc. cit.* and *Seneca Lucan Corneille Studien zum Manierismus der Römischen Kaiserzeit und der Französischen Klassik* 1962 *passim*.

Latin dramatists in the creation of a play which bears the unmistakable stamp of Corneille, albeit not yet at the height of his creative power.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from Corneille's *Examen* that the general principle of "vraisemblance" - what most probably could have happened - and the rules of the three unities underlie his conception of the requirements of tragedy. Balanced against these formal rules is Corneille's desire to interest and amuse his audience. As he says in the letter of dedication to his patron: "[Le but] de la poésie dramatique est de plaire, et les règles qu'elle nous prescrit ne sont que des adresses pour en faciliter les moyens au poète, et non pas des raisons qui puissent persuader aux spectateurs qu'une chose soit agréable quand elle leur déplaît."<sup>7</sup>

Corneille chose the part of the Medea legend dramatized by Euripides and Seneca as a vehicle to divert the public of his time. He made important changes to the basic structure of the myth in order to make it more acceptable to his contemporaries.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Corneille retains the principal characters Médée, Jason and Créon, as well as Médée's nurse and confidante, here called Nérine. The Aegaeus-role has been taken over from Euripides, but Égée has an expanded part as suitor of Créuse

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6 See, for example, W. Kleinhardt *Medea Originalität und Variation in der Darstellung einer Rache* 1962. At 57 he rightly remarks that according to the number of lines copied Corneille followed Seneca, but that the Attic influence is evident from the "Gesamtkonzeption"; and especially the thorough introduction to and commentary on Corneille's *Médée* by André de Leyssac *op. cit.* Kurt von Fritz *loc. cit.* 384 seems to ignore Seneca's influence on Corneille: "Corneille selbst sagt, daß er die Tragödie des Euripides zu seinem Ausgangspunkt genommen habe . . ." Only at 396 does he briefly acknowledge that Seneca also partly served as an example to Corneille.

7 "Épître de Corneille A Monsieur P.T.N.G." in Pierre Corneille *Théâtre II* ed. J. Maurens 1980 135. All references to and quotations from the dedicatory epistle, the *Examen*, and *Médée* are from this volume unless otherwise indicated.



who plays an active role in the drama. She too has a confidante, Cléone, while Jason's erstwhile fellow-Argonaut, Pollux, serves as his confidant. There is no chorus.

The increase in the number of speaking parts and the absence of choral odes separating the acts gave Corneille the possibility of introducing a number of scenes which do not belong to the main plot. These scenes were intended by Corneille to give more credibility to the action. Although the elaboration of the plot offers much fuel for criticism, it is interesting to learn why Corneille deviated from his ancient models. He explained these deviations carefully in his theoretical writings and thus provides a fascinating insight into the mind of the dramatist at work. Corneille had to take particular care that the background of the legend was clear. This the ancient dramatists did not have to do as the material was well known to their audiences.

The *Médée* of Corneille starts with a scene between Jason and Pollux. The introduction of Pollux has no precedent in the ancient tragedies. Corneille uses him in the prologue as a device to provide the necessary background information.<sup>8</sup> Pollux has been absent in Asia and has no knowledge of recent events in Greece. He (and the audience) may therefore be given all the information necessary to understand the situation at the opening of the play.<sup>9</sup> All the elements of the plot are mentioned: the information that Jason is to remarry, the rejection of Médée, details about the flight from Thessaly as a result of the death of Pélie (Pelias), and the fact that Jason has been preferred above Égée, king of Athens, as the prospective husband of Créuse. Jason is passionately in love with Créuse. In spite of his infatuation with Créuse he remembers his children's interests and in the next scene asks Créuse to intercede with her father so that they do not accompany their mother into exile.

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8 Cf. *Examen* 138: "Pollux est de ces personnages prototypiques qui ne sont introduits que pour écouter la narration du sujet."

9 De Leyssac *op. cit.* 26 notes that Corneille's innovation of starting the play with a conversation between the hero and the confidant, and giving most of the essential background information in this way, was repeated in his later dramatic work and had a decisive influence on his great rival Racine whose tragedies from *Andromaque* to *Phèdre* all commence in this way.

When Médée calls the gods of marriage to witness how shamelessly Jason has broken his vows, the audience is therefore fully aware of the further blows awaiting her. This tirade is based on Seneca's prologue and Medea's second monologue in the Latin play.<sup>10</sup> Here, and in the next scene with her confidante, Médée gives more details of her past with Jason and also indicates her desire for revenge. The confrontation with Créon is postponed to the second act in accordance with Corneille's theory that the first act should contain only the exposition of the dramatic action.<sup>11</sup>

The second act opens with a scene between Médée and Nérine. Médée reiterates her resolution to exact vengeance. Yet she believes that Jason still loves her and is being manipulated by Créon. Consequently the king and his daughter must die. Then Créon and Médée face each other. This scene contains many echoes from the similar scene in Seneca's play but the emphasis is different. Créon himself grants Médée a day's grace to prepare for her exile (503-4), according to Corneille<sup>12</sup> ". . . comme pour diminuer quelque chose de l'injuste violence qu'il lui fait, dont il semble avoir honte en lui-même".

The confrontation is followed by a number of scenes introduced by Corneille to make the action more plausible. Créon, Créuse and Jason regard the problem of Médée as solved but Égée still has to be told that Créuse prefers Jason to him (513-20). Créuse reveals to Jason that in return for her intercession on behalf of the children she wants Médée's splendid robe. To Corneille, this change implies that the gift cannot be suspect, since Créuse passionately desires it and obliges Jason to procure it for her. The motivation may be sound in theory but in practice it shows Créuse exhibiting the kind of caprice more suitable to a character in a comedy. In the next scene Créuse announces to Égée that she has chosen to marry Jason and remain as ruler of Corinth rather than to marry him and become queen of Athens. Égée is

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10 The following scenes are all modelled on episodes in the Senecan *Medea*: I 4, II 2, III 3, IV 1, V 2 and V 6.

11 *Discours des Trois Unités* 57-69 in *P. Corneille Théâtre Complet* v. I ed. G. Couton 1971 62.

12 *Examen* 138.

outraged at being spurned in favour of a younger rival who has neither position nor wealth. The act ends with Égée uttering threats of retribution.

A short monologue by Nérine announces the third act. Her pity for Créuse and enumeration of Médée's magic powers bring the attention back to the main plot and point up the royal family's complete underestimation of the threat posed by Médée. Jason tries to obtain the robe through Nérine but Médée enters and there follows a scene between Jason and Médée. This scene is modelled on the great confrontation in Seneca's tragedy. However, Créuse's desire for her dress shows Médée the way to exact the first part of her vengeance, while Jason's love for his children indicates the means by which her vengeance may be completed.

Act IV shows Médée in her "grotte magique" preparing poisons so that the robe Créuse so brazenly requests will cause her death. This scene, which is considerably shorter than the portrayal of Medea's magic preparations in Seneca, is interrupted by Nérine who brings sensational news. Égée has attempted to abduct Créuse, but she has been rescued by Jason and the king of Athens is now in prison. Médée is relieved that Créuse has been saved and so will not evade the punishment she plans. She instructs Nérine to let the children carry the poisoned garment to Créuse. Médée further sees the opportunity of putting Égée under an obligation to her by freeing him from prison. The action of both plots therefore develops simultaneously.

The following scene takes place between Créon and Pollux. The king is grateful for Pollux's assistance in rescuing Créuse but is reluctant to heed his warning about the danger originating from Médée's vengeful hatred. In the end he agrees to let a condemned criminal try on the dress to ensure it contains no hidden snare. The audience already know that it is part of Médée's spell that the magic will take effect only on Créuse and her father. Créon's false sense of security creates suspense.

There is an abrupt shift to Égée in prison. The aged king, overcome by emotion, a dejected and rejected lover, unsuccessful adventurer and beaten foe, resorts to lyric metres to express his feelings. Technically these lyrics are known as "stances" (stanzas) and were often used by Corneille at a moment of

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suspense or to emphasize the turning point in a play. Here *Égée's* lamentation about his fate is interrupted by *Médée*. She frees him by opening the bars of the prison with a touch of her magic wand. The grateful *Égée* offers *Médée* refuge in Athens and his help in punishing *Créon*, *Créuse* and *Jason*. Confident that she will be able to exact vengeance on her own, *Médée* accepts only the offer of refuge. She further assists *Égée* by giving him a ring which makes him invisible and by substituting in his cell "un fantôme pareil et de taille et de face" (1285) so that he will not be missed and may depart safely.

The fourth act ends with the first demonstration of *Médée's* command of magic; the opening of the fifth act underlines this power. By a touch of her wand she immobilizes the messenger *Theudas* who is on his way to bring *Jason* the dreadful news of the effects of *Médée's* robe on *Créuse* and *Créon*. *Theudas* is forced to recount his tale of horror before *Médée* releases him. She hesitates between carrying out the second part of her plan of vengeance and giving in to her maternal feelings. *Médée's* oscillation between sentiment and thirst for retribution strikes a somewhat unconvincing note. This inner conflict which is portrayed in such a powerful and moving way by *Euripides* and *Seneca* is here superficial, so that it is not such a shock when *Médée* expresses her determination to make *Jason* lose the children as she is losing them. The impact of this decision is further weakened by *Créon* bursting on to the scene tormented by invisible flames. He is followed by *Créuse*. Together they suffer volubly until *Créon* takes his own life. *Jason* arrives from saying farewell to *Pollux* to find *Créuse* racked by invisible torments. They have a scene together before she expires. She has asked *Jason* to avenge her death and that of her father.

*Corneille* deliberately planned this series of scenes where there are two characters with speaking parts on the stage at a time: "Un auteur est bien embarrassé quand il en a trois, et qu'ils ont tous trois une assez forte passion dans l'âme pour leur donner une juste impatience de la pousser au dehors."<sup>13</sup> *Corneille* therefore lets *Créon* die before *Jason's* arrival and *Créuse* die before *Médée's* appearance on the balcony. Thus he ensures a farewell scene between *Créon* and *Créuse*, a farewell scene between *Créuse* and *Jason* and a last

confrontation between Jason and Médée. These scenes, except the final one between Jason and Médée, do not occur in the ancient plays. Corneille's long drawn-out scene, "Ce spectacle de mourants", as he himself calls it, is again a weakness in the structure of his play as he acknowledges: "[I]l n'a pas l'effet que demande la tragédie, et ces deux mourants importent plus par leurs cris, et par leurs gémissements, qu'ils ne font pitié par leur malheur."<sup>14</sup> He adds that he was compelled to include these scenes so that his fifth act would have the required length. (In *Le Discours des Trois Unités*<sup>15</sup> Corneille lays down that the fifth act should be the longest and contain the most action.)

The final scene between Médée and Jason contains a new aspect. Jason in his grief at Créuse's death is deliberating whether to kill the children to punish Médée for her horrible vengeance. He sees them as the instruments of her revenge and consequently ungrateful for Créuse's efforts on their behalf. While he is voicing his inner conflict, Médée appears on the balcony and mocks him for his cowardly indecision. She cruelly exhibits the blood-stained dagger with which she has just killed their children and extinguished the fire of their love in the blood of their children: ("Ce poignard que tu vois vient de chasser leurs âmes, Et noyer dans leur sang les restes de nos flammes" (1541-2)). That Jason also considers killing the children does detract from the full horror of Médée's deed and contains an element of sensationalism. Nevertheless, it is dramatically effective to confront Jason, steeling himself for the crime with the accomplished deed.

In his baffled pain and rage Jason wants to destroy Médée as she cruelly jeers at him, but she is borne away in a dragon-drawn chariot. The play ends with Jason's suicide which is Corneille's own solution. This inglorious end is suitable for the shabby adventurer Jason has become. It is also in accordance with the Aristotelian notion of a completed action to which Corneille subscribes in his *Discours du poème dramatique*.<sup>16</sup>

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14 *Examen* 140.

15 *Loc. cit.* 61.

16 *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique* 13-32 in *P. Corneille Théâtre Complet* v. I ed. G. Couton 1971 30.

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The result of Corneille's introduction of a number of minor characters and the expansion of the role of Égée therefore lead to a play with a much more complicated plot than that of the ancient tragedies. Inevitably the intrigues and machinations bring to mind the convoluted plots of Corneille's comedies. Christiane Wanke goes as far as distinguishing three layers of action: the main plot (*Haupthandlung*), the plot of the lovers' intrigues (*Komödienhandlung*) and the plot dominated by magic (*Zauberhandlung*).<sup>17</sup> She rightly observes that the comic action in the end becomes a tragi-comedy and that this action is only loosely connected to the main tragic action by means of the magic action. Ironically it is clear from Corneille's theoretical writings that it was at least partly as a result of his striving for "vraisemblance" that he changed the motivation of the characters and even introduced new characters and events. Perhaps owing to lack of experience, the young poet's end product seems to be in many aspects less convincing than its predecessors.

Corneille's search for "vraisemblance" leads him into conflict with the rules of the three unities. The unity of action is violated in the attempt to motivate convincingly the events taken over from his Greek and Latin models. The occurrence of so many events in one place in a single day - the arrival of Pollux, the banishment of Médée, the arrival of Égée, his attempt to abduct Créuse, his imprisonment, Médée's release of Égée, the spell on the robe, the destruction of Créon and Créuse, the murder of the children, Médée's flight and Jason's suicide - detracts from the "vraisemblance". The scenes where Médée prepares her drugs and where Égée is in prison disturb the unity of place. The change of location was however the lesser of two evils to Corneille, for, as he explains in his *Examen*,<sup>18</sup> not to have changed them would have harmed the "vraisemblance".

Despite Corneille's meticulous plans, the structure of his first tragedy comes perilously close to that of a tragi-comedy or melodrama.

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17 *Seneca Lucan Corneille op. cit.* 19.

18 *Loc. cit.* 137 and 139.

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### THE PORTRAYAL OF MÉDÉE

Corneille's *Médée* exhibits no strongly unifying traits. Just as the action is split into sub-plots, so there seems to be a number of different *Médée* figures which are not integrated into one identifiable protagonist.

The first aspect of *Médée*, which underlies the tragi-comic love story of Jason and Créuse, is that of the abandoned wife. *Médée*'s appearance in the drama is delayed. The callous way in which Jason repudiates her in favour of his new love provokes the sympathy of the audience for *Médée*. This sympathy is strengthened by the presentation of Créuse as a self-centred, coquettish princess. *Médée*'s passionate cry for revenge as the wronged wife and loyal helpmeet therefore stands in stark contrast to the frivolous lovers. Moreover, through her own words, the image of a self-conscious heroine emerges. Her determination to avenge the wrong she is enduring is clearly illustrated by the following lines adapted by Corneille from Seneca's version:

L'âme doit se roidir plus elle est menacée,  
Et contre la fortune aller tête baissée,  
La choquer hardiment, et sans craindre la mort  
Se présenter de front à son plus rude effort.  
Cette lâche ennemie a peur des grands courages,  
Et sur ceux qu'elle abat redouble ses outrages. 309-14

In the confrontation with Créon she displays a similar unflinching defiance and conviction of the justness of her case. She maintains that Créon and Jason are guilty of treating her dishonestly in order to serve their own interests. *Médée* does not initiate the separation from her children, nor does she simulate gratitude for the day's delay Créon spontaneously grants her:

Cr. : De grâce ma bonté te donne un jour entier.  
M. : Quelle grâce! 504-5

*Médée*'s unswerving insistence on her rights places Créon, and by implication Jason and Créuse, in a false position. De Leyssac<sup>19</sup> even maintains that *Médée*, in her resistance to the arbitrary justice of Créon and the treacherous infidelity

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19 *Op. cit.* 38-9.

of Jason, already represents the prototype of Corneille's hero - the defender of the "devoir" - because she is concerned not only with defending herself but also her rights and the rightness of her cause. Without going as far as de Leysac, it may at least be said that *Médée* is shown as clearly not prepared to compromise her principles.

The same conviction of the fundamental justness of her cause supports *Médée* in the pivotal scene with Jason. She scornfully rejects Jason's claim to recognition that he has saved her life by his intercession with the king. An added factor comes into play in this scene - *Médée*'s secret belief that Jason must still love her as she loves him (361, 368, 911). Her attempt to elicit some indication that Jason still cares for her, only succeeds in making it apparent that Jason is eager to be rid of *Médée* and passionately in love with Créuse. With the exception of Jason's sentiments, the dialogue follows the same path as that of Seneca's protagonists. Once *Médée* is convinced that she has indeed lost Jason forever, she does not scruple to use hypocrisy as an instrument of her vengeance. She pretends to accept Jason's argument that he is acting in the best interests of their children and so dupes him.

After the decisive encounter with Jason yet another aspect of the *Médée* figure comes into prominence - her control of witchcraft. Ironically one of the ways in which Créon, Jason and Créuse try to dismiss the potential threat of *Médée* to their plans is by discounting her power. In spite of their knowledge of her past exploits through the use of witchcraft they are thus unprepared for the violence of her vengeance. Seneca highlighted *Médée*'s communication with supernatural powers. With Corneille the effects of *Médée*'s control of occult powers are of crucial importance in the development of the action. She ensures that the poisoned robe attacks only Créon and Créuse, thus confounding precautions. *Médée*'s magic wand - an attribute which does not figure in the ancient dramas and is undoubtedly more suitable to a fairy tale witch than to a tragic heroine - frees *Égée* from prison and ensures her a place of refuge. *Médée* gives *Égée* a ring which makes him invisible and conjures a replica of the aged king into existence. Inevitably this emphasis on *Médée*'s power as a sorceress detracts from her credibility as a woman. It prompts the question as to why she should still need *Égée*'s help in providing her with asylum. Corneille anticipates this question and tries to bring *Médée*'s human side into



relief again by having her express weariness and reluctance to continue using her powers of magic:

Si je vous ai servi, tout ce que j'en souhaite,  
C'est de trouver chez vous une sûre retraite,  
Où de mes ennemis menaces ni présents  
Ne puissent plus troubler le repos de mes ans. 1260  
Non pas que je les craigne; eux et toute la terre  
A leur confusion me livreraient la guerre;  
Mais je hais ce désordre, et n'aime pas à voir  
Qu'il me faille pour vivre user de mon savoir.

The overwhelming impression of *Médée* as a witch in the last part of the drama also detracts from the impact of her conflict about the fate of the children.<sup>20</sup> The unconvincing portrayal of true feeling for the children is aggravated by the way in which the children are generally treated more as bargaining counters than as humans. *Médée*'s hesitation about the fate of the children is expressed in the form of rationalization: If *Créuse* and *Jason* already had children these could pay for their parents' wrongs, but now her children will pay as they are no longer hers but *Jason's*. She is separating him from them as she has already been separated from them. *Jason's* similar rationalized argument to motivate his design to kill the children detracts from the maternal side of *Médée* and strengthens the impression that she is an unnatural parent. At 1533 *Jason* calls the children "petits ingrats". *Médée* takes up this appellation in the next scene and the result is that the pathos of the situation is lost. A different order of sympathy arises - for the children whose parents disregard them as living human beings but see them chiefly as possible weapons in the struggle waged in their disintegrating world.

Like *Seneca's* heroine, *Médée* feels herself strengthened by the deed and, once more the self-conscious witch-princess, she taunts *Jason* with his own words (894) as she triumphantly departs in the chariot, the crowning achievement of her magic:

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20 Cf., for example, L. Séchan: "La légende de *Médée*" REG 40 (1928) "rien de plus froid . . . que ses rapides hésitations maternelles" 306.

Adieu, parjure: apprends à connaître ta femme,  
Souviens-toi de sa fuite, et songe une autre fois,  
Lequel est plus à craindre ou d'elle ou de deux rois. 1578-80

Although *Médée*'s composite character fails to make her a convincing tragic heroine, there is a degree of sympathy for her, not least because the other leading characters are uniformly base. Corneille does allow a tantalizing glimpse of a possible heightening of the tragic effect of the *Médée* character when she says:

Misérable! je puis adoucir des taureaux;  
La flamme m'obéit, et je commande aux eaux;  
L'enfer tremble, et les cieux, sitôt que je les nomme,  
Et je ne puis toucher les volontés d'un homme! 907-10

The tension between *Médée*'s ability to alter the physical environment and her powerlessness to win back Jason's love is however not exploited. Stegmann rightly remarks that Corneille, hampered by *Médée*'s mythical character, has not succeeded in creating a flesh and blood *Médée*: "*Médée* avait surtout le tort d'appartenir au mythe."<sup>21</sup>

#### JASON AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *MÉDÉE* AND JASON

"Abgesehen von Corneille stellt keiner der späteren Dichter Jason so bloß wie Euripides",<sup>22</sup> wrote Friedrich. It could even be said that with Corneille, Jason has become even more repellent in his callousness and egotism than he was in Euripides' tragedy. Indisputably Jason's role has expanded considerably in Corneille's drama in comparison with the ancient dramas. According to Stegmann<sup>23</sup> one of the reasons for the larger role was extraneous to the play itself. The part was designed for the celebrated tragic actor, Mondory, and consequently extended to one worthy of the talents of the great man.

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21 *Loc. cit.* 125.

22 *Loc. cit.* 209.

23 *Loc. cit.* 121.

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Stegmann adds that the development of the role was also motivated by psychological necessity, "pour expliquer l'évolution intérieure de Médée vers la solution tragique". Jason's enlarged role is one of the changes which make Corneille's play so different from those of his predecessors.

Jason is on stage when the *Médée* opens and the play ends with his suicide. In the intervening five acts the cocksure gallant changes to a failed hero who does not even have the resolution required to attempt to carry out his fiancée's last wish. Instead he chooses to take his own life as there is no way in which life may become enjoyable, or even acceptable, to him any more. Jason's suicide is the result of the sub-plot of his love affair with Créuse rather than of the main action and the loss of his children. The reason why he ends his life is grief at the loss of Créuse and with her the loss of his future happiness and prosperity. Following Seneca, Corneille's Jason too professes to be inseparably attached to his children:

M'enlever mes enfants, c'est m'arracher le coeur;  
Et Jupiter tout prêt à m'écraser du foudre,  
Mon trépas à la main, ne pourrait m'y résoudre.  
C'est pour eux que je change; et la Parque, sans eux,  
Seule de notre hymen pourrait rompre les noeuds. 924-8<sup>24</sup>

Yet the development of the action to the point where he considers killing them shows that his love for the new princess is the stronger.

Jason is a character likely to provoke the disapproval and even dislike of the audience. He has a clearly defined personality which is already evident at the beginning of the play. The character of the seducer of princesses (Hypsipyle, Médée, Créuse), who prides himself on always being able to reconcile his affairs of the heart with his own best interests speaks clearly from lines like the following:

Aussi je ne suis pas de ces amants vulgaires;  
J'accommode ma flamme au bien de mes affaires... 30

This attitude undercuts the traditional picture of the heroic Argonaut. Instead of courage, he possesses the ability of always finding the right woman to fall in love with him:

Nous voulant à Lemnos rafraîchir dans la ville,  
Qu'eussions-nous fait, Pollux, sans l'amour d'Hypsipyle 35  
Et depuis à Colchos, que fit votre Jason,  
Que cajoler Médée et gagner la toison?  
Alors, sans mon amour, qu'eût fait votre vaillance?  
Eût-elle du dragon trompé la vigilance?  
Ce peuple que la terre enfantait tout armé,  
Qui de vous l'eût défait, si Jason n'eût aimé? 40  
Maintenant qu'un exil m'interdit ma patrie,  
Créuse est le sujet de mon idolâtrie;  
Et j'ai trouvé l'adresse, en lui faisant la cour,  
De relever mon sort sur les ailes d'Amour.

Jason's satisfaction with his reputation and situation as a successful suitor leaves room for the realization that his conduct is immoral, but he rationalizes his decision to leave Médée as the only way of preserving his own life and safeguarding the future of his children. In this way he creates a façade of reconciling "l'utile" with "l'honnête". Nevertheless, even his friend Pollux does not approve of his chosen course of action.

The superficiality of the love affair between Jason and Créuse is pointed up by the reward Créuse exacts for her intercession on behalf of his children - Médée's dress. Jason's quest for the dress may be seen as a parody of his earlier quest for the Golden Fleece. This parallel makes clear the difference between Jason's present love and his relationship with Médée. Whereas Médée's love brought her to sacrifice even her family loyalty to ensure Jason's safety, he has now become the instrument of Créuse's fancy.

Throughout the play Jason tries to suppress the thought of the full implications a scorned Médée's wrath could have. He seems to refuse even to allow himself to dwell upon her probable plans of vengeance. He is so bent on enjoying his present good fortune that he dismisses Pollux's warning about the power of Médée (150-1) and tries to avoid coming face to face with her (594-605, 769-70). This cowardly manoeuvring to try to obtain Médée's dress through the agency of Nérine shows Jason at his most hypocritical where he

pictures the supposed distress of the three characters most anxious to get rid of Médée:

Tu peux connaître aussi quelle douleur me presse.  
Je me sens déchirer le coeur à son départ:  
Créuse en ses malheurs prend même quelque part,  
Ses pleurs en ont coulé; Créon même soupire, 730-33

Jason's dialogue with Médée initially also pursues this vein of hypocrisy (821-32) until her implacable refusal to accept his version of his rejection of her as "un malheureux divorce" (825) causes him to reveal his true feelings: impatience to be rid of Médée, no recognition of her past sacrifices on his behalf and eagerness to continue his life with Créuse and his children. Significantly the dialogue ends with Jason being the dupe<sup>25</sup> of Médée's simulated agreement to his arrangements.

Jason's blindness to the depth of Médée's feelings for him and his unwillingness to recognize the potential threat posed by a desire for vengeance on her part therefore unleash the double catastrophe. Ironically, his reaction to the terrible deaths of Créon and Créuse shows that his love for the Corinthian princess is genuine:

Ma reine, si l'hymen n'a pu joindre nos corps,  
Nous joindrons nos esprits, nous joindrons nos deux morts;  
Et l'on verra Caron passer chez Rhadamante,  
Dans une même barque, et l'amant et l'amante. 1471-4

Unfortunately the earlier image of an opportunistic Jason remains so strong that one involuntarily wonders if part of his regret is not for the loss of a materially comfortable future!

Créuse's death forces Jason to admit that Médée's power is more than human. He refers to her as "sorcière" no fewer than four times in the last 120 lines of the play (1509, 1535, 1602, 1626). He does not acknowledge that it was his betrayal which made Médée's womanly nature yield to her powers of

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25 Cléone's report to Créon about the state of mind of Créuse shows clearly that Jason has totally accepted Médée's acquiescence and has also persuaded Créuse that there is nothing to be feared from Médée (1113-6).

witchcraft. At the end of the drama Jason has not learnt from the calamity he has provoked. Torn between his promise to avenge the death of Créuse and his feeling of impotence he rationalizes his own death as a punishment for not punishing Médée:

Tourne avec plus d'effet sur toi-même ton bras,  
Et punis-toi, Jason, de ne la punir pas.

1619-20

Jason's part in the drama is larger than in the ancient plays and his words and actions make Médée's fierce desire for vengeance even more understandable. His suicide underlines the false premise on which he has built his life - the use of love as a tool to promote his own interests.

#### CRÉON AND THE MINOR CHARACTERS

Créon is portrayed as a doting father who is even prepared to forego a possible alliance with the king of Athens in order to let his daughter marry the man of her choice. He treats Médée brutally. The hollowness of his fierce rhetoric against Médée is nevertheless revealed when he suddenly grants her a day's grace. Créon knows that he cannot justify his violation of the sacred promise of asylum he made with the full knowledge of Médée's past. Créon's suffering as a result of his disregard of Médée's rights may therefore be viewed as justified, although the nature of the punishment evokes horror rather than the effect of justice having been done. It is noteworthy that in his death scene Créon assumes part of the responsibility for his own and Créuse's suffering and confesses that he has been too indulgent a father (1389-92).

While the role of Créon is within the bounds of that of the ancient plays, there are other characters whose parts Corneille has developed significantly. Créuse for the first time has an active role in the drama. Inevitably comparisons are drawn between Jason's old and new loves. Créuse does not emerge with credit. Her presence is indubitably central to what Van Stockum terms

"die intensive Erotisierung des ganzen Dramas".<sup>26</sup> She is shown to be "in love" with Jason as he is with her, while Égée in his turn displays the silliness of an old man in love with a young girl. Créuse and Jason are therefore the common angles in the two love triangles in the play and it is logical that the two spurned lovers, Médée and Égée, should join forces to avenge themselves on Créuse and Jason who have been the cause of their rejection.

Créuse's coquettish assumption of the role of Jason's beloved also harbours traces of ambition. She believes that by marrying Jason she will become famous:

les races futures,  
Comptant notre hyménée entre vos aventures,  
Vanteront à jamais mon amour généreux,  
Qui d'un si grand héros rompt le sort malheureux. 561-4

This consideration counterbalances her decision to forego the prospect of marrying Égée and becoming queen of Athens.

Like Jason, Créuse has no conception of the depth of Médée's desire for vengeance, but sees her as an obstacle barring the way to complete happiness with Jason. Her request for the robe of Médée adds insult to injury while it also shows that she is self-centred, even with regard to Jason. Créuse's sufferings caused by the robe may be seen as poetic justice. They do not evoke much sympathy for her, partly as a result of the highly stylized description of her torments:

L'ardeur qui me dévore, et que j'ai méritée,  
Surpasse en cruauté l'aigle de Prométhée,  
Et je crois qu'Ixion au choix des châtiments  
Préférerait sa roue à mes embrasements. 1385-8

It is significant that she actually admits that her punishment is deserved. In spite of their realization that they have caused their own doom, Créuse and Créon die enjoining Jason to avenge their deaths.

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26 *Loc. cit.* 9.

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The minor role of Aegeus, which Seneca omitted, is taken over from Euripides and considerably expanded. Corneille explains this expansion carefully in his *Examen*. He finds the role of Aegeus in the Greek tragedy unsatisfactory because, although he is at the court of king Creon, he expresses no intention of paying him a visit. Secondly, according to the generally accepted version of the myth, Aegeus spent a considerable time in Troezen after his departure from Corinth. This would leave Médée stranded on arrival in Athens because her host who had offered her refuge would be absent. These objections may seem petty but they are evidence that small details were important to Corneille in his striving for "vraisemblance". Other criticism, from the time of Aristotle onwards, concentrates on the interruption in the flow of the principal action as a result of the Aegeus episode. Nevertheless, it is important in Euripides' tragedy because it assures Medea of a place of refuge and this is decisive in precipitating her revenge. Furthermore, the childlessness of Aegeus determines the nature of the punishment destined for Jason.

Corneille saw the solution to his criticism of this episode in altering both the character of Égée and the cause for his presence in Corinth: "Pour donner un peu plus d'intérêt à ce monarque dans l'action de cette tragédie, je le fais amoureux de Créuse, qui lui préfère Jason, et je porte ses ressentiments à l'enlever, afin qu'en cette entreprise, demeurant prisonnier de ceux qui la sauvent de ses mains, il ait obligation à Médée de sa délivrance, et que la reconnaissance qu'il lui en doit l'engager plus fortement à sa protection, et même à l'épouser, comme l'histoire le marque."<sup>27</sup> Even this concise summary by Corneille of Égée's part in the drama serves to show what a complicated chain of events results from the altered role. These events divert the attention from the main action and also alter the atmosphere to one of melodrama. The part of Égée is one of the most often criticized aspects of Corneille's play.<sup>28</sup> The gist of the criticism centres round the absurdity of the aged monarch abandoning all restraint in his desperate desire to wed Créuse. This ridiculous figure

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27 *Loc. cit.* 138.

28 E.g. Voltaire *loc. cit.* 27-8: "Il est inutile de remarquer combien le rôle d'Égée est froid et insipide. Une pièce de théâtre est une expérience sur le coeur humain. Quel ressort remuera l'âme des hommes? Ce ne sera pas un vieillard amoureux et méprisé, qu'on met en prison, et qu'une sorcière délivre" and G. Braden *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* 1985 140: "A comic *senex* transposed into a tragic key."



would have been better suited to comedy or even farce. The attempt by Von Fritz<sup>29</sup> to defend Corneille's *Égée* against the criticism of Voltaire is quite misplaced and unconvincing.

An interesting aspect of the role of *Égée* is his mention of the attitude of the ordinary people towards the proposed marriage between *Créuse* and *Jason*. This subject is not mentioned elsewhere in the play.

Votre peuple en frémit, votre cour en murmure;  
Et tout Corinthe enfin s'impute à grande injure  
Qu'un fugitif, un traître, un meurtrier de rois,  
Lui donne à l'avenir des princes et des lois;  
Il ne peut endurer que l'horreur de la Grèce  
Pour prix de ses forfaits épouse sa princesse,  
Et qu'il faille ajouter à vos titres d'honneur:  
< Femme d'un assassin et d'un empoisonneur. > 617-24

The dignity which *Égée* exhibits here is however lost in his subsequent attempt to abduct *Créuse*. In his lament in prison he is fully aware of the impropriety of his conduct:

Ton amour qu'on dédaigne et ton vain attentat  
D'un éternel affront vont souiller ta mémoire... 1181-2

His majesty is not restored by the way in which *Médée* frees him by the touch of her wand and he then promptly proposes to her (1256) before being made invisible and sent on his way (1280-8). He still has the function of establishing a place of asylum for *Médée*, but on the whole Corneille's attempt to make

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29 *Loc. cit.* 387 ff. Von Fritz censures Voltaire's dismissal of *Égée* as "un vieillard amoureux et méprisé" i.a. on the grounds that: "Bei Corneille findet sich keine Andeutung, daß Aigeus alt zu denken sei". This statement makes it hard to believe that Von Fritz who discusses Corneille's *Médée* at considerable length (384-403), has read it attentively. The following citations from the text make it quite clear that Corneille deliberately portrayed *Égée* as an old man: *Créuse* refers to him as "ce vieux roi d'Athènes" (521); *Créon* says of him, "Un vieillard amoureux mérite qu'on en rie" (538); *Égée* himself says: "La jeunesse me manque et non pas le courage" (689); *Nérine* describes *Égée* as "ce généreux vieillard" (1003); and when *Égée* curses *Jason* who has put him in prison the climax is: "qu'il ait le sort d'*Égée*/Et devienne à mon âge amoureux comme moi!" (1206-7).

Égée more interesting has resulted in focusing too much on the sub-plot and introducing an element of farce into the drama.

The presentation of Pollux is far more successful. Here Corneille had no precedent. In his *Examen* he merely states: "Pollux est de ces personnages protatiques qui ne sont introduits que pour écouter la narration du sujet."<sup>30</sup> This statement refers only to his function in the prologue. The introduction of such a character could be very unnatural ("fort artificieuse" wrote Corneille later in his *Discours du poème dramatique*), but he then cites Pollux as an example of a "personnage protatique" serving a useful purpose further in the drama in quite a natural way (i.e. without harming the "vraisemblance").<sup>31</sup> By letting Jason accompany Pollux out of the city as he departs, the dramatist has a plausible explanation for Jason's absence at the time when his fiancée tries on the poisoned dress.

Pollux and Médée's confidante, Nérine, are the only characters who show proper respect for Médée's powers. Furthermore Pollux, by failing to congratulate Jason on his good fortune, but instead reproaching him for hardheartedness and ingratitude, gives an objective perspective on Jason's conduct. Thus Pollux, not least perhaps because his role is relatively limited, is a happy addition to the characters of the drama.

The two female confidantes develop no strong personalities of their own but are important rather as dramatic devices which give Médée and Créuse opportunities to express their feelings. Cléone serves to announce the entry of new characters (at 197 Médée, at 609 Égée), while Nérine brings Médée the news of Égée's attempt at abduction (1001-25). The only scene where Nérine develops some personality is at the beginning of Act III where she expresses sympathy with Créuse whose doom is sealed because she has incurred the implacable hatred of Médée. Nérine's candid acknowledgement that there is no hope of saving the situation because any action on her part would only ensure her destruction as well, evokes pity for her plight and at the same time warns of Médée's immense power.

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30 *Loc. cit.* 138.

31 *Loc. cit.* 29.

The messenger Theudas is a character who is introduced solely with the purpose of reporting the catastrophic effects of Médée's robe. The contents of his speech are similar to that of Euripides' messenger but Theudas is under duress while the Greek messenger spoke spontaneously.

The minor characters and the large number of short scenes in which they appear, form part of Corneille's design of avoiding self-contained scenes. His aim was to give each scene a definite function in the progress of the action. In the absence of choral odes this succession of scenes was meant to fuse the various elements of the plot into a coherent whole.

#### CORNEILLE'S LITERARY STYLE

"Quant au style, il est fort inégal en ce poème: et ce que j'y ai mêlé du mien approche si peu de ce que j'ai traduit de Sénèque, qu'il n'est point besoin d'en mettre le texte en marge pour faire discerner au lecteur ce qui est de lui ou de moi", wrote Corneille in his *Examen*.<sup>32</sup> The unevenness and lack of unity in the dramatic structure of the *Médée* is indeed also apparent in the literary style.

A very interesting perspective on the style of this play is contained in Voltaire's *Commentaires sur Corneille*.<sup>33</sup> He also distinguishes between two styles in the *Médée*. Voltaire notes that in Corneille's time: "Les bornes qui distinguent la familiarité bourgeoise et la noble simplicité, n'étaient pas encore posées."<sup>34</sup> He therefore condemns many of Corneille's lines in the *Médée* as, for example, "le style de la comédie",<sup>35</sup> or "Ce vers est un exemple de ce

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32 *Loc. cit.* 140.

33 *Loc. cit.* 7 ff.

34 *Loc. cit.* 16.

35 *Loc. cit.* 16 on "mais un objet plus beau la chasse de mon lit" 8.

mauvais goût qui régnait alors chez toutes les nations de l'Europe",<sup>36</sup> but he quotes others with approval as "des vers qui annoncent Corneille",<sup>37</sup> or "Ces vers sont dignes de la vraie tragédie".<sup>38</sup> Although Voltaire also criticizes Seneca's *Medea* in the course of his commentary, it is striking that the lines and passages which he praises are in fact based on Seneca's tragedy, "translated" as Corneille wrote in his *Examen*. Thus, without directly referring to Corneille's remarks about the style of the *Médée*, Voltaire seems implicitly to share his conclusion.

This differentiated style is more narrowly defined by Christiane Wanke who is the author of a comprehensive comparative stylistic analysis of the dramas of Seneca and Corneille.<sup>39</sup> She comes to the conclusion that the different styles are characteristic of the different plots: "Sind die Szenen der antiken Kernhandlung von einer 'pathetischen' d.h. mit affektischen Mitteln überladenen Sprache, die der Senecas mit entsprechenden Transformationen entspricht, gekennzeichnet, so enthält die andere Stilschicht alle Merkmale des 'preziösen' Stils."<sup>40</sup> Wanke further observes that the "precious" style also exhibits elements of the "style naïf"<sup>41</sup> which Corneille himself defines in the *Examen* of *Mélite* as "le style naïf qui faisait une peinture de la conversation des honnêtes gens".<sup>42</sup> A few examples of the different styles will illustrate the aptness of Wanke's comments.

When *Médée* appears on stage for the first time the audience has seen Jason boasting of being a prosperous wooer, his pitiless rejection of *Médée* and

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36 *Loc. cit.* 18 on "De relever mon sort sur les ailes d'amour" 44.

37 *Loc. cit.* 20 on "Souverains protecteurs des lois de l'hyménée" etc. 201 ff.

38 *Loc. cit.* 21 on "Me peut-il quitter après tant de bienfaits?" etc. 231 ff.

39 *Seneca Lucan Corneille Studien zum Manierismus der Römischen Kaiserzeit und der Französischen Klassik passim.*

40 Wanke "Die französische Literatur" in *Der Einfluß Senecas auf das Europäische Drama* ed. E. Lefèvre 1978 199.

41 *Seneca Lucan Corneille* 39.

42 Corneille *Théâtre Complet* v. I ed. G. Couton 85.

the flirtatious relationship between Jason and Créuse. Now Médée strikes a forbidding contrast in her role as abandoned wife:

Souverains protecteurs des lois de l'hyménée,  
Dieux garants de la foi que Jason m'a donnée,  
Vous qu'il prit à témoin d'une immortelle ardeur  
Quand par un faux serment il vainquit ma pudeur,  
Voyez de quel mépris vous traite son parjure,  
Et m'aidez à venger cette commune injure :  
S'il me peut aujourd'hui chasser impunément,  
Vous êtes sans pouvoir ou sans ressentiment.  
Et vous, troupe savante en noires barbaries,  
Filles de l'Achéron, pestes, larves, Furies,  
Fières soeurs, si jamais notre commerce étroit  
Sur vous et vos serpents me donna quelque droit,  
Sortez de vos cachots avec les mêmes flammes  
Et les mêmes tourments dont vous gênez les âmes;  
Laissez-les quelque temps reposer dans leurs fers;  
Pour mieux agir pour moi faites trêve aux enfers.  
Apportez-moi du fond des antres de Mégère  
La mort de ma rivale, et celle de son père,  
Et si vous ne voulez mal servir mon courroux,  
Quelque chose de pis pour mon perfide époux :  
Qu'il coure vagabond de province en province,  
Qu'il fasse lâchement la cour à chaque prince;  
Banni de tous côtés, sans bien et sans appui,  
Accablé de frayeur, de misère, d'ennui,  
Qu'à ses plus grands malheurs aucun ne compatisse;  
Qu'il ait regret à moi pour son dernier supplice;  
Et que mon souvenir jusque dans le tombeau  
Attache à son esprit un éternel bourreau.  
Jason me répudie! et qui l'aurait pu croire?  
S'il a manqué d'amour, manque-t-il de mémoire?  
Me peut-il bien quitter après tant de bienfaits?  
M'ose-t-il bien quitter après tant de forfaits?  
Sachant ce que je puis, ayant vu ce que j'ose,  
Croit-il qu m'offenser ce soit si peu de chose?

201-34

This monologue is a combination of Seneca's opening monologue and Medea's reaction to the sound of the wedding hymn.<sup>43</sup> It is immediately clear that Corneille has not just "transplanted" Seneca. He has skilfully combined elements from the two speeches to form a monologue to suit the *Médée* in his play. A factor to be borne in mind is that the total number of lines of Seneca's speeches exceeds that of Corneille by 17 lines. Voltaire remarks on the difficulty of translating from Greek or Latin into rhyming French couplets:

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43 Sen. *Med.* 1-55 and 116-49.

"Rien n'est plus difficile que de traduire les vers latins et grecs en vers français rimés. On est presque toujours obligé de dire en deux lignes ce que les anciens ont dit en une."<sup>44</sup> Corneille does not passively imitate Seneca, but reshapes elements of his verse to conform to the exigencies of the alexandrine and his conception of what is required in his context. He selects from the Latin, and then transposes the original into his own idiom. This transposition is well illustrated by Corneille's celebrated adaptation of Seneca's famous "Medea superest" (166-7) which becomes "Moi . . ." in reply to Nérine's question: "Dans un si grand revers que vous reste-t-il?" (320).

Voltaire comments on the fact that in the *Médée* the dialogues often have more effect than a long monologue but explains that Corneille retained monologues because of the demands of contemporary actors.<sup>45</sup>

Corneille's *Médée* may be wicked ("méchante") but she is never vulgar. Part of the marked contrast between Jason's new love, Créuse, and his abandoned wife lies in their diction. *Médée*'s elevated tone enhances her "grandeur" while Créuse's speech, which often reflects the "style naif" or "familiarité bourgeoise", betrays her pedestrian and ignoble spirit. A few examples will illustrate this characteristic:

Ayant Jason à moi, j'ai tout ce que je veux 180

as well as,

Pourvu qu' à votre tour vous m'accordiez un point  
Que jusques à tantôt je ne vous dirai point. 191-2

and

. . . je ne veux rien pour rien. 195

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44 *Loc. cit.* 20-1.

45 *Loc. cit.* 21-2.

This same base selfishness is revealed in the words with which Créuse explains her desire for Médée's robe:

Après tout, cependant, riez de ma faiblesse;  
Prête de posséder le phénix de la Grèce,  
La fleur de nos guerriers, le sang de tant de dieux,  
La robe de Médée a donné dans mes yeux ;  
Mon caprice à son lustre attachant mon envie,  
Sans elle trouve à dire au bonheur de ma vie;  
C'est ce qu'ont prétendu mes desseins relevés,  
Pour le prix des enfants que je vous ai sauvés. 565-72

The antithesis between the inflated and affected rhetoric of these lines and the triviality of the content accords with the picture of a Créuse who has no real sense of moral values. Jason's reply exhibits a similar pettiness and absence of moral scruples. Stylistically it is an uneasy mixture of everyday speech and elevated diction:

Que ce prix est léger pour un si bon office!  
Il y faut toutefois employer l'artifice :  
Ma jalouse en fureur n'est pas femme à souffrir  
Que ma main l'en dépouille afin de vous l'offrir;  
Des trésors dont son père épuise la Scythie,  
C'est tout ce qu'elle a pris quand elle en est sortie. 573-8

It is notable that, in the scenes which Corneille has based on Seneca, Jason, hypocrite though he may be, in speech preserves the noble simplicity worthy of a tragic hero, e.g.:

J'ai honte de ma vie, et je hais son usage,  
Depuis que je la dois aux effets de ta rage. 865-66

In contrast Égée, who has little in common with his Greek predecessor, while still preserving his regal bearing and diction in the scene with Créuse, in the later scenes illustrates the precious style:

L'un t'a déjà coûté ton repos et ta gloire;  
L'autre te va coûter ta vie et ton Etat.

Destin, qui punis mon audace,  
Tu n'as que de justes rigueurs;  
Et s'il est d'assez tendres coeurs  
Pour compatir à ma disgrâce,

Mon feu de leur tendresse étouffe la moitié,  
Puisqu'à bien comparer mes fers avec ma flamme,  
Un vieillard amoureux mérite plus de blâme  
Qu'un monarque en prison n'est digne de pitié.

1183-92

After the elevated apostrophe of fate with which this stanza commences, the preciousness of the diction and especially the references to his love and his imprisonment as "feu", "flamme" and "fers" respectively seem coy. No wonder that Voltaire roundly condemned "ces stances ennuyeuses et mal écrites".<sup>46</sup>

From the above examples it is clear that, as Corneille himself acknowledged, he had not yet achieved a consistently dignified style suitable for tragedy. Stylistically as well as structurally the *Médée* shows many traces of his apprenticeship as a creator of contemporary light drama.

#### CORNEILLE'S WORLD VIEW

It is difficult to divorce the impression of Corneille's world view one gains from the *Médée*, from the supplementary indications he gives about his conception of the function of dramatic poetry in contemporary society. From the dedicatory epistle of the *Médée* it is clear that Corneille had no ideological axe to grind in his play. The arguments and ideas expressed in the *Examen* too show that Corneille's major concern was artistic - to present a work of art which was a logically integrated whole. In spite of the above considerations it may be said that the *Médée* does indicate something of seventeenth-century French social or political life.

First, the atmosphere is unmistakably French, especially in the scenes invented by Corneille. In the first act, for example, Jason is indistinguishable from the heroes of comedies who pursue wealthy or comely young ladies. If the names were altered, the Gallic knowingness with which Jason speaks of his conquests could be transferred to a hero of any contemporary French farce or melodrama:

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46 *Loc. cit.* 34.



Et que fit Hypsipyle,  
Que pousser les éclats d'un courroux inutile?  
Elle jeta des cris, elle versa des pleurs,  
Elle me souhaita mille et mille malheurs;  
Dit que j'étais sans foi, sans coeur, sans conscience,  
Et lasse de le dire, elle prit patience.

9-14

The coquettishness of the relationship between Jason and Créuse would also be readily interchangeable with a similar relationship in comedies of the time. This is not to aver that these characters were drawn from real life, but rather to state that Corneille modelled them on characters conventionally acceptable on the French stage. This is partly why they fuse so awkwardly with the figures taken over from the ancient plays.

Apart from the distinctly French social conduct, some commentators have also noted reflections of contemporary politics in the play. So de Leyssac<sup>47</sup> comments that the type of rhetorical contest between Seneca's Medea and Creon would only be possible under a fragile autocracy, like in Seneca's world, where the opponent is forced to resort to stealth and hypocrisy. Corneille's world, on the other hand, was governed by a stable, hereditary monarch and this is mirrored in his play where an open confrontation takes place between an all-powerful king and a foreign former princess who has been condemned to exile without a fair trial. This observation is interesting, as is too de Leyssac's insistence<sup>48</sup> that Corneille emphasizes the royal status and omnipotence in the words of Créon about Égée,

Mais le trône soutient la majeste des rois  
Au dessus du mépris, comme au dessus des lois.

539-40

and in Égée's own words (618-20). However de Leyssac does not take into consideration that both these monarchs sadly lose their power and dignity in the play.

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47 *Op. cit.* 37.

48 *Op. cit.* 39.

In my view it would be strained to read any political implications into this drama. I think it would be nearer the mark to ascribe some of the typical features of the *Médée* to a much more personal factor, namely Corneille's relative youth. He was a young man of twenty-nine, who was attempting his first tragedy. Van Stockum attributes the romanticization of the *Médée*, with its strange mixture of rational and irrational motivation, to Corneille's youth at the time of composition of the drama.<sup>49</sup>

Certain French critics and scholars bear witness to the strong contemporary colour of the piece - even to the point of comparing Jason to personalities prominent in French society of the period, e.g.:

C'est un de ces grands seigneurs du temps de Louis XIII, qui mêlaient si candidement, dans leurs conquêtes, le plaisir à l'intrigue, l'amour à l'intérêt. Il n'agit pas autrement que le duc de Guise, dont les aventures galantes, à Naples, étaient aussi piquantes que les aventures politiques, ou encore les Guiche ou les Lauzun, lorsque les événements les transportaient en Pologne ou en Turquie. La couleur contemporaine de la pièce est même telle qu'elle devait en faire oublier, souvent, pour les spectateurs de cette époque, l'intérêt historique.<sup>50</sup>

To this may be added that Corneille's strong contemporary accent does not always blend well with the mythical substratum. In this respect too the drama thus lacks unity.

## CONCLUSION

Corneille's *Médée* is thus a drama with many flaws, but it is interesting especially because it reveals an author using ancient dramatic treatments of the myth as aids in his search for technical perfection.

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49 *Loc. cit.* 9.

50 D. Mimoso-Ruiz *Médée antique et moderne* 176. This is a quotation by Mimoso-Ruiz from G. Larroumet "Causerie théâtrale: Médée dans Euripide et Corneille" in *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* v. 40 (1903) 412.

*Médée* does not consistently dominate in this version. In the first part of the play she may even seem neglected because of the emphasis on the new lovers. Her traditional role seems somewhat stark against the baroque background of the amorous intrigues. However, as the two plots develop to the point where they become inextricably intertwined, *Médée* assumes the dominant role. Here her feminine nature is almost swamped by the prominence given to her witchcraft. The aspect of *Médée* as a mother is not highlighted. Indeed, although the killing of the children is part of her vengeance, and the point on which Euripides and Seneca focused their dramas, the first part of the vengeance receives more attention. This is in keeping with the emphasis on the romantic intrigues throughout the play. Killing Jason's prospective bride and her father who arranged the match does not satisfy *Médée*, therefore she kills the children who are so dear to him. Ironically this part of her vengeance seems superfluous as Jason also deliberates whether to kill the children and eventually kills himself from sorrow at the loss of *Créuse*. At the end *Médée*, woman and witch, survives and departs in her magic chariot satisfied with her achievements but without knowledge of Jason's suicide:

Enfin je n'ai pas mal employé la journée  
Que la bonté du roi, de grâce, m'a donnée;  
Mes désirs sont contents. Mon père et mon pays,  
Je ne me repens plus de vous avoir trahis;  
Avec cette douceur j'en accepte le blâme.  
Adieu, parjure : apprends à connaître ta femme,  
Souviens-toi de sa fuite, et songe, une autre fois,  
Lequel est plus à craindre ou d'elle ou de deux rois. 1573-80

As Corneille pointed out in his dedicatory epistle, he did not expect his audiences to interpret the play as an example to be imitated. In the event, the play did not find favour with contemporary audiences.<sup>51</sup> General reaction to it from the seventeenth to the twentieth century may perhaps be most effectively summarized in Jean Schlumberger's phrase "un somptueux et rocailleux coquillage vide".<sup>52</sup>

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51 Voltaire *loc. cit.* 10.

52 *Plaisir à Corneille* 1936 47.

It cannot be said that Corneille succeeded in re-creating Medea, but there is a certain measure of fascination in watching his attempt. One of the important reasons for this failure is the excessive concentration on details of the plot and the resultant lack of attention to the psychology of the characters.

CHAPTER 4  
THE *MÉDÉE* OF LONGEPIERRE

**BACKGROUND**

Turning to the *Médée* of Hilaire-Bernard Requeleyne de Longepierre (1659-1721) after that of Corneille is like turning from a canvas on which there are so many figures and so much action that it is hard to find the focal point, to a canvas where neatly arranged figures and the delicate use of light and shade direct the eye to the essential. Sixty years separate these two tragedies. This interval saw not only the perfection of Corneille's talent but also the full flowering of the genius of Jean Racine, (1639-1699). Two factors, the influence of Racine, and Longepierre's great love for Classical, especially Greek, literature, played a great role in his literary formation.

Longepierre was born in Dijon in 1659 and was a brilliant pupil of the Jesuits. From an early age he was passionately interested in literature. In 1684 he published a verse translation of Anakreon and Sappho. His favourite author from antiquity was Theokritos whose *Idylls* he also translated into French. His interest was not confined to ancient literature and in 1686 there appeared as part of the *Jugemens des Sçavans* his "Parallèle de M. Corneille et de M. Racine". He was the first to compare the two French tragedians to their classical Greek counterparts: "Disons que Monsieur Corneille approche davantage de Sophocle, et Monsieur Racine ressemble plus à Euripide."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of several royal appointments, Longepierre's active interest in literature did not decline. In 1694 his first drama, the tragedy *Médée*, was produced on the stage of the Comédie-française. This production enjoyed considerably more success than the *Médée* of Corneille. Voltaire reports: "On

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1 Cited by Tomoo Tobari in the introduction to his edition of Longepierre's *Médée* 1967 10. This edition is used for all references to and quotations from Longepierre's *Médée*.

ne représente d'autre *Médée* à Paris que celle de Longepierre."<sup>2</sup> According to statistical information the *Médée* of Longepierre was performed eighteen times in 1694, and five more times in 1695 and 1696. The play was revived with great success in 1728 and remained in the repertory of the Comédie-française until 1813.<sup>3</sup> Longepierre, however, did not live to experience the later success of his *Médée*. His other dramas, *Electre* (1702), and *Jerusalem délivrée* (1712) were less favourably received and not published during his lifetime. *Médée* therefore represents the summit of the scholarly nobleman's creative achievement.

In the preface to the text of the *Médée*, Longepierre gives as his reasons for choosing the Medea myth the simplicity of the subject which is nevertheless capable of causing terror and pity.<sup>4</sup> He wanted to try to present the public with a drama in the ancient style. He claims that Euripides and Seneca "ont esté mes seuls et veritable guides".<sup>5</sup> In spite of Longepierre's protestations that he would have written precisely the tragedy he did write if the *Médée* of Corneille had not existed, it is clear to anyone who is familiar with Corneille's drama that Longepierre borrowed substantially from it.<sup>6</sup> J.D. Hubert probably describes the diverse influences on Longepierre most accurately:

En cherchant ainsi à faire revivre la tragédie antique et à continuer l'oeuvre de Racine, Longepierre se propose forcément d'imiter certains modèles. Dans sa *Médée*, il s'inspire tour à tour d'Euripide, de Sénèque et, bien qu'il s'en défende, de Corneille. Et il imite aussi Racine, à tel

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2 *Loc. cit.* 10.

3 See H.C. Lancaster *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* Part IV 1673-1700 v. I 1940 358; Voltaire *loc. cit.* 10 and Tobari *op. cit.* 12-13.

4 *Op. cit.* 27.

5 *Op. cit.* 31.

6 Cf. W.H. Friedrich "Medeas Rache" 206: "Übrigens ist Longepierre seinem großen Vorgänger Corneille stärker verpflichtet, als er in seiner Vorrede wahrhaben will", and H.C. Lancaster *op. cit.* 359: "The story dramatized is essentially that given by Euripides, Seneca, and Corneille, but in the treatment, while he borrowed from all three, he leaned most heavily upon Corneille." Lancaster has a list of minor resemblances of Longepierre's *Médée* to Corneille's drama, 359-60.

point qu'on peut dire que sa *Médée* est une adaptation racinienne de certaines scènes tirées d'Euripide, de Sénèque et de Corneille. Loin d'extraire de tout cela une monstruosité littéraire, Longepierre a composé une tragédie cohérente et originale.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE DRAMA

The similarity to Corneille's drama is already manifest in the opening scene where Jason is in conversation with his confidant Iphite. Like Corneille, Longepierre has Créuse as one of the *dramatis personae*, who further include Médée, Créon and the two female confidantes. Like Seneca, he omits the Aegeus episode entirely. The children are shown on stage as in the two ancient dramas. There is no chorus. The dramatic action takes place in the palace of Créon within the space of hours.

The scene between Jason and Iphite serves as a prologue. The information that Jason intends abandoning Médée is central. As in Corneille's drama, love is the cause of his defection. At the same time marriage to Créuse will ensure Créon's protection against Acaste. Although love and self-interest therefore coincide for Jason there is less gloating over his good fortune. He remains conscious of the debt he owes Médée but believes that her love will prevent her from seeking vengeance.

Longepierre has, however, introduced a new element which constitutes an obstacle to the completion of Jason's happiness, namely the timid reluctance of Créuse. She is overwhelmed by the love of the famous hero but modestly asserts that it is not proper to declare love for a married man. This obstacle is, however, swept aside in a dramatic way. Créon enters with the news that Acaste will only refrain from attacking Corinth if Médée is extradited to him or banished. Créon does not wish to endanger his subjects and although he is filled with revulsion for Médée he will, in deference to the feelings of Jason and his children, only exile her. Further association with Médée would be

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7 J.D. Hubert "Une tragédie de la sensibilité: La *Médée* de Longepierre" *Rom Forsch* 69 (1957) 28-48 at 33.

degrading for Jason. He is to be married to Créuse. The marriage is to be announced at once by means of wedding hymns. Thus Créuse's qualms are disregarded and Jason's aim is to be realized through the intervention of Créon.

The marriage songs bridge the transition between the first two acts and, like in Seneca, bring *Médée* confirmation of Jason's intentions. In an emotional tirade she invokes the gods of marriage, her ancestor the Sun and the gods of the underworld to witness her betrayal and to assist her in avenging the injustice done to her. Rhodope, her confidante, attempts to calm her, but *Médée* confesses that her love for Jason is too strong to control. *Médée* does not yet know of her sentence of exile but threatens destruction to Créon who is responsible for the projected marriage.

Then Créon enters and bluntly banishes her. He mentions the demand of Acaste as one reason for her exile but places more stress on the second, viz. that the people of Corinth would kill her if she remained. *Médée* disregards the implication of danger from the side of the populace but insists on the debt the Argonauts owe her, and her innocence of any trespass entailing exile. A debate about Jason's co-responsibility for her past deeds turns into an outburst of pure hatred and loathing on Créon's part and threats on *Médée*'s. Créon puts the time of her departure at dawn the following day. Thus Longepierre avoids the request for a day's delay which had caused some awkwardness to the earlier dramatists.

The confrontation with Créon leaves *Médée* determined to punish him, but still hoping to regain Jason's heart. In the first meeting between *Médée* and Jason, Longepierre follows his predecessors in that *Médée* reproaches Jason for his perfidy and reminds him of the benefits and sacrifices he owes her. Jason's reaction is, however, psychologically different. He shifts the accent to the impossibility of another solution in the present dangers threatening *Médée*. He thus underplays the advantages he will gain and also expresses his recognition for all her sacrifices. However, when Jason reveals that he has no intention of letting the children accompany her into exile, *Médée* ends the scene with open menaces. Jason's tranquil response creates dramatic tension which is increased in the next scene, where *Médée* reveals that by taking the children away from



her, Jason has changed her love for him to hatred. She vows that a terrible fate is in store for him.

In strong contrast to Médée's resolve to wreak vengeance, is Jason's total acceptance that Médée no longer poses a problem. An unexpected hindrance, however, is the attitude of Créuse. In a scene with Jason she expresses fear for their happiness and even pity for Médée. She is afraid the gods may transfer Médée's suffering to them. Furthermore she has lurking doubts about Jason's reliability. He found it easy to abandon Hypsipile and Médée, perhaps he will one day do the same to her. At last Jason reassures Créuse that this time his love is real, but in the next scene there is a new obstacle. Jason now finds himself haunted by images of Médée. He confesses to Iphite that the thought of Médée spoils his happiest moments. As Jason is voicing the effect of Médée on his conscience, he is confronted by her in person. He attempts to flee but Médée summons him back and there follows a second scene between the two in which Médée takes the initiative. She declares that she accepts that Jason is right in adopting his chosen course of action. She still loves him and cannot blame him, but pleads that the children be allowed to accompany her. Even Jason's refusal is met by reasonable words. Médée gives him tender instructions about the children's upbringing and reveals that she intends to send the children to Créuse. Thus they may win over Créon. She intends to leave in the evening already to compensate for her earlier recalcitrance. In spite of Jason's earlier fears he now accepts Médée's resignation. The dramatic irony of his farewell words to Médée is striking:

Puisse le juste Ciel à mes vœux favorable  
Vous accorder, Madame, un repos desirable.  
Jason à son destin cedant avec regret,  
Nourrissant loin de vous un déplaisir secret,  
Gardera chèrement dans le fond de son ame,  
Le tendre souvenir d'une si belle flâme.  
L'absence ni le temps n'effaceront jamais  
De son coeur affligé le prix de vos bien-faits.

829-36

How little Jason knows the strength of Médée's emotion and how soon the consequences will be felt become apparent in the next scene. Médée establishes a complicity with the audience by confessing how hard it was for her to

conceal her anger during the scene with Jason. The third act ends with the outline of Médée's design of vengeance. Her splendid dress which Créuse has admired will be poisoned and presented as a gift by the children.

The fourth act is dominated by Médée. The eight scenes of this act are virtual monologues by Médée in spite of Rhodope sometimes being present. The exception is the seventh scene where there is a dialogue between Médée and her confidante and the children also utter a few words. The first half of this act shows Médée invoking Hecate and making her preparations for sorcery. The prolonged incantation is reminiscent of Seneca as is also the apparition of her murdered brother. She vows that as her love caused his death, her love will also wreak vengeance.

In the second half of the act Médée begins to set her plans in motion. Rhodope is despatched to fetch the children so that they may carry the dress to Créuse. Corneille's invention of the poison attacking only the two destined victims is again employed. The meeting with the children is filled with conscious irony. Médée plays the part of the mother going into exile and preparing her children for a future with a stranger as stepmother. However, to those who know the myth, lines like, "C'en est fait, mes Enfants; vous n'avez plus de Mere" (978) have a second, sinister, meaning. Longepierre develops this aspect of the vengeance after the children have left. As Médée pictures the destruction of Créon and Créuse, she feels the necessity that Jason should also be punished.

Terms like "Enfantons quelque monstre" (1031) hint darkly at her plan. Médée's soliloquy is interrupted by the return of Rhodope and the children. The confidante reports that the present has been well received and the children treated with affection. Médée suddenly starts weeping and ambiguously explains her tears as for the children (1055). She speaks to the children with great feeling, much in the manner of Euripides' protagonist. However, as she expresses the aim of freeing the children from the yoke they will have to bear, her behaviour becomes so strangely emotional that the children cry out in fright. Rhodope takes them to the next room. Alone, Médée articulates her thoughts more clearly. The conflict between her mother love and desire for retribution against Jason is still unresolved at the end of the act.

The fifth act opens with a dramatic entrance by Rhodope who counsels Médée to flee as the populace are enraged at the horrible fate of the royal family. Médée revels in the results of her schemes. She goes off with the frightening statement that now she will lose her innocence and crown her vengeance. Jason appears in pursuit of Médée but is then joined by Créuse. She reports that Créon is dead. Créuse wants to die close to Jason. She now fully declares her love for Jason. He wants to die with her but she pleads that he should preserve his life and the memory of their love. After her death he vows to kill Médée cruelly. As he is uttering his determination to pursue Médée, she suddenly enters and immobilizes him by means of her magic wand. She pours forth all her scorn and hatred for Jason's heartless abandonment of her and bitterly mocks him with being unable to consecrate his new marriage. As he impotently threatens that her blood will atone for Créuse's death, Médée says that she has already shed the purest of her blood and then gives evidence that she has killed their children. Her explanation is that she wanted, first, to end the misfortunes of the children, and secondly to sever the last bonds linking her to Jason, thus obliterating all traces of their marriage. Médée's concern about the future of the children is a fresh perspective on her character introduced by Longepierre. According to Médée, Jason is morally responsible for her deed as his infidelity was the cause. She exculpates herself as having served as the instrument of the gods to punish Jason's betrayal. She rejoices in Jason's grief. She feels she has recovered everything she lost through Jason but hates him too much to kill him. Médée has therefore deliberately reduced Jason to a state where he would welcome death. She leaves in the dragon-drawn chariot for an unknown destination and with a last expression of helpless grief, Jason commits suicide. The tragedy ends with Iphite attributing the catastrophe to love and the mad fury caused by love.

The structure of Longepierre's *Médée* thus shows similarities to the two predecessors he acknowledged but also to Corneille. He follows Corneille especially in Acts I and V, starting with the conversation between Jason and his friend and ending with Jason's suicide. The details of rendering motionless by means of a magic wand and of showing a gory dagger to Jason are also borrowed. In Act IV he uses the ancient authors, Seneca chiefly, for the preparations for the magic and Euripides for the presentation of the children.

Acts II and III incorporate elements from all three of the earlier dramatists. The omission of Aigeus is conducive to the greater simplicity admired by Longepierre, but the retention of Créuse inevitably complicates the action. Nevertheless, his tragedy again focuses the attention on the main plot. The love between Jason and Créuse is not allowed to dominate but is integrated into the main action. The relative subtlety Longepierre exhibits in the structure of his play can also be seen in the characterization.

### THE PORTRAYAL OF MÉDÉE

Discussing the *Médée* of Longepierre, Voltaire wrote: "[L]ors-qu'une actrice imposante fait valoir le rôle de Médée, cette pièce a quelque éclat aux représentations, quoique la lecture en soit peu supportable."<sup>8</sup> This opinion indicates that Médée has once again become the leading character in the tragedy. She does not dominate the drama to the same extent as Seneca's Medea, but is far more important than her counterpart in Corneille.

Although Médée's appearance is delayed until Act II, her name is spoken by Jason in the very first line of the drama:

Je sçais ce que je dois à l'amour de Médée.

The last words of the tragedy, spoken by Iphite after Jason has taken his own life, are:

Quels horribles malheurs  
O trop funeste Amour, produisent tes fureurs. 1359-60

Framed by these utterances about love, the tragedy has developed and ended in catastrophe. The tale, as represented by Longepierre, revolves around Médée's love for Jason. It is the story of Médée's love which turns to hate. Médée's last words to Jason are:

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8 *Loc. cit.* 10.

Adieu; je t'abandonne aux horreurs de ton sort  
Ingrat, je te hais trop pour te donner la mort.

1343-4

The first impressions of *Médée* are, as with *Corneille*, given by other characters. Sympathy for *Médée* is evoked by Jason's decision to abandon her even though he is conscious of his debt to her. Overconfidence that she loves him too much to harm him causes Jason to neglect Iphite's warning about her powers (126-32). Créon provides another perspective on *Médée*. He is plainly afraid of her and eager that she should leave the city (e.g. 221-8). The reminders of Iphite (125) and Créuse (174-6) to Jason that he is betraying *Médée*'s trust enhance the sympathy for her.

This composite picture of the abandoned wife who is yet a dangerous force to be reckoned with is then succeeded by the character herself. When she first appears *Médée* is frantic. Wedding hymns and frivolity have just cruelly demonstrated the bitter truth that Jason has decided in favour of the princess. As the wronged wife she calls the marriage gods to avenge the injustice (279-82). Another side of her character, however, overwhelmed by what she calls her "fureur barbare" (293 and 309), wants the total destruction of Corinth and crimes surpassing those in Colchis. Significantly she cites her love for Jason as the cause of the earlier crimes. What may she not do now that love is joined by hate, wrath and suffering?

L'amour seul animait ma main encor tremblante.  
La haine avec l'amour, le courroux, la douleur  
M'embrasent à present d'une juste fureur.  
Que n'enfantera point cette fureur barbare?

306-10

*Médée*'s attitude to Jason is well captured in the appellation of "Ingrat" which she uses to refer to him. This implies that she considers him lacking in gratitude not only for her past sacrifices in his interest but also thankless for her devoted love. Significantly Jason himself first uses the epithet to describe himself as he imagines how *Médée* now feels about him:

. . . sa tendresse extrême  
Parlera puissamment pour un Ingrat qu'elle aime.

137-8

The frequency with which Médée uses this designation is striking: in 274, 279, 312, 325, 334, 340, 348, 360, 451, 485, 488, 525, 530, 539, 563, 617, 1339 and 1344. She employs the term both in soliloquies and when addressing Jason, thus demonstrating that this is the image of him uppermost in her mind. The other epithets used by her, "cruel" (604, 613), "perfide" (608) and "infidelle" (1324) also convey how deeply she is affected by his heartless abandonment of her, while the sarcastic appellation "Magnanime Heros" (1279) at the moment when she has rendered him helpless by means of her magic powers, shows that Médée is exulting in her control over Jason. The crowning taunt is expressed in "Epoux fortuné" (1292) which carries the bitterness about her broken marriage and especially the exultation at her successful vengeance. The frequency of these epithets exceeds by far the number of times Jason's name is used and thus reflects the preoccupation of Médée with what Jason has become - no longer the loyal, loving husband Jason, but an ungrateful, heartless betrayer. The reason for this strong reaction which seems to permeate Médée's whole being is the depth of her love for Jason:

J'aime; que dis-je aimer? j'adore encor Jason.  
Pour lui je trahirois encor Pere et Patrie;  
Pour lui j'immolerois mon repos et ma vie. 344-6

It seems that Médée deliberately suppresses the information given her by Rhodope (353-4) that Jason is in love with Créuse. Longepierre has also brought to the fore a possessive element in Médée's love for Jason. She regards him in a certain sense as her creation; cf.:

. . . ce Heros, ton amour, ton ouvrage;  
Le fruit de tant de soins, de perils, d'attentats, 362-3

and

Il me coute assez cher l'Ingrat! pour être à moi. 451<sup>9</sup>

Part of Médée's raging despair comes from her powerlessness to inhibit her feelings for him in spite of her objective realization that they are unrequited

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9 Cf. also 413-44.

and in spite of her control over supernatural forces, cf. 336-343 and her prayer to Love:

O Toi, qui vois mon trouble et causes ma douleur,  
Amour, daigne amollir l'ingrat en ma faveur;  
Remets-le dans mes fers; efface son injure;  
Rens moi, Dieu tout puissant, le coeur de ce parjure:  
Tout mon art n'y peut rien: seul tu peux le fléchir.  
Prête un charme à mes pleurs qui puisse l'attendrir. 487-92

The turning point in her love for Jason comes in their first encounter on stage where Jason shows himself impermeable to her entreaties. His inflexibility and especially his blunt refusal to give up the children change her love to inexorable hatred (617-18). Her pretence of accepting Jason's arrangements signifies the continuation of her plan of vengeance. How hard it was for her to simulate acceptance is shown in the next scene where she openly expresses her true feelings:

Que j'ai souffert, Rhodope, à cacher ma colère?  
Quelle horrible contrainte il a fallu me faire! 841-2

This very human confession is one of the small touches which make Longepierre's *Médée* credible as a woman. The other very important factor in this regard is her portrayal as a mother. Here Longepierre has followed Euripides in the tender solicitude for their welfare *Médée* exhibits in Act IV 5 and IV 7. The ambiguity, which sets off the last farewell in Corinth and the last farewell in life and moves *Médée* to tears, is effectively exploited, e.g. 1075-88 and:

Je fremis. Leurs regards et leurs larmes  
Me troublent, et des mains me font tomber les armes.  
O mon sang! ô mes Fils, si chers à mes desirs!  
Objets de ma tendresse et de mes déplaisirs,  
Infortunez auteurs de ma douleur amère,  
Approchez mes Enfants; embrassez votre Mère.  
Empressez-vous encor d'obéir à mes loix;  
Et baisez-moi du moins pour la dernière fois. 1105-12

The decision to murder the children arises gradually in her mind, foreshadowed by such ambiguous expressions as:

Oùï, l'amour maternel se faisant violence.  
Cede enfin à vos vœux, et s'impose silence. 793-4

The reason for killing them is to punish Jason, but she tries to rationalize the deed to herself by saying that she is freeing them from the yoke which will be imposed on them by strangers (1059-64, 1098-99 and 1117-20). This rationalization - that she fears her children will suffer under a stepmother - seems to be Longepierre's own contribution to the character of *Médée*. Another consideration is that Jason may kill them to avenge the deaths of Créon and Créuse. As *Médée*'s distress intensifies, she invents more reasons why she should kill the children: They have been adopted by Créuse and are no longer hers. They are innocent but so was her brother whom she killed to help Jason. She is going to be separated from them in any event:

Qu'ils meurent pour leur Pere;  
Qu'ils meurent. Aussi-bien ils sont morts pour leur Mere.<sup>10</sup> 1137-8

This utterance expresses her resolution. The murder takes place off stage as with *Corneille* and is announced to Jason in a similar taunting way. *Médée* then adds another motive: their death severs the last tie binding her to Jason:

Rompre ces derniers noeuds qui nous serroient encore;  
Et pour mieux t'oublier, effacer sans retour  
Jusqu'aux traces, Ingrat, de nôtre affreux amour. 1318-20

Like Seneca's *Medea* this *Médée* wants to cancel her whole association with Jason. She even goes as far as attributing the guilt for the deed to Jason. He is responsible as he provoked her by his disloyalty (1322-4, 1327-30). She served as the instrument of the gods and now rejoices in his suffering.

*Médée* departs in triumph to an unknown destination. She does not feel

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10 Cf. Sen. *Med.* 950-1: "pereant patris, periere matri".



the necessity of having a place of refuge. Like her Senecan counterpart she is secure in her victory.

Despite the greater coherence of this *Médée* when compared to that of Corneille, the duality of the Medea figure is not completely integrated. The juxtaposition of her human side and her character as sorceress is not always convincing. The first two scenes of the fourth act are, although long, impressive in their portrayal of *Médée*'s communication with another world. The transition to the normal world is however abrupt (953-4) and this strains credibility. Even graver criticism may be levied against Longepierre's recourse to the magic wand (1272). This has the effect of trivializing the drama when the tragic atmosphere is at its tensest.

In brief, the portrayal of *Médée* is evidence of how Longepierre succeeds in depicting a convincing tragic heroine when he relies on psychological motivation, but of how he jeopardizes this creation when he falls prey to the seduction of the plot devices so liberally used by Corneille.

#### THE DEPICTION OF JASON AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JASON AND MÉDÉE

In comparison to the self-centred Jason of Euripides and the extravagant opportunist in Corneille, Longepierre's Jason is subdued, but not quite as passive as the Senecan character.

The chief characteristic of Jason here is his rejoicing in his newly discovered love. He does not glory in the promotion love will bring him but rather accepts this as an incidental benefit. He wishes *Médée* well and despite the seeming shallowness of his initial protestations that he sympathizes with *Médée* and will always remember how deeply he is indebted to her (11-14, 83-4, 519-20, 551-2), his later confession that he is haunted by the image of *Médée* shows that he does have a guilty conscience about her (717-32). Paradoxically, despite vaunting his own state of being in love with the princess, he does not understand the nature of *Médée*'s passionate love for him. He believes she

loves him so much that she will not harm him - a simple transposition of his feelings towards Créuse whom he wants to protect and cherish. Jason lacks the imagination to make the leap to what love may do when it has been scorned. Jason's blindness to the true feelings of Médée which causes the catastrophe is therefore well motivated by Longepierre.

This Jason is not a "gallant" like his counterpart in Corneille but a man who enjoys his good fortune of being in love, love reciprocated and ensuring his own material prosperity and that of his children. In the encounters with Médée he does not display the callousness of the Jason of Euripides or Corneille. His attitude is naïvely insensitive. Instead of retaliating with anger and threats to Médée's wrathful outbursts, he attempts gentle persuasion and withdraws rather than becoming involved in an acrimonious exchange (609-12).

A subtle touch to Longepierre's psychological portrait of Jason is his realization that man cannot control his own happiness, but that it is subject to the arbitrary vacillations of fate:

Grands Dieux! quel sort fatal, quelle loi trop severe  
Des plaisirs les plus grands rend la douceur amere?  
Quel noir poison se mêle au sort le plus charmant?  
Et ne sçauroit-on être heureux impunement? 725-8

As a father, Jason is shown to be loving and concerned about the future of his sons. The strength of his affection is not minimized by a desire to kill them as in Corneille's drama. His grief at the end is for all the victims of Médée's vengeance:

Je ne puis me venger; il faut que je perisse.  
Trop malheureux objets de l'amour de Jason,  
Déplorable Créüse! infortuné Creon!  
O mes Fils! jouissez de la seule vengeance,  
Que les Dieux inhumains laissent en ma puissance. 1353-8

Jason's error lies in not comprehending the true character of Médée. Significantly Créon refers to her as "barbare Etrangère" (466) and "barbare" (478), but Jason addresses her simply as "vous" in their first meeting and more cordially as "Madame" in the second. When speaking about her to others he consistently uses her name without any pejoratives. However, after the deaths

of Créon and Créuse he refers to her as "la Barbare" (1267, 1293, 1309, 1347), and after learning that she has killed their children too, as "Monstre" (1312). This change in appellation conveys the change in his perception of his betrayed wife and lends new point to the lines Longepierre adapted from Seneca ("coniugem agnoscis tuam?" (1021)):

En est-ce assez, et connois-tu Médée?  
De son affreux pouvoir garderas-tu l'idée?  
Oubliaras-tu sa haine, ainsi que son amour?

1309-11

Thus, by indulging his love for Créuse and misunderstanding the love of Médée, Jason has caused his whole world to be destroyed. There remains nothing but destroying himself as well - so removing, ironically, all evidence of the Jason-Médée episode and leaving only Médée.

### CRÉON AND THE MINOR CHARACTERS

In Longepierre's version Créon plays a definite role in the development of the action. He is the one who disregards the scruples his daughter has about alienating Jason from Médée. His deep personal loathing of Médée, whom he regards as a sinister foreigner, and his genuine admiration for Jason as a hero, bring him to act decisively when danger looms from the side of Acaste. Créon intends at one stroke to remove all risks for Corinth and its citizens and to ensure the happiness and honour of his daughter as well as the future of his line (Act I 3).

His communication with Médée starts with a brusque and callous enumeration of the problems her presence in Corinth causes and a blunt banishment order. He becomes sarcastic and brutal when she insists that Jason shares the responsibility for her past crimes and defies his authority with menaces:

Va sors de mes Etats, sors barbare Etrangere.  
Abandonne Corinthe, et cours en d'autres lieux,  
Porter tes attentats et le courroux des Dieux.  
D'un monstre tel que toi délivre mon Empire,

Cesse d'infecter l'air qu'en ces lieux on respire;  
De ton horrible aspect ne souille plus mes yeux;  
Et n'empoisonne plus la lumière des Cieux.  
Va semer à Colchos l'horreur et l'épouvante:  
Vas y hâter des Dieux la justice trop lente.  
Demain dès que l'Aurore allumera le jour,  
Précipite tes pas; fuis loin, fuis sans retour;  
Ou contentant les Dieux las de tes injustices,  
Tu periras, barbare, au milieu des supplices.

466-78

Ironically the fate mentioned in the last line is in store for Créon and his daughter.

Créon intends to do his best for his state and his family but neglects to take Médée's claims into account because she is in opposition to what he regards as right. In spite of his fear of her he underestimates her as an opponent. Créon appears only once. His death is announced by Créuse while she too is dying. Although it may be argued that Créon deserves the title "Tyran" bestowed on him by Médée (461, 464, 479, 962), Créuse who is also included in the frequently used designation "Tyrans" (965, 1022, 1123, 1181) hardly deserves to be so categorized.<sup>11</sup>

Longepierre follows Corneille in presenting Créuse on stage, but the princess he portrays is very different from her coquettish predecessor. Her chief distinction is the overwhelming love she inspires in Jason. In spite of returning his feelings, she is modest in expressing her sentiments. Indeed, she is conscious of Médée's rights as Jason's wife. This sensitivity to others makes her a sympathetic character. Créon takes no account of her scruples and simply arranges for her marriage to Jason to go ahead.

More evidence of her sensitivity is provided in the scene with Jason where she expresses further reservations regarding a relationship with Jason. On the one hand she feels sorry for Médée (653-4) and on the other she does not fully trust Jason because of his past history of fickleness. Once Jason has succeeded in calming her fears, she proclaims "l'Amour est vainqueur" (707). Ironically, despite the evidence of love's inconstancy she has just cited, she places her

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11 Cf. Médée's own definition of a tyrant: "Un Tyran par la force agit dans ses Etats;/Un Roi juste au coupable apprend ses attentats" (407-8).



The confidants in Longepierre's *Médée* do not develop personalities of their own, but merely serve as devices for letting the main characters express their feelings and to give some measure of the reaction of ordinary people to the events, especially in the case of Iphite.

### LONGEPIERRE'S LITERARY STYLE IN THE *MÉDÉE*

In his preface to the *Médée* Longepierre writes: "J'ai voulu tenter de donner au public une Piece à peu pres dans le goût des Anciens: c'est à dire, une Piece dans laquelle une action grande, tragique et merveilleuse, mais en même tems tres simple, fût soutenuë seulement par la noblesse des pensées, par la vivacité des mouvemens, et par la dignité de l'expression . . ."13 These aims he tried to realize, not by imitating the style of his ancient models but, as Hubert points out, by imitating the alexandrines of Racine. "En lisant la *Médée* de Longepierre, on ne songe guère à Euripide, à Sénèque ou même à Corneille, car notre auteur cherche à reproduire les harmonies raciniennes . . ."14 Hubert goes on to remark that the most striking aspects of Racine's influence on Longepierre are in his use of tragic irony and in his technique of creating ambivalent metaphors. Hubert shows how Longepierre endeavours to establish his system of metaphors from the opening scene. Hubert then analyses the metaphor of light, seemingly conveying love and happiness, but in reality leading to death and destruction. This image with its ambiguity is polarized in the descriptions of Médée's dress, first (849-56) emphasizing its shining beauty and later (1149-60) detailing its destructive force as the superficial glitter is turned to deathly fire.

Another notable theme in the tragedy is the metaphor of being bound by love and fate. A few examples of the "bond" imagery will serve to illustrate the nature of this metaphorical system. In the opening scene already, Jason, trying to appease his conscience about abandoning Médée, speaks of his powerlessness to resist Créon and Créuse as:

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13 *Op. cit.* 27-28.

14 *Loc. cit.* 35.

Où de leur joug pressant l'invincible contrainte,  
Fixe enfin mes destins et mes vœux à Corinthe. 9-10

Ironically, however, later in the same scene he seems to believe that he has the power to determine his own fate. Again the image of bonds is used:

Je dois donc, profitant d'un rayon favorable,  
M'assurer en Créon un appui ferme et stable,  
Et l'attachant à moi par le noeud le plus fort,  
Prevenir et fixer l'inconstance du sort. 65-8

Significantly Créuse uses the metaphor in explaining the obstacle which prevents her from declaring her love for Jason unreservedly:

Médée est votre Epouse, et des noeuds si puissans  
Mettent un frein trop juste à mes vœux innocens. 175-6

Upon which Jason asks:

Dés demain, dès ce jour faut-il briser ses chaînes? 181

Créon sees Jason as hamstrung by his marriage and strongly expresses his disapproval of the connection with Médée. With unconscious irony he counsels Jason to break away. Créon does not understand that Jason is inextricably linked to Médée.

Rompez avec éclat le charme qui vous lie:  
Expiez un hymen qui tache votre vie.  
Assez et trop long-temps, ses liens mal tissus,  
Ternissent votre gloire, et souillent vos vertus.  
Assez et trop long-tems avec douleur la Grece,  
Voit gemir sous le joug de cette Enchanteresse  
Le plus grand des Heros qu'elle conçût jamais.  
Séparez vos vertus d'elle et de ses forfaits. 233-40

Médée in her despair at her disintegrating marriage likewise refers to Jason's attempt at breaking the bond between them:

Que dis-je, Epouse! hélas! pour nous plus d'hymenée;  
L'Ingrat en romp les noeuds. 278-9

Later she prays:

Amour, daigne amollir l'ingrat en ma faveur;  
Remets-le dans mes fers . . . 488-9

However, when Médée is defying Créon she proclaims:

De quel droit osez-vous separer nos fortunes?  
Même sort nous est dû; nos causes sont communes. 453-4

In reminding Jason of his obligations towards her she says:

Ta vie est un tissu des bien-faits de Médée. 549

With these and other instances of the use of this metaphor (e.g. 567 "ses sacrez noeuds") Médée insists on the indissoluble bonds which unite her to Jason. This chaining is expressed in a concrete way when Jason is immobilized by Médée's magic:

Je me sens retenu par une étroite chaîne.  
Je demeure immobile, et malgré mes efforts  
Le pouvoir de son art s'oppose à mes transports. 1274-6

So it is forcibly brought home to Jason that he cannot ignore or wish away the bond with Médée. This bond was the only obstacle to what he regarded as complete happiness. The shocking violence with which Médée destroys part of the bond, namely the children, is also captured in this metaphor:

J'ai dû finir leurs maux, j'ai dû les prevenir;  
Te délivrer d'un joug que ton esprit abhorre;  
Rompre ces derniers noeuds qui nous serroient encore;  
Et pour mieux t'oublier, effacer sans retour  
Jusqu'aux traces, Ingrat, de nôtre affreux amour. 1316-20

These instances are not an exhaustive catalogue of the occurrences of this metaphor in the drama. The image is further elaborated by references to the bonds uniting Médée to her children and her desire to protect the children from falling under the yoke of strangers. The metaphor extends throughout the



tragedy, and together with other images, e.g. light, fire, charms, is responsible for throwing certain themes into relief.

The language of the drama is simple and clear throughout. Even learned allusions in scenes which Longepierre based on his Roman predecessor are kept to a minimum (cf. II 1, II 3, II 5, IV 1, IV 2). It is notable that in keeping with his statement that he took great pains with his choice of language and expression,<sup>15</sup> Longepierre has succeeded in eschewing vulgarisms and in achieving an elevated tone which, with the exception of some awkward expressions, is well maintained. If Longepierre lacks Corneille's flamboyance, he also lacks his spectacular lapses.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from the tragedy as well as from Longepierre's preface that his purpose in composing the drama was primarily literary. He believed that Corneille had vulgarized the Medea theme, "ce grand genie qui s'est fait admirer depuis, ne s'estoit pas encore entierement developpé".<sup>16</sup> In line with his great admiration for Greek and Latin tragedy he wanted to attempt a worthy dramatic treatment of the Medea myth in the style of his period. Lancaster remarks that Longepierre had the advantage of composing his work after the technique of classical French tragedy had been thoroughly established.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately Longepierre also had Corneille's treatment of the Medea legend as an example, and, however much he would have protested against the reproach, it must be said that the weakest features of his tragedy are imitations of features of Corneille's *Médée*. Nevertheless, the interest of Longepierre's version lies in the attempt of a lover of classical literature to make the tragedy of Medea available to his contemporaries in a less exuberant

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15 *Loc. cit.* 29.

16 *Loc. cit.* 31.

17 *Op. cit.* 358.

form than that of Corneille. It is a sad truth that he had everything of Racine but his genius.

Although Longepierre's version of the tragedy of Medea did not have any imitators, his *Médée* contains some interesting features, not least his attempt to make the action of the characters psychologically more plausible. Both Jason and Créuse have considerably more depth than their counterparts in Corneille. *Médée* too has regained more credibility as a woman although the fairy tale witch aspect still remains. Significant, too, is the highlighting of the indivisibility of the couple Medea-Jason, here portrayed by the metaphor of bonds. The indissoluble couple prefigures one of the central aspects of Jean Anouilh's drama.

In spite of Longepierre's borrowings from the tragedies of Euripides, Seneca and Corneille, his treatment bears his own stamp.

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CHAPTER 5  
JEAN ANOUILH'S *MÉDÉE*  
"Jason-Médée! Cela ne se séparera plus" (373)

BACKGROUND

While Jean Anouilh's *Médée* (published in 1946, but first performed in 1953) represents a return to the Latin drama of Seneca in some respects, the most striking impression is the radical reinterpretation it offers of the relationship between Medea and Jason.

Anouilh, one of the most accomplished and popular playwrights of the French theatre this century, was born in Bordeaux in 1910. Early attempts at studying law were abandoned when Anouilh's first play *L'Hermine* was successfully produced in Paris in 1932. From this time onwards Anouilh devoted his life to writing for the theatre.

He was already an experienced dramatist when his first play based on Greek myth, *Eurydice*, was staged in 1941. The transposition of classical material into a modern form (i.a. modern dress) was repeated with Anouilh's *Antigone*, based on the tragedy of Sophocles with the same name. *Antigone* was written in 1942 but first produced in 1944. *Médée*, which was written during this period, was published together with *Antigone* and two other plays as *Nouvelles Pièces Noires*<sup>1</sup> in 1946. Anouilh's abiding fascination with extracting modern plays with themes relevant to contemporary man from ancient sources led to *Tu étais si gentil quand tu étais petit* (1972) which is based on the Orestes myth.

Anouilh's dramatic exploitation of ancient Greek myth is however not an isolated phenomenon in the modern French theatre. He was preceded (and inspired) by elder contemporaries such as Giraudoux (*Amphitryon 38* (1929), *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (1935), *Électre* (1937)), and Cocteau (*Orphée*

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1 Jean Anouilh *Nouvelles Pièces Noires* 1961. All references to and quotations from the *Médée* refer to this volume.

(1926), *La Machine Infernale* (1934) - the Oedipus myth). In 1943 Jean-Paul Sartre used the story of Orestes to express his existentialist philosophy in the drama called *Les Mouches*. It falls outside the scope of this thesis to attempt to account fully for the modern French resurgence of interest in Greek myth as a source for drama,<sup>2</sup> but at least a partial explanation is provided in T.S. Eliot's words on the use of myth by James Joyce: "It is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."<sup>3</sup> This judgement may be applied to Giraudoux's *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* which anticipated the start of the Second World War. Furthermore it has become a commonplace among critics that only their classical camouflage made it possible for *Antigone* and *Les Mouches* to be performed during the German occupation. This latter condition does not apply to Anouilh's *Médée* which was only performed after the war, but many of the contemporary themes which were raised by Anouilh's earlier dramas recur.

Anouilh's *Médée* does not enjoy as high a reputation among critics as his *Antigone*. Freeman ascribes the initial failure of the play (only 32 performances) to the inadequacy of the leading actress.<sup>4</sup> She replaced Anouilh's first wife, Monelle Valentin, who had played the heroines in his earlier plays but had now fallen ill. In spite of its failure in the theatre this *Médée* is nevertheless of particular interest to scholars because of Anouilh's original treatment of the elements of the Medea drama which had become accepted as traditional.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF ANOUILH'S *MÉDÉE*

Although Anouilh's *Médée*, like all other dramas based on this part of the myth, ultimately depends upon the version of Euripides, he has primarily made use of

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2 See, for example, the introduction of E. Freeman in *Jean Anouilh Eurydice Médée* ed. E. Freeman 1984 vii-xlvi, and P.J. Conradi *The Treatment of Greek Myths in Modern French Drama* 1963.

3 T.S. Eliot "Ulysses, order and myth", *The Dial* Nov. 1923, quoted by E. Freeman *op. cit.* xiv.

4 *Loc. cit.* 210 note 27.

the *Medea* of Seneca for the structure of his drama. A number of scholars have pointed out Anouilh's debt to Seneca,<sup>5</sup> while others stress the influence of Euripides.<sup>6</sup> It will be shown below that, perhaps contrary to expectation, Anouilh preferred the simpler and shorter plot of the Roman dramatist.

Médée's alliance with Aegeus is completely omitted and, as in Seneca, the two sons are to stay with Jason. Jason's new bride is not called Glauke but Créuse, as in Corneille and Longepierre who also gallicized the Latin Creusa. Anouilh follows the ancient tragedians in not making Médée's rival a *dramatis persona*. Anouilh thus has as characters Médée, her nurse, Créon, Jason and a boy who acts as messenger. There is no chorus (in *Eurydice* and *Antigone* Anouilh employs one) and the children do not have speaking parts. Anouilh takes over the most important scenes from the Senecan drama: the scene between Médée and her nurse, the scene between Créon and Médée, and the central Médée-Jason scene. The emphases are totally different from those highlighted by Seneca. The focus of the classical authors on the passion of Médée, her jealous rage, its development and destructive force, has been widened to the conflict between Médée and Jason and the complex marriage relationship. Euripides, Seneca and most other dramatists portray the dissolution of the marriage as occurring in Corinth because of Jason's wish to marry the local princess. In Anouilh's version Jason's new marriage is not the decisive factor in breaking his attachment to Médée, but only the last symptom of an unbearable tension which has been building up between them for years.

The action of Anouilh's drama takes place without an interval or division into acts. The duration of the action is from the evening to the dawn of the next day. The setting of the play differs from that of its predecessors. Médée is depicted as a gypsy squatting in front of her caravan outside the town.

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5 E.g. John C. Lapp "Anouilh's *Médée*: A Debt to Seneca" in *Modern Language Notes* 69 (1954) 183-7; Christiane Wanke "Die französische Literatur" in *Der Einfluß Senecas auf das Europäische Drama* 1978 221-6; and C. Rambaux "Le mythe de Médée d'Euripide à Anouilh ou l'originalité psychologique de la Médée de Sénèque" *Latomus* 31 (1972) 1010-36.

6 P.J. Conradie *op. cit.* 45-51, and to a lesser extent Kurt von Fritz, "Die Entwicklung der Iason-Medeasage und die Medea des Euripides" 424-9, who also emphasizes parallels between the treatments of Grillparzer and Anouilh. These are not always convincing.

Thus, at a stroke Anouilh indicates to his audience Médée's status as an outsider. It is an example of his effective use of anachronism.

The first scene combines the opening monologue of Seneca's *Médée* and the scene between Médée and the Nurse. The device of the wedding hymn signalling Jason's perfidy has been adapted to a background of revelry and festive noise while Médée and the Nurse squat over their fire. Médée's feeling of exclusion culminates in certainty of Jason's betrayal with the arrival of a boy sent by Jason to announce that he is marrying Créuse the next day. Médée's reaction is vividly evoked by Anouilh's adaptation of Seneca's image "parta iam, parta ultio est: peperit" (25-6) to a metaphor of Médée giving birth to hatred:<sup>7</sup> "Nourrice, nourrice, je suis grosse ce soir. J'ai mal et j'ai peur comme lorsque tu m'aidais à me tirer un petit de mon ventre . . . J'ai quelque chose à mettre au monde encore cette nuit, quelque chose de plus gros, de plus vivant que moi et je ne sais pas si je vais être assez forte . . ." (359). After receiving confirmation of Jason's intentions Médée cries ". . . [J]e suis délivrée . . ." (361), giving the participle the meaning both of freedom from her bond to Jason and having given birth. Her next words to the Nurse are: "Laisse femme! Je n'ai plus besoin de tes mains. Mon enfant est venu tout seul. Et c'est une fille, cette fois. O ma haine! Comme tu es neuve . . . Comme tu es douce, comme tu sens bon. Petite fille noire, voilà que je n'ai plus que toi au monde à aimer" (362). The sinister force and dramatic irony of this image are manifest.

In reflecting on her relationship with Jason, Médée recounts the background to the play. (This is a far subtler technique than that of the confidant

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7 According to Kleinhardt, *op. cit.* 149, and Wanke, *loc. cit.* 221, Anouilh may possibly have found inspiration for this image in Léon Herrmann's translation of Seneca's *Medea: Sénèque Tragédies* v. I. ed. and trans. L. Herrmann 1961 133-74. He often renders the Latin *ira* as *haine*. This is a plausible suggestion as Anouilh undoubtedly made considerable use of Herrmann's translation (see fnnt 8 below and the section on Anouilh's literary style in this chapter). Some examples of the rendering of *ira* as *haine* are:

"nullum scelus irata feci" (135-6) - "Pourtant aucun de mes crimes ne fut commis par haine".

"regalis ira" (473) - "la haine du roi".

"ira concitum pectus" (506) - "ton âme qu'excite la haine".

"ira discessit loco" (927) - "Ma haine m'a quittée".

used by Corneille and Longepierre.) The intensity of the sexual relationship between her and Jason is emphasized. Euripides' Medea cursed fate for having created her a woman. Anouilh's *Médée* protests against woman's helpless dependence upon the male, particularly as regards the physical relationship between the sexes:

Amputée! . . . O soleil, si c'est vrai que je viens de toi,  
pourquoi m'as-tu faite amputée? Pourquoi m'as-tu faite  
une fille? Pourquoi ces seins, cette faiblesse, cette plaie  
ouverte au milieu de moi? N'aurait-il pas été beau le  
garçon Médée? N'aurait-il pas été fort? Le corps dur  
comme la pierre, fait pour prendre et partir après, ferme,  
intact, entier, lui!

363

*Médée*'s as yet unformed plans of vengeance are in contrast to the Nurse's obsession with practical details. The Nurse tries to restrain *Médée* in her outbursts which threaten blood and destruction. The attempt to bring her mistress back to the realities of the situation merely prompts her to assert a boundless confidence in her own power. *Médée* further draws a brutal distinction between herself and ordinary people, like the Nurse, who are attached to the very simple objects of everyday life. Then Créon arrives on the scene.

He introduces himself to *Médée* and bluntly informs her that she has to leave because of her reputation which is causing alarm. Créon does not mention the proposed marriage until *Médée* leaves him no choice but to reveal that it is to take place the next day. *Médée* forces him to admit that it would be the best policy for him to have her executed. At first Créon gives as excuse that Jason has interceded for her life, but finally he discloses that he has grown weary of shedding blood. Anouilh has shifted the emphasis from a king who fears Medea, to a *Médée* who actively menaces the king with the harm she will cause without provoking the reaction expected from a resolute ruler. It is as if *Médée* is challenging Créon to prove that, like her, he belongs to the group of those who act, but the fact that this could entail her execution hints that she may already be nursing a death wish. The scene ends, like Seneca's, with *Médée* obtaining a postponement of her departure, in order to allow her children an undisturbed night and to take leave of them in the morning.

After Créon's departure Médée makes it clear that she will not leave without exacting retribution. She instructs the Nurse to prepare for departure within the hour. As she utters the words, "Nous serons parties dans une heure" (375), Jason appears and asks: "Où vas-tu?" This is a good example of the fluidity with which Anouilh manages the transition from one scene to the next. Furthermore he has here made good use of Senecan material, more precisely of Léon Herrmann's translation of Seneca's *Medea*. Médée's reply, "Je fuis, Jason! Je fuis. Il n'est pas nouveau pour moi de changer de séjour. C'est la cause de ma fuite qui est nouvelle, car jusqu'ici c'est pour toi que j'ai fui" (375),<sup>8</sup> is identical with Herrmann's translation of Medea's first words to Jason in their encounter. Only the word "jusqu'ici" has been transposed to lend more emphasis to "c'est pour toi".

Apart from the initial echo of Seneca the rest of the scene develops very differently from that of the Roman dramatist. Where Medea's words are just the first cries of a long monologue (of 42 lines) in which many other aspects of Jason's debt to Medea are contained, Anouilh's Jason immediately addresses Médée and steers the conversation in a different direction (it is a conversation and not styled as a public debate). This intense, intimate, brutally honest dialogue is the central and most important scene of Anouilh's drama. It contains the history of the couple Médée-Jason and the explanation for Médée's subsequent action is to be found here too. The scene is long, 24 of the total of 44 pages for the entire play, and would therefore occupy at least half of the production time. Here Anouilh very subtly interprets the Médée-Jason story as that of an inseparable couple.

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8 Herrmann's translation of Sen. *Med.* 447-9:

Fugimus, Jason: fugimus - hoc non est novum,  
mutare sedes; causa fugiendi nova est:  
pro te solebam fugere.

W. Kleinhardt *op. cit.* at 99 notes that Anouilh took over certain passages word for word from Herrmann's translation, but adds: "Diese Adaptation ehrt die gelungene Übersetzung Herrmanns und schmälert die Leistung Anouilhs in keiner Weise." A study of the relevant passages makes it clear that Anouilh has successfully integrated them into his drama. Anouilh's practice in this regard does, however, strengthen the argument that he used Seneca's *Medea*, even probably Herrmann's French translation of the Latin tragedy, as his principal source of inspiration. See also *Style* in this chapter.



Jason and Médée reveal a rich range of feelings towards each other, from tenderness to love and ultimately to indifference on Jason's part and hatred on Médée's. Anouilh's originality lies especially in the Jason he has created. For the first time a Médée is confronted with a Jason who is self-confident enough to expound his feelings and the reasons for his decision fully, without taking refuge in hypocrisy or bluster. This Jason has faced up to the fact that he no longer wishes to share Médée's life of hazardous adventure and says so openly, without using as pretexts arguments about Médée's own interests or the welfare of their children. Jason's proud claim in the earlier dramas that he recompensed Medea for her past help to him by interceding for her life with Créon is used by Anouilh in a new way. Médée regards this fact told her by Créon as a sign that Jason still cares for her. Jason quenches this spark of hope by stressing that it was because of their past love that he wished to spare her, but now he desires only peace and to forget. This attitude lies at the centre of the conflict in Anouilh's couple - Jason has succeeded in going through hatred to indifference and is therefore able to sever the bond with Médée by rejecting her and marrying another and then forgetting Médée and his past. Médée understands what he envisages but is determined that he shall not achieve this new life, as she cannot free herself from her involvement with Jason. Even his hatred, even her death at his instigation would be preferable because it would show that she still played a role in his life as he dominated her existence:

Ce dialogue que tu as commencé avec elle, tu ne le termineras qu'avec ta mort maintenant. Après les mots de la tendresse et de l'amour, ç'aura été les insultes et les scènes, c'est la haine, à présent, soit, mais c'est toujours avec Médée que tu parles. Le monde est Médée pour toi, à jamais.

379-80

Another innovation by Anouilh is that Médée reveals that she has made earlier attempts to cut herself loose from Jason, first with a shepherd on Naxos and then with other men, but she found, and still finds it impossible to drive Jason from her thoughts. Seen from Médée's perspective the nature of the bond has thus acquired a new complexity. Médée too wants to be free. Her desire to punish Jason stems from her rage and hatred that he has achieved what she herself has tried and failed to accomplish. Jason does not love the princess he is to marry, but hopes that with her he will find peace. By

breaking with Médée, Jason is signalling acceptance of an ordinary existence removed from Médée's way of life which Jason describes as one of crime and adventure: ". . . ton monde noir, ton audace, ta révolte, ta connivence, avec l'horreur et la mort, ta rage de tout détruire" (388). He longs for relief from this disorder and tells Médée that he does not expect to attain anything which she would regard as worth striving for, but only happiness: "le bonheur, le pauvre bonheur" (390). Jason has freed himself from the world of Médée and parts from her with the words: "Je ne peux pas dire: sois heureuse . . . Sois toi-même" (391). His departure brings home to Médée that Jason is irrevocably lost. The couple has been broken up because he has changed and she is incapable of accepting change and changing herself. There are two brief moments of suspense when Médée first offers to try again with Jason, but he rejects it as an impossibility, and then tries to call Jason back but he is too far away to respond.

This instant of seeming indecision is followed by a return to brisk resolution. Médée calls the Nurse and instructs her to wake the children and dress them in their best to carry her wedding gift to the princess. The motif of the poisoned veil and crown is introduced without lengthy description and their deadly magic only suggested by Médée's instruction that the children should not open the chest. Anouilh eschews lengthy accounts of the preparation of the gifts as in Seneca and Corneille or of its effects as in Euripides, Corneille and Longepierre, to concentrate on the battle raging within Médée.

In a long monologue Médée celebrates her union with the powers of evil. This surrender to "mal" is vividly evoked by the image of evil as a beast coupling with Médée. Having lost Jason as a partner she now gives herself over to evil: "Je vis enfin! Je souffre et je nais. Ce sont mes noces. C'est pour cette nuit d'amour avec toi que j'ai vécu" (393). Médée identifies with beasts of prey who kill indiscriminately.

The Nurse interrupts this orgy of verbal destruction with the news of the ravages caused in the town by Médée's gift. She is followed by the boy who reports succinctly: "Tout est perdu! La royauté, l'État sont tombés. Le roi et

sa fille sont morts" (394).<sup>9</sup> At Médée's request a short account of the disaster is given. She is also advised to flee at once since she is suspected of having caused the catastrophe. Médée refuses to heed this advice and, on the contrary, instructs the Nurse to kill the horse and set fire to the caravan. She even tries to kill the Nurse who flees crying that she wants to live.

Then the children enter. So far they have played a very small part in the drama. They were mentioned as motivation for Médée's delay in departing, but Anouilh has not made concern for their future or about their immediate fate a part of the preoccupations of Médée or Jason. Médée addresses them seemingly tenderly but her words have an ambiguous undertone: "Vous avez peur? Tous ces gens qui courent et qui hurlent; ces cloches . . . Tout va se taire" (395). The calm of this scene, outwardly the touching embrace of a mother and her children, but in dramatic terms laden with almost unbearable tension, is ruptured by a sudden shout from Médée. She confesses that she has never had any opportunity to pursue happiness, innocence, faith and loyalty because she has been chosen by the gods as their victim. Therefore she is compelled to kill in herself the innocent she would have liked to be and also her children who are part of her: "J'ai l'innocence à égorger encore dans cette petite fille qui aurait tant voulu et dans ces deux petits morceaux tièdes de moi. Ils attendent ce sang, là-haut, ils n'en peuvent plus, de l'attendre!" (396-7). Now it is evident that the fate of the children is sealed but the full implication of slaughtering "the innocence of the little girl" is yet to be realized.

When Médée and the children are in the caravan the Nurse returns. In spite of her fear of Médée her loyalty forces her to warn her mistress that the pursuers are near. Her dramatic entry is met by an even more spectacular sight. Flames have begun to lick round the caravan. The action becomes more frenetic as Jason storms in accompanied by armed men. His first thought is to arrest Médée, his second for the safety of the children. Médée triumphantly proclaims from the burning caravan that she has butchered them and intends to kill herself too. In ringing tones she echoes the claim of Seneca's heroine: "Désormais j'ai recouvré mon sceptre; mon frère, mon père et la toison du

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9 Cf. Herrmann's translation of Sen. *Med.* 879-80: "Tout est perdu: la royauté, l'État sont tombés. La fille du roi et son père sont morts, réduits ensemble en cendres!"

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bélier d'or est rendue à la Colchide: j'ai retrouvé ma patrie et la virginité que tu m'avais ravies!" (397).<sup>10</sup>

Anouilh's heroine is however mistaken in her belief that by killing herself she is punishing Jason. Ironically her scrupulous care to eliminate every trace of herself ("qu'il ne reste rien de Médée tout à l'heure" (395)) because she is certain that her memory will live in his mind, is taken up by Jason: "Qu'un de vous garde autour du feu jusqu'à ce qu'il n'y ait plus que des cendres, jusqu'à ce que le dernier os de Médée soit brûlé" (398). Jason shows no signs of hesitation. He is confident that he will forget Médée. Her triumph is an illusion. Jason shows in his final words that he has the conviction to face up to "normal" life without illusions: "Il faut vivre maintenant, assurer l'ordre, donner des lois à Corinthe et rebâtir sans illusions un monde à notre mesure pour y attendre de mourir" (398). Jason does not draw sustenance from any idealism, but pragmatically accepts that life in an ordered society is the best part of man's fate.

Anouilh has thus radically reinterpreted the end of the drama. Instead of suffering an inner conflict about killing the children Médée acts with relentless determination. The real struggle was about the continued existence of the couple Médée-Jason. When Médée loses that struggle she acts true to her philosophy of "crime and adventure" in the conviction that Jason will be unforgettably affected by her act. Jason, however, is not stricken like his counterpart in Seneca, but proves that he has the resolution to carry out his design of seeking an ordinary life.

Unlike Anouilh's earlier heroines who abandoned life because their quest for purity was fruitless, Médée is concerned not with purity but only with revolt and action. She therefore represents anarchy rather than any positive principle. How self-deluding her triumph is, is pointed up by her fiery destruction in the caravan (which makes a shrill contrast with the traditional flight in a dragon-drawn chariot) while her ancestor the Sun, indifferent to her fate, heralds the dawn of a new day.

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10 This is word for word the translation of Herrmann of *Sen. Med.* 982-4; except "ma patrie" for "la patrie" which makes the claim even more personal.

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The play ends with an exchange of remarks by the Nurse and the guard. The sheer banality of their words is an anticlimax after the furious emotions of Médée's death scene. This representation of ordinary people continuing their daily tasks and pleasures is perhaps too facile an end to the drama. Their refusal to look for anything below the surface of everyday life risks the comment that their "bonheur" is indeed a "pauvre bonheur".

### THE PORTRAYAL OF MÉDÉE

Anouilh's emphasis on the theme of Médée and Jason as an inseparable couple entails considerable changes to the character of Médée. She is more of a woman, but less of a mother, more of an outsider, but less of a witch. It is, however, not easy to categorize this protagonist, for she is above all herself: Médée. Like her predecessors since Seneca's Medea, she consciously assumes the role of Medea, and Anouilh has his own conception of what this entails.

The first characteristic of Médée to be shown is an antipathy to happiness: "Le bonheur. Il rôde" (355); "Cela pue le bonheur, jusque sur cette lande" (357). This misanthropic attitude is emphasized by the contrast it forms with the Nurse's enjoyment of and interest in the affairs of others. Later it becomes apparent that Médée's aversion to "bonheur" makes a reconciliation with Jason impossible because his quest is precisely for "bonheur" (e.g. 390). Another aspect of Médée's misanthropy is her portrayal as a stranger, a gypsy and an evil-doer. She sees herself as a stranger, e.g. "Je hais leurs fêtes. Je hais leur joie"<sup>11</sup> (355) and knows that the townspeople regard her as a typical gypsy, therefore a thief: "Ils avaient peur que nous leur volions leurs poules, la nuit" (357). Créon underlines that Jason is "de chez nous" (373) while Médée is a foreigner, a barbarian. The supernatural side of Médée is underplayed by Anouilh. The effects of her magic powers are evident in the deaths of Créon and his daughter, but for the rest events are explicable in a rational way. This dominance of logically understandable events is reminiscent of Euripides'

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11 My emphasis.

tragedy, where everything, except the poisoned robe and the dragon-chariot is rationally explicable. Corneille and Longepierre strongly stress the witch-like characteristics of Médée, but with Anouilh, instead of her being a sorceress, there clings to her the aura of the witch of children's stories, e.g. Créon: "Ton histoire est venue jusqu'à moi. Tes crimes sont connus ici. Le soir, comme dans toutes les îles de cette côte, les femmes les racontent aux enfants pour leur faire peur" (368).

Médée has her own classification of people into two groups which she calls "races".<sup>12</sup> Those of her "race" share her passion for a life of crime and adventure where everything is permitted, but the other "race" want calm and security. In the course of the drama the Nurse who expresses her desire to go on living (367) is the first to be classified by Médée as belonging to a "race" separate from her own. This group attaches importance to the petty details of everyday life: "A ta vaisselle, vieille, à ton balai, à tes épiluchures, avec les autres de ta race. Le jeu que nous jouons n'est pas pour vous" (367). In her confrontation with Créon Médée starts with the assumption that he, as king, will share her view of a life of action without regrets: "Je suis de ta race. De la race de ceux qui jugent et qui décident, sans revenir après et sans remords . . ." (371). By his attitude, however, he reveals that he has grown old and no longer has the strength of conviction to act unscrupulously. Médée therefore contemptuously dismisses him as being good for nothing more than cultivating his vineyard. By implication he no longer belongs to her "race".

The struggle to retain Jason is also an attempt to keep him attached to her philosophy of a life of adventure. When Médée realizes that it is not a mere possibility but a fact that Jason has opted for the other "race" she exclaims: "Race d'Abel, race des justes, race des riches, comme vous parlez tranquillement. C'est bon, n'est-ce pas, d'avoir le ciel pour soi et aussi les

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12 This classification accords with Anouilh's depiction of the two worlds inhabited by his characters. In *Eurydice*, for instance, the heroine accepts the harsh realities of life and the necessity to compromise, but Orphée's idealistic insistence on the need for absolute honesty leads to the demise of both. Créon in the *Antigone* is, like Jason in the *Médée*, under no illusion that one has to blind oneself to the full absurdity of life in order to play the human role. He is, however, prepared to do so, while Antigone cannot accept a life without absolute purity and therefore chooses death, like Médée.

gendarmes" (389). It is Médée's commitment to the exacting code of conduct she has adopted, which prevents her from changing like Jason.

One aspect of this relentless pursuit of her own ends is well illustrated by the use of images from the world of animals. The Nurse refers to Médée as "ma chatte" (357) but also as "mon aigle fière, mon petit vautour . . ." (361); "ma louve" (363); "ma louve, tu te vengeras, mon vautour" (366). Médée herself, in a moment of self-loathing, likens herself to a bitch on heat in her sexual relationship with Jason (362-3). The dehumanizing force of these images culminates in the erotic vision of herself as a beast coupling with evil in the form of a beast of prey (393). The effect of the animal imagery is to render Médée inhuman rather than superhuman. This facet of her character makes her unreceptive to rational argument as is apparent in Jason's observation: "Tu as l'air d'une petite bête éventrée qui se débat empêtrée dans ses tripes et qui baisse encore la tête pour attaquer" (383). That Médée herself is sometimes conscious of this flaw emerges from the startlingly moving soliloquy where she reveals that in her there could also have existed a Médée who loved happiness, innocence, faith, purity and tenderness.

Mais Médée innocente a été choisie pour être la proie et le lieu de la lutte . . . D'autres plus frêles ou plus médiocres peuvent glisser à travers les mailles du filet jusqu'aux eaux calmes ou à la vase; le fretin, les dieux les abandonnent. Médée, elle, était un trop beau gibier dans le piège: elle y reste. Ce n'est pas tous les jours qu'ils ont cette aubaine les dieux, une âme assez forte pour leurs rencontres, leurs sales jeux. Ils m'ont tout mis sur le dos et ils me regardent me débattre. Regarde avec eux, Jason, les derniers sursauts de Médée.

396

This remarkable speech occurs when Médée is alone on stage with the children. It is thus not meant to explain and excuse her conduct to Jason or one of the other characters, but purely to shed light on the Médée figure. It implies that she wants Jason to see her only as a figure of strength. This confession would have served admirably to refute one of Jason's harshest attacks on her (382) to which she only retorts "Tant mieux" and absolutely refuses to accept any pity. At the same time the image of Médée trapped in the snare of the gods, draws the animal images together and sheds an ironic light on them. According to this revelation Médée sees herself as playing a predetermined role. She is

helpless to alter the destiny the gods have in store for her: "Je veux, je veux, en cette seconde encore, aussi fort que lorsque j'étais petite, que tout soit lumière et bonté!" (396). This side of her personality is not shown to any of the other characters in the play. This demonstrates that she wants to play the role which has been assigned her by the gods as convincingly as possible.

The assumption of this role runs throughout the drama. Continuous references to it, as well as Médée's frequent use of the third person when expressing her own thoughts vary the tension between the real Médée and the role of Médée:

Mais c'est fini ce soir, nourrice, je suis redevenue Médée.  
Comme c'est bon; 363

Jason, tu l'avais endormie et voilà que Médée s'éveille!; 364

Qu'est-ce que je ne peux pas, bonne femme? Je suis  
Médée, toute seule, abandonnée devant cette roulotte; au  
bord de cette mer étrangère, chassée, honnie, haïe, mais  
rien n'est trop pour moi! 365

To Créon:

Regarde-moi dans les yeux et reconnais-moi. Je suis  
Médée. 371

To Jason:

Tu ne serais jamais délivré, Jason! Médée sera toujours ta  
femme! 377

Tu as déjà tué Médée aujourd'hui, tu le sais bien. Médée  
est morte. 379

Morte ou vivante, Médée est là devant ta joie et ta paix,  
montant la garde. Ce dialogue que tu as commencé avec  
elle, tu ne le termineras qu'avec ta mort maintenant. 379-80

Je suis Médée: Je suis Médée, tu te trompes! Médée qui  
ne t'as rien donné, jamais, que de la honte. 384



Jason's farewell words to her after their long dialogue are:

Adieu, Médée. Je ne peux pas te dire: sois heureuse . . .  
Sois toi-même.

391

Médée starts her invocation of evil:

C'est maintenant, Médée, qu'il faut être toi-même . . .

and this monologue ends:

Tout ce qui chasse et tue cette nuit est Médée!

393

Her last words in the drama are:

Je suis Médée, enfin, pour toujours! Regarde-moi avant de  
rester seul dans ce monde raisonnable, regarde-moi bien,  
Jason? Je t'ai touché avec ces deux mains-là, je les ai  
posées sur ton front brûlant pour qu'elles soient fraîches  
et d'autres fois brûlantes sur ta peau. Je t'ai fait pleurer,  
je t'ai fait aimer. Regarde-les, ton petit frère et ta  
femme, c'est moi. C'est moi! C'est l'horrible Médée! Et  
essaie maintenant de l'oublier!

397-8

Then Médée stabs herself in the belief that she is attaining a kind of sinister apotheosis, at least in the mind of Jason. This gesture replaces the literal demonstration of supernatural triumph in the dramas where she escapes in a dragon-drawn chariot. The reaction of Jason shows the ironic truth - that Médée has become her role and that once she has played it out, player and role disappear together with nothing real left for Jason to remember. He has made the rational choice to discount everything but the immediate practicalities of day to day existence.

It was this choice of Jason which precipitated the crisis in the play. Médée's view that - in spite of the lack of conjugal fidelity, in spite of the death of their love for each other, in spite of the lack of mutual sexual interest, in spite of their hatred of each other - they still belong together is evident throughout the play. To Créon she says: "[I]l [Jason] sait que son nom et le mien sont liés ensemble pour les siècles. Jason-Médée! Cela ne se

séparera plus. Chasse-moi; tue-moi, c'est pareil" (372). Despite this statement she fears, from the opening of the play, that Jason intends abandoning her, and therefore her references to her past inevitably end with the words "mais pas seule" (358). Her appeal to Créon reiterates her need and right to have Jason with her: "Ne me laisse pas partir seule . . . Je n'étais pas seule quand je suis venue" (372).

Médée's hatred for Jason because of his break with her is, paradoxically, intensified by her own failure to break with him. For her: ". . . [C]e monde comprend et Jason et Médée, et il faut bien le prendre comme il est" (376). She is incapable of visualizing an existence without Jason and therefore believes that he too is unable to make that leap of the imagination: "Tu as donc pu imaginer un monde sans moi, toi?" (389). Her erroneous belief that Jason suffers a reciprocal absolute necessity to continue the relationship with her, gives her the motivation to kill herself in the persuasion that thoughts of her will continue to haunt him. In this delusion lies her tragedy. She is a Médée obsessed by her own view of reality and that subjective view is demonstrated to be false.

## JASON

Anouilh's Jason, the other half of the couple, has more stature than any of his predecessors. His honesty and self-confidence mark him out as a new incarnation of the Jason figure. Throughout the long dialogue with Médée, Jason courteously but firmly pursues his policy of trying to convince Médée that his decision is irrevocable. Even when she tries to provoke him into emotional responses by insults and coarse language, he replies with moderation; e.g.

M : Heureux Jason délivré de Médée! C'est ton amour soudain  
pour cette petite oie de Corinthe, sa jeune odeur aigre, ses  
genoux serrés de pucelle qui t'ont délivré?

N : Non.

376-7

The first part of their dialogue is marked by emotional outbursts from Médée and measured responses from Jason. When they go back over their past

together Jason reveals that Médée was the first to make herself guilty of infidelity. Even here Jason has succeeded in conquering his emotions. The hatred which he once felt for her has been left behind and now he pities her for her limited view of life: "J'ai pitié de toi, Médée, qui ne connais que toi, qui ne peux donner que pour prendre, j'ai pitié de toi attachée pour toujours à toi-même, entourée d'un monde vu par toi . . ." (382-3). When Médée reacts with furious scorn to his pity and claims all the basest attributes of the Médée role, Jason in his turn self-confidently and with a degree of detachment expounds the full role he played in their story:

Ces conflits insolubles se dénouent, comme les autres, et  
quelqu'un sait sans doute déjà comment tout cela finira.  
Je ne peux rien empêcher. Tout juste jouer le rôle qui  
m'est dévolu, depuis toujours. Mais ce que je peux, c'est  
tout dire, une fois. Les mots ne sont rien, mais il faut  
qu'ils soient dits tout de même. Et si je dois être, ce soir,  
au nombre des morts de cette histoire, je veux mourir lavé  
de mes mots . . .

384-5

Jason's tale gives a depth and dimension to the love story which have been lacking hitherto. He discloses that his love for Médée had many facets. He loved her as a man a woman, as a boy his mother, as his very life's necessity. Later his love deepened still further to that of a parent's love and responsibility for his child. Their love was so great that his companions left them. "Le monde est devenu Médée" (386). This was the acme of their love when they knew spiritual and physical contentment together. Afterwards this love lost its strength and mental unfaithfulness was followed by physical infidelity. Suffering, pain and hatred ensued. Jason overcame the hatred because of his realization that Médée's anarchic approach to life is no longer what he wants. He craves order. He does not have great ambitions but "je veux m'arrêter, moi, maintenant, être un homme" (388). He does not propose to try to understand and reconcile the problems and injustices of the world but merely to accept everyday life: "Ces contradictions épouvantables, ces abîmes, ces blessures, je leur réponds maintenant par le geste le plus simple qu'ont inventé les hommes pour vivre: je les écarte" (389).

Jason does not love Créuse. He sees her simplicity and purity as part of the new existence he is planning for himself. He even goes as far as saying that he would have liked Médée to have grown old with him, to have changed

with him, but her refusal makes it impossible. He hopes to achieve "le bonheur, le pauvre bonheur" and qualifies it to Médée as "ce que tu hais le plus au monde, ce qui est le plus loin de toi" (390). Jason therefore has a fully motivated reason for his abandonment of Médée.

Jason is not shown as a concerned father. The welfare of his children plays no part in his aspiration to a new life. The impact of Médée's revenge is calculated to be cumulative; the horrible deaths of Créon and Créuse, and the slaughtering of the children are meant to heighten the fearfulness of Médée. This horror is then to be compounded by the physical destruction of Médée so that her legend will harass Jason until his death. Jason's reaction to the catastrophe proves that his conversion to his new way of life is total: "Oui, je t'oublierai. Oui, je vivrai et malgré la trace sanglante de ton passage à côté de moi, je referai demain avec patience mon pauvre échafaudage d'homme sous l'oeil indifférent des dieux" (398). Jason's readiness to submit to an everyday existence bears a strong resemblance to the pragmatic approach to life of Anouilh's Creon in his *Antigone*.

Because of the strength of Jason's belief in the acceptance of the simple values of everyday life, "Il faut vivre maintenant, assurer l'ordre, donner des lois à Corinthe et rebâtir sans illusions un monde à notre mesure pour y attendre de mourir" (398), he, for the first time emerges triumphant (although the triumph is in a very low key) from the traumatic separation from Médée.

Jason's conclusion, in its acceptance of the human condition, echoes the sentiment of *Candide*, "il faut cultiver notre jardin". In other words the only way in which to combat evil is to strive to make human existence, with all its limitations, more tolerable.<sup>13</sup> It is through this fresh interpretation of the Jason figure that Anouilh has succeeded in giving his play a positive ending.

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13 Freeman *loc. cit.* xlv remarks on the "Camusian" ring Jason gives to this drama of Anouilh. He compares Jason's attitude to the "relativist humanism which Cherea, in Camus's *Caligula*, opposes to the emperor's nihilism", and remarks that his concluding speeches recall *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

### CRÉON AND THE MINOR CHARACTERS

Because of the large emphasis on the Médée-Jason relationship the other characters play a relatively minor role in the drama. Créon is brusque in the initial exchanges with Médée but in the course of their meeting is forced to abandon his intransigent attitude.

He threatens Médée with extradition to the sons of Pélias, but Médée calls his bluff by challenging him to do it at once. This forces him to reveal that he has yielded to Jason's demand that she be allowed to leave. Again Médée challenges his policy. He should know that the only assurance of safety for him and for Corinth is to kill her. Créon is compelled to reveal his weakness. He is tired of bloodshed. Médée thus demonstrates that Créon no longer has the unyielding resolution required by a successful ruler.

Médée's manipulation of Créon is further shown by her appeal to his proven humanity to let Jason depart with her. This request he refuses, but he does allow her the delay she requests in order to take leave of her children in the morning.

Créon's failure to pursue the policy he knows would be best is shown to be an error. According to Médée he has given up the conduct befitting the "race" of rulers. Thus he has rendered himself vulnerable like a "vieux lion", a "vieux crocodile". In contrast, Médée remains true to her code and will show no mercy.

The role of Médée's Nurse is important especially in the antithesis it creates between Médée's view of life and the aspirations of ordinary people. The Nurse is shown to be devoted to Médée in the sense that she cares for her physical and material wellbeing. Her nostalgic references to the happy past in Colchis are not welcome to Médée. The profound differences in the attitudes to life of Médée and the Nurse have been discussed above. One of the notable features of the Nurse is, despite her superficial concern for Médée, her regard for her own welfare. Although she is outwardly sympathetic to Médée she therefore provides no real support to her in her struggle to come to terms with the crisis precipitated by Jason's abandonment. The gulf between Médée and

the Nurse is highlighted by Médée's brutal physical treatment of her. As a dramatic device the dialogue with the Nurse serves to allow Médée to reveal her feelings before the great scene with Jason. Furthermore, as only confidante to Médée, she is instrumental in conveying the fatal poison to Créon and Créuse and unleashing the catastrophe.

A final demarcation of the difference between the "heroic" characters, like Médée, who refuse to accept the compromises of everyday life, and ordinary people, is provided by the matter-of-fact remarks which conclude the drama. Médée's horrific and spectacular end is not part of the ordinary course of events and is therefore dismissed without comment, even by the Nurse who had such a long association with Médée. Her first remark after the suicide is unexpected in its triviality.<sup>14</sup> It indicates a refusal to involve herself, even by means of words, with Médée's deed: "On n'avait plus le temps de m'écouter moi. J'avais pourtant quelque chose à dire. Après la nuit vient le matin et il y a le café à faire et puis les lits" etc., etc. (398). So Médée's act passes unnoticed. The Nurse's litany of household duties approaches the dialogue of the Theatre of the Absurd and emphasizes the divide between Médée's world and the "real" world. For the Nurse and the Guard it is important that life goes on. The weather and the harvest count far more than a search for absolutes.

#### ANOUILH'S LITERARY STYLE

One of the most striking features of the dramas of Jean Anouilh is the bold realism of the mid-twentieth century which resounds in almost every line. The language of his characters is earthier and consciously coarser than that of the characters created by his predecessors who dramatized this myth. Gilbert Highet dismisses Anouilh's *Médée* as a "foul-mouthed Russian gipsy". The rider he adds to this damning judgement, "instead of escaping in sombre triumph at the end, [she] burns in her own caravan like the subject of a cheap 'crime

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14 Cf. the guard in Anouilh's *Antigone*, who shows very little interest or compassion for Antigone who is awaiting execution. Thus Anouilh underlines man's essential solitude.

passionnel",<sup>15</sup> reveals that he has not analysed the drama in depth. *Médée*'s directness of expression is part of her character which seeks no compromise with conventionally accepted behaviour or language.

Jean Anouilh's theatre is not one of verse plays. The poetry of his language is the poetry of everyday speech.<sup>16</sup> Yet, in the *Médée* he has integrated a considerable portion of Herrmann's translation of Seneca's *Medea*<sup>17</sup> into his own dialogue without creating a disturbing dichotomy of style. An examination of some of the passages where Anouilh has made creative use of Herrmann's prose translation provides interesting insights into the stylistic methods of the French dramatist.

At 369 *Médée* informs Créon that she will only return to Colchis if Jason returns with her: "Je retourne à Colchos, mais que celui qui m'en a emmenée m'y ramène." In the similar situation in Seneca's tragedy (197), *Medea* proclaims: "Redeo: qui advexit ferat" which is rendered by Herrmann (somewhat pedantically) as: "Soit, j'y retourne: mais que celui qui m'en a amenée m'y ramène." A single reading suffices to demonstrate that Anouilh has preserved the essence while eliminating the old world, elevated tone of "Soit, j'y retourne", which would fall strangely from his *Médée*'s lips. There are many similar examples. *Médée* still addresses Créon: "Ne me laisse pas partir seule. Rends à l'exilée son navire, rends-lui son compagnon! Je n'étais pas seule quand je suis venue" (372). These lines are Anouilh's transformation of Seneca:

Redde fugienti ratem  
et redde comitem: fugere cur solam iubes?  
Non sola veni.

272-4

translated: "Rends alors à l'exilée son navire; rends-lui son compagnon."

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15 G. Highet *op. cit.* 527.

16 Cf. Pol Vandromme (quoted by Paul Ginestier *Anouilh* 1974 at 212): "Anouilh ne récite pas les répliques, comme beaucoup de ses confrères, il fait danser les mots. Son langage est un ballet qui vire-volte dans un univers tout de suite identifiable, dans la poésie du quotidien."

17 See *ftnt* 8 above.

Pourquoi m'ordonnes-tu de fuir seule? Je n'étais pas seule quand je suis venue." Again Anouilh has subtly edited the text to suit his *Médée*.

Often there is a slight change to more familiar language. So Seneca's "Cur sontes duos distinguis?" (275-6), rendered "Pourquoi fais-tu cette distinction entre deux complices?" by Herrmann, becomes "Pourquoi distinguer maintenant entre nous?" which blends with the conversational style of Anouilh's *Médée*.

There are nevertheless a few instances where Anouilh may be reproached with having followed Herrmann too closely; e.g. "Gagnerai-je le Phase, la Colchide, le royaume paternel, les champs baignés de sang de mon frère? Tu me chasses. Quelles terres m'ordonnes tu de gagner sans toi? Quelles mers libres?" (378). This is a somewhat edited version of the translation of Seneca's *Medea* 451-5:<sup>18</sup> "Gagnerai-je le Phase, la Colchide, le royaume paternel, les champs qui furent baignés du sang de mon frère? Quelles terres m'ordonnes-tu de gagner? Quelles mers m'assignes-tu?" Indisputably there are considerable differences between the elevated diction of these lines and the more frequent ungrammatical or vulgar language used by *Médée*, e.g.: "Pourquoi? Crois-tu qu'un muscle qu'on déchire, une peau qui se fend, ce soit plus?" (379). The few occasions where Anouilh retains the elevated tone and diction seem to be intended to show *Médée* trying to play the tragic role (as in this context) and point to the tension between the real *Médée* and the role of *Médée*.

An example where Anouilh has employed Herrmann's version to a happy effect is: "Moi fuir? Mais si j'étais déjà partie, je reviendrais pour jouer du spectacle" (394). Herrmann: "Moi m'éloigner d'ici? Mais si j'étais déjà partie je reviendrais pour <contempler> ce <spectacle>: je jouis du spectacle de cet hymen nouveau."<sup>19</sup> Very small alterations thus change the lines into realistically acceptable dialogue.

18

Phasin et Colchos petam  
patriumque regnum quaeque fraternus cruor  
perfudit arva? Quas peti terras iubes?  
Quae maria monstras?

19 Sen. *Med.* 893-4:

Egone ut recedam? Si profugissem prius  
ad hoc redirem. Nuptias specto novas.



There are considerable parts of Anouilh's drama which are completely independent of Seneca's tragedy as regards contents and style. The language and expression of the *Médée* in general bear a close resemblance to those of Anouilh's other dramas. He prefers an exchange of short remarks in his dialogues. This contributes to the air of realism. On occasion longer monologues are employed when they are necessary to explain fully a character's motivation or background, e.g. the monologue of Jason (384-7) and that of Médée (393).

The rapid variation from one mood to another is also a feature which enhances realism and maintains suspense, e.g. the transition from brutality to tenderness in the following lines:

*La N.* : Où m'entraînes-tu?

*M.* : Tu le sais. La mort, la mort est légère. Suis-moi, la vieille, tu verras! Tu as fini de traîner tes vieux os qui te font mal et de geindre. Tu vas te reposer enfin, un long dimanche!

*La N., se détache hurlant*

: Je ne veux pas, Médée! Je veux vivre!

*M.* : Combien de temps, vieille, la mort sur ton dos?

*Les enfants entrent en courant et viennent se jeter effrayés dans les jupes de Médée.*

*M., s'arrête*

: Ah! Vous voilà vous deux? Vous avez peur? Tous ces gens qui courent et qui hurlent, ces cloches . . . Tout va se taire.

395

The familiarity of much of the language in the dialogue, together with the deliberate use of anachronism, serves to break the illusion of the mythical past and brings the action of the drama closer to contemporary audiences. There is nothing in the opening exchanges of *Médée* and the Nurse to place the action in another time. It is only the mention of the barbaric customs of Colchis which indicate that this is not our century, or at least not Western Europe in the present century. Throughout the play the mixture of contemporary idiom

and mythical plot combine to make the ancient myth more accessible to a modern audience.

The use of anachronism, already employed in Anouilh's other plays derived from ancient sources, and also by Cocteau and Giraudoux, serves the same end, although with more of a shock effect: e.g. "Race d'Abel, race des justes, race des riches, comme vous parlez tranquillement. C'est bon, n'est-ce pas, d'avoir le ciel pour soi et aussi les gendarmes" (389). Thus, at a stroke, are brought into consideration not only the struggle of an outsider combating the acceptances of ordered life but also revolt against the forces of Judaeo-Christian culture and bourgeois civilization.

The imagery used is predominantly from the natural world, for instance *Médée*'s identification with animals discussed above. The images used by *Médée* are often violent and explicit:

Ce n'est plus cette femme attachée à l'odeur d'un homme,  
cette chienne couchée qui attend. Honte! Honte! Mes  
joues me brûlent, nourrice. Je l'attendais tout le jour, les  
jambes ouvertes, amputée . . . Humblement, ce morceau de  
moi qu'il pouvait donner et reprendre, ce milieu de mon  
ventre, qui était à lui . . . Il fallait bien que je lui obéisse  
et que je lui souris et que je me pare pour lui plaire  
puisqu'il me quittait chaque matin m'emportant, trop  
heureuse qu'il revienne le soir et me rende à moi-même.

362

Jason, especially in his description of their love at its height uses simple and moving comparisons:

Jason ne commandait plus qu'un seul petit argonaute. Ma  
petite armée frêle aux cheveux levés dans un mouchoir, aux  
yeux clairs et droits, c'était toi. Mais je pouvais conquérir  
le monde encore avec ma petite troupe fidèle! . . .

386

The contrast between these two extracts shows up the different styles of speech of *Médée* and Jason. *Médée*'s violent emotions are reflected in her words, as is Jason's rational control of his thought and actions.

Anouilh's seemingly effortless creation of a natural, familiar and sometimes

even vulgar style of expression is not the least part of his rewarding re-interpretation of Seneca's *Medea*.

### ANOUILH'S WORLD VIEW AS REFLECTED IN THE *MÉDÉE*

The dramas of Anouilh which are based on ancient source material are not modernizations in the sense that he wants to explain the ancient myths to a modern audience. He uses these stories to reflect the problems of existence which are universal but have particular relevance to contemporary society.

Most critics agree that in his dramas, especially in his "pièces noires", Anouilh reveals a largely pessimistic approach to life. The impossibility of love in *Eurydice* is followed by the revolt against everything which detracts from the purity of existence in *Antigone*. Antigone refuses to compromise her principles and "says no" to human happiness. Her choice of death is a denial of life and hope and points to the absurdity of human existence.

Some scholars have found evidence of the same profound pessimism in the *Médée*,<sup>20</sup> but from the preceding discussion of the drama it should be clear that through the emptiness of Médée's nihilistic gesture and through Jason's acceptance of the challenges of existence, Anouilh is showing a more positive attitude to life. The following perceptive judgement of Freeman<sup>21</sup> and his citation from Marcel<sup>22</sup> supports this conclusion: "Marcel was the first to see the pivotal importance of the play in the development of Anouilh's ideas in bidding farewell to suicide and nihilistic rebellion:

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20 E.g. John C. Lapp *loc. cit.* 187: "Anouilh concludes . . . with the conviction that when an orderly society casts out its violent and heroic figures, somehow, in the process, it is they who triumph."

21 *Loc. cit.* xliv-v.

22 G. Marcel "Le tragique chez Jean Anouilh de *Jézabel* à *Médée*" *Revue de Paris* (June 1949) 109.

il m'est tout à fait impossible de ne pas attacher à cette fin une signification symbolique. Pour la première fois, me semble-t-il, le charme est perçu comme maléfice, et du coup il est rompu. L'adieu de Jason à Médée, c'est l'adieu d'Anouilh à son oeuvre antérieure, l'adieu à cette âme révoltée dont le secret semble bien résider en quelque nostalgie ombilicale presque informulable, et enfouie profondément hors des prises de la raison!

The passage of time has proved Marcel's interpretation to be correct: *Médée* marks a turning point in Anouilh's development. Unlike *Antigone*, *Orphée*, *Eurydice* and *Médée*, Jason is a hero who survives." This interpretation of the *Médée* is supported by other scholars such as Ginestier.<sup>23</sup>

Williamowitz (somewhat disparagingly) remarked that Seneca's *Medea* had read the *Medea* of Euripides. In the same generalizing way it may be observed that Anouilh's Jason has at least a nodding acquaintance with the heroes of the existentialist works of Jean-Paul Sartre. It has to be borne in mind, however, that Anouilh himself had been grappling with the problems of existence long before he wrote the *Médée*. It would fall outside the reach of this thesis to attempt to distinguish in what way Anouilh was influenced by Sartre or vice versa. However, the existentialist slant to his dramas shows that Anouilh is fully involved in contemporary intellectual debate, although he has consistently refused to commit himself to any political ideology.

## CONCLUSION

The *Médée* of Jean Anouilh, with its emphasis on the intimate drama of the couple of Jason and Médée, moves the spotlight from the traditional catastrophic climax of the murder of the children. Although Médée still commits this horrific murder, the escape in the chariot is replaced by her suicide. The other side of the realism of the twentieth century which looms large in the play is the lack of belief in the supernatural. For the first time Médée, representing

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23 *Op. cit.* 85 "Il semble bien que par cette réplique [Jason's last] Anouilh ait exorcisé ce fascinant attrait de la mort qui, sous certains angles, donnait à ses pièces noires un aspect nihiliste. Avec *Médée*, le dramaturge en a fini pour longtemps de la couleur du deuil et de l'anarchie."

the forces of anarchy, is clearly shown as coming off second best. The true hero of the drama is Jason whose positive approach to the problems of human existence leaves the audience with a feeling of relative optimism.

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SECTION III

THE MEDEA-JASON STORY  
DRAMATIZED AS A TALE OF CONFLICTING CULTURES

The position of Medea as a foreigner and a barbarian, which is relevant in Euripides' tragedy without dominating the drama, has been chosen as a focal point by some modern dramatists. This aspect has in some cases been developed so that the heroine is no longer of a different, and inferior, culture, but of a different and despised race. Anouilh's gypsy Médée exhibits some of these traits, but in her revolt her own brand of racism outstrips that of her foes.

One of the earliest dramatic treatments of the myth in which race is an important factor is the *Medea* of Hans Henny Jahnn (1926). Jahnn was deliberately addressing the racist attitudes of his contemporaries. As Jahnn himself explained:

Was für die Griechen die Barbaren, sind für ons heutige Europäer Neger, Malaien, Chinesen. - Einer der schamlosesten Gebräuche des europäischen Menschen ist die Nichtachtung vor den einzelnen Vertretern nicht weißhäutiger Rassen. Das Eheproblem Medea-Jason konnte ich im ganzen Umfang nur deutlich machen, indem ich die Frau als Negerin auf die Bühne brachte.<sup>1</sup>

Jahnn's Medea is an old and ugly negress, while Jason, through Medea's magic, has been "blessed" with everlasting youth and beauty.

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1 Jahnn in *Die Scene* 16 1926 quoted in *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon* v. IV ed. W. von Einsiedel 1965 2269.

Nicht einer Griechin dürftest du  
die Frechheit sagen, die anzutragen mir  
du nicht in Zweifel kamst. Barbarenfrau  
schimpfst du auf meine dunkle Farbe.  
Die Negerin, gellt es von deinen Lippen.<sup>2</sup>

Jason no longer finds his pleasure in Medea's company. This neglect and his sexual adventures with girls and young men arouse Medea's wrath. Jason's words:

Voll schöner Männer ist das Haus Medeas,  
voll schöner Weiber nicht

17

which refer to the incestuous passions between father and sons and sons mutually, is an indication of the importance of sexual lust in the play. In the motivation of the action *libido* is the dominant psychological factor. The initial emphasis on Medea's blackness is one aspect of a complex web of sexual desire and frustration which involves, *inter alia*, Jason deciding to marry the daughter of Kreon in spite of his son's wish to do so.

Significantly Kreon cites the elder son's mixed blood as the reason he would never allow his daughter to marry him:

Niemals hätt'ich  
gebilligt, daß mein heißgeliebtes Kind  
'nem halben Neger beigegeben würde.  
Ausländer lieb ich nicht. Jason ist Grieche,  
der schönsten einer und ein Held.

43

Kreon's deep-seated hatred and contempt for those of a different colour is forcefully expressed by the messenger who brings Medea and her sons the order of banishment:

Ja, wärt ihr Tiere,  
anstellen eine Jagd auf Euch würd'er  
Noch zweifelt er, ob dunkelfarb'ge Menschen  
den Tieren gleichzusetzen sind.  
Aus diesem Lande müßt ihr bis zum Abend.

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2 Hans Henny Jahn *Medea* Reclam 1966 19. For a discussion of Jahn's *Medea* see Kleinhardt *op. cit.* 86-98.

Trifft man euch morgen hier, wird Kreon wissen,  
daß Neger und Barbaren Tiere sind,  
zu anderm nicht geschaffen, als  
daß man mit Pfeilen auf sie schieße  
und sie erlege, niederschlage,  
verbrenne wie die Schlangen.

47

Jahn's highly individual interpretation of the Medea-Jason story has found no followers, but there are several modern treatments of the drama which present the adventure of Medea as a fable about colonialism and imperialism and in which colour prejudice and cultural conflict play a considerable role. They are *Asie* (1931), by the French playwright Henri-René Lenormand, *The Wingless Victory* (1936), by the American verse dramatist Maxwell Anderson, and *African Medea* (1968), by the modern American dramatist Jim Magnuson. These dramas transfer the story to different parts of the world - to the French colonies in Asia and France itself (*Asie*); to a Massachusetts town in the early nineteenth century (*The Wingless Victory*); and to Portuguese colonial Africa in the nineteenth century (*African Medea*). The first two dramas have added considerably to the traditional plot and also use different names, while Magnuson is closer to the established action and uses some of the mythical names. These three dramas will be examined in this section to see how they deal with the conflict in the marriage of Medea and Jason.



CHAPTER 6  
*ASIE* BY HENRI-RENÉ LENORMAND

BACKGROUND

H-R Lenormand (1882-1951) is regarded by some critics as one of the most original French dramatists of the period between the two world wars,<sup>1</sup> but has been eclipsed by subsequent playwrights so that his plays are no longer widely known. In spite of the relative obscurity of the playwright today, an examination of *Asie*,<sup>2</sup> which was first produced in Paris in 1931, repays the interest of the scholar studying different dramatic versions of the Medea myth. This play represents a thought-provoking elaboration of the Medea-Jason relationship transferred to the French colonial world in the period following the First World War.

Unfortunately Lenormand has left no record in his autobiography, *Les Confessions d'un auteur dramatique*,<sup>3</sup> of his motivation or inspiration in creating this drama. The fascination which exotic places and foreign customs held for him is, however, amply demonstrated in his autobiography and by his accounts of travels to distant places.<sup>4</sup>

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1 See, for example, S. Radine Anouilh *Lenormand Salacrou-Trois dramaturges à la recherche de leur vérité* 1951 55 and *A Library of Literary Criticism Modern French Literature* v. II ed. D. and M. Popkin 1977 32-6.

2 *Asie* in H-R Lenormand *Théâtre complet* v. IX 1938 6-147. All references are to and quotations from this edition.

3 1949.

4 E.g. *op. cit.* 33-34 and *passim*.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Apart from certain very minor additions Lenormand preserves the traditional core roles under new names. The Medea role is assumed by princess Katha Naham Moun who has an Ayah as confidante and child minder. The roles of Creon and his daughter are taken by a French colonial administrator, de Listrac, and his daughter Aimée, while Jason is transformed into an adventurer and explorer turned business entrepreneur called de Mezzana. The parts of the children are larger than in any of the dramas discussed hitherto, while the action takes place over a period of some weeks and in different locations. Lenormand therefore transcends the ancient bounds of time and place which are observed by most later dramatists. The play is divided into three acts and ten scenes.

The first act takes place on board a boat from Indochina bound for France. The whole of this act is Lenormand's own invention. Here the audience sees the exposition of the ingredients of the plot which in the ancient dramas are conveyed as background information in the course of the more compressed action.

In conversations between de Listrac and Aimée, and between de Listrac and de Mezzana, it emerges that de Mezzana is returning to Europe after eight adventurous years in the kingdom of the Sibangs (this fictitious country is the counterpart of the mythical Colchis and remains equally nebulous). He is not alone, but accompanied by his wife, Katha Naham Moun, the daughter of the deposed ruler of the Sibangs. They are to collect their two sons at a mission school in a port along the way. There is a strong mutual attraction between Aimée and de Mezzana which is reinforced by a budding friendship between de Listrac and de Mezzana. The princess is portrayed as out of place in the European world of the boat in appearance and language: "De sa bouche ensanglantée par le bétel qu'elle mâche continuellement, sort un français méprisant, poivré d'RRR barbares et soudain adouci par la mollesse d'une diphtongue" (20). She is fully aware of the scorn of the Europeans but is proud of her different culture. The conflict between her world and Europe is concentrated in the position of the children who have been renamed "Julien" and "Vincent" by Christian missionaries. The falseness of these representatives

of Europe is implicitly shown by the contempt which they feel for the heathen princess. The inevitable struggle between the parents for the souls of their children is on de Mezzana's side represented by an enthusiasm for technology rather than for the Christian virtues while the princess prefers that the children should believe in the primitive forces of demons.

As the mutual attraction between Aimée and de Mezzana becomes more explicit the question of the children's future becomes more pressing. De Mezzana leaves no doubt that he wishes them to be educated to become Europeans and he significantly identifies Aimée with Europe. She reminds him that though he may be fleeing Asia, she (Asia) is also abroad. He has to choose between Europe and Asia, between her and the princess.

Thus the first act provides the introduction to the characters. The lengthier and more detailed exposition may be explained by the fact that, although Lenormand is in essence using the Medea-Jason legend, he has so transposed it that it would not be immediately recognizable. Familiar details such as names, locations, the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece are all absent. The audience has to become acquainted with the couple de Mezzana and princess Katha Naham Moun and their children. There is a grave conflict between the parents about the way the children should be brought up. Each parent shows marked hostility to the culture and conventions of the other. This tension is increased by the attraction between de Mezzana and Aimée. He seems ready to abandon his wife and marry Aimée, but she still holds back. The atmosphere on board is strained as the boat approaches Marseille where de Listrac is to be Préfet - thus assuming the powers over the domicile of foreigners that Creon held in Corinth.

The second act is set on the terrace of a villa near Marseille. The atmosphere of ancient Western civilization created by the décor acquires a further dimension through the presence of a convent in the vicinity. The sound of the nuns at their devotions provides the Christian element in European culture and forms a counterpoint to the behaviour of the Europeans in the drama.

De Mezzana is showing de Listrac and his daughter his new property. It has been decided that the princess should be repatriated. She is yet to be

informed, and also to be told of the impending marriage of de Mezzana to Aimée. Aimée declares her readiness to be a mother to the children but the words of the caretaker's daughter:

Ils sont bien mignons, pour deux petits café au lait! C'est pas comme celui de la Cloclo, la fille de l'aubergiste. Elle avait eu le sien d'un Sénégalais, pendant la guerre. Et le pôvre, il fallait voire cette grosse tête qu'il tenait! Mon père, on aurait dit une courge! Il n'avait pas seulement la force de la porter. Il la traînait sur toutes les marches du village. Ceux-là ont du vif, au moins! . . . On dirait deux petits singes savants.

70

and incidents at their school indicate that they are already becoming the victims of racial prejudice. In spite of de Mezzana's fierce love of his sons his own uneasiness about their future breaks through: "Où seront-ils à leur place? Pas ici. Pas en Asie. Où?" (74).

At the end of this scene the action is at the point where most traditional Medea-dramas start: Jason and the daughter of Creon are to be married, the children are to stay with their father and Medea is to be banished. The suspense about the reaction of the princess is heightened in *Asie* by the uncertainty about the children's future. Because of their presentation as lively and inquisitive youngsters they engage the sympathy of the audience.

In the next scene there is a confrontation between Katha Naham Moun and de Mezzana. She feels betrayed by the news that de Mezzana, whom she regards as her husband because they were married according to the laws and customs of her people, has deceived her. She advances the arguments of her sacrifices for his sake because of her love for him. These arguments are central in all the Medea figures and form their chief reproach at Jason's callous disregard of their merits and abrupt rejection of them in a strange land. De Mezzana counters cynically, "Les actions commises par amour n'engagent pas au delà de l'amour" (78). He insists that he has changed and is under no obligation to her for the crimes she committed, for instance the killing of her brother, because murder is in her nature. She insists that he share the responsibility and, when he retorts that these crimes do not bother his conscience, she advances a new argument: because of their colour de Mezzana did not regard her father and her brother as fellow men - to him they were simply

savages. In the same way he is disposing of her like an exotic beast of which he has grown tired. De Mezzana changes the subject to the support which will be given her to regain her kingdom. In her furious reaction to the news that she is to be expelled Katha Naham Moun utters menaces against the life of Aimée. De Mezzana dismisses her threats. In a civilized country like France murder is not so easily accomplished. He recommends that she return to her country. She will find happiness with a man of her own race. He now loves a woman of his race. Thus Lenormand lends prominence to de Mezzana's newly acquired belief in the purity of the races. This is a new motif in the conflict between Jason and Medea. The result of the encounter is a decisive break between Katha Naham Moun and de Mezzana. As yet there is no formal expulsion order. The princess has, however, been provoked to such an extent that she disowns the children, "Je les hais, tes enfants! . . . Je n'ai plus d'enfants, si je ne suis plus ta femme!" (85).

The disclosure of Katha Naham Moun's refusal to leave provokes divergent reactions from de Listrac and his daughter. The latter, like Longepierre's Créuse, but in a more consistently presented argument, defends the rights of the princess (89). Aimée maintains that if they want to be just they should let the princess depart when she wants to and allow her to take the children. De Mezzana refuses to give up the children. Although there is implicit love for them in his desire not to let them leave, the motive he emphasizes is that he wishes to atone for his mistake in fathering half-castes by devoting himself to them. Psychologically this aspect is not convincingly motivated.

De Listrac is equally adamant that the princess should be banished. He is concerned about his daughter's safety. As Préfet he intends to have an "arrêté d'expulsion" served on Katha Naham Moun. This will ensure that she leaves, or is forced to leave, on the next boat. Aimée warns the two men that by chasing the princess away and depriving her of her children they are committing an act equal to murder. They should therefore fear the consequences.

The tension generated by this scene is not diminished by Katha Naham Moun's avowal to her Ayah that she will not leave until Aimée is dead. To de Listrac whom she has summoned to her hotel room she dissimulates her intentions. This scene is the equivalent of the Medea-Creon scene which occurs

in the dramas of Euripides, Seneca, Corneille and Longepierre except that it is initiated by the heroine. The purpose of the confrontation remains the same - that the princess may obtain a delay of her banishment in order that she may have an opportunity to wreak vengeance. She states that she bears Aimée no grudge. She is ready to leave but wants the children to accompany her. When de Listrac points out that de Mezzana will not allow this, she succeeds, by a moving appeal, in persuading him to postpone her departure for ten days, until the next boat, so that she may take her leave of the children. De Listrac agrees against his better judgement. As soon as he has departed Katha Naham Moun announces that the ten days' delay will bring catastrophe to her enemies. She herself is prepared to die afterwards.

The princess then immediately starts to set her plan in motion. As she is taking out her drugs she bursts into tears with the words: "Je pense aux enfants . . . Dans dix jours, ayah, je serai privée, de mes enfants" (104). This expression carries a sinister ambiguity for any auditor familiar with the story of Medea, especially taken in conjunction with the princess's affirmation, "[J]e suis redevenue moi-même" (103) a few minutes before. At this moment the dramatic tension is relieved by a short comic interlude when a hotel messenger enters to announce that de Mezzana wishes to see the princess.

As in the second meeting between Jason and Medea in the tragedy of Euripides, Katha Naham Moun simulates agreement with de Mezzana's plans. As she is isolated in her hotel room, she requests to be allowed to stay with de Mezzana and the children in his new house. He consents but his emphatic denial that the prospect of having children by Aimée could reconcile him to losing their children, proves to the princess that the children are dearer to him than all else. He loves them even more than Aimée.

As in the tragedy of Seneca the husband's love for his children determines the form of the vengeance. At the commencement of the last act Katha Naham Moun reveals that she has decided to kill the boys. This will be the surest punishment of de Mezzana and at the same time appropriate revenge for the loss of her father and brother and for the betrayal of her people to the forces of colonization. It will not be necessary to kill Aimée because de Mezzana will not marry the woman who caused his children's death. (It would also cause

problems of verisimilitude to present the murder of a prominent person in a twentieth-century European environment.) The princess relentlessly maintains that her resolve is fixed - the children must die. Lenormand has externalized the debate about their fate in the form of a dialogue between the princess and the Ayah. The latter advances the arguments for sparing them which would appeal to the mother's love. At last, it seems as if Katha Naham Moun has been overcome by this constant appeal to her maternal feelings. She even avers that she will try to live without vengeance. For a few moments it thus seems possible that Katha Naham Moun may withdraw and the conflict be settled without catastrophe. However, the arrival of the children who talk excitedly about a visit to their father's office and technical marvels like racing cars and aeroplanes which can fly to the stars, changes her resolve once more. She is determined to save the souls of the children from domination by ideas of technology.

The tension created by this decision underlies the next scene which takes place in the evening on the terrace. It is the eve of the princess's departure. She and de Mezzana talk to each other but he is neither willing nor able to understand what she wants to say. Indeed, de Mezzana's total lack of response to such sinister statements as "Ne t'occupe pas de mes souffrances. Elles prendront fin avant les tiennes" (124) serves to increase the tension. An interlude with the children makes the princess tearful, but demonstrates yet again de Mezzana's monstrous lack of tact with regard to Katha Naham Moun's feelings. He launches into a denunciation of her qualities as a mother: "Tu es incapable d'endormir ce qui hurle et ce qui grince dans leurs petites consciences. Tu aurais été pour eux une mère funeste" (129). The dramatic irony of this statement is underlined by Katha Naham Moun's sombre enunciation of her intentions while de Mezzana, unheeding, expounds his ideas of the children's future. Her words are almost like a litany:

Tous les deux, bientôt, dans la terre . . .  
Fraîchement tués . . . dans la terre fraîche . . .  
Serrés l'un contre l'autre . . . serrés dans le  
même cercueil . . .  
Immobiles . . . Immobiles pour toujours . . .

129-30

The last encounter between the parents thus conclusively demonstrates the utter lack of communication between them. In the first scenes they could still

discuss and argue but even that meeting ground has now fallen away. Katha Naham Moun's decision that only an act will penetrate her egocentric husband's consciousness therefore becomes the more comprehensible.

The actual deaths of the children occur on stage but because they are presented as euthanasia, there is no outward violence. The boys are talking in their bedroom. They mention that they have eaten jelly which their mother gave them. This raises the suspense, as the audience knows that the princess poisoned her brother by means of mango jelly. A few minutes later they say it was mango jelly. Now the audience know that the fate of the boys is sealed. Their mother enters. She is highly emotional. She puts them to bed, covers them with her dead brother's "langouti" and, as they are falling asleep, tries to introduce them to the wonders of her religious world. They are going to a new home, the garden of the gods where she will always be with them. They fall asleep and die in their sleep. Katha Naham Moun then opens the window to the rising sun (also called her ancestor) and, believing that she is being carried away in the dragon-drawn chariot of the Sun, jumps. The play ends as the Ayah looks after her mistress, not down at the earth where she lies, but up at the sky.

From the above discussion it is clear that Lenormand has used the basic elements of the Medea-Jason story as the outline of his drama: the irrevocable breakdown of the marriage between the "civilized" man and his "barbarian" wife when the husband decides to change his way of life, to return to his country and to marry a woman of his own culture; the attempt by the husband and his new ally, the prospective father-in-law, to banish his former wife with a show of due legal process; the spurned wife's desperate attempt to exact retribution for the wrongs she is made to suffer in spite of her steadfast devotion and her great sacrifices out of love for her husband; the realization that the most effective punishment of the traitor is through their children; the emotional conflict which precedes the execution of the deed, and the actual killing of the children followed by the triumphant departure of the heroine. Lenormand has manipulated and transposed these elements to create a new drama which has relevance to the political and social problems of his era. Thus there is strong emphasis on the relations between people of colonizing ("civilized") and colonized ("barbarian") races (which usually implies white and non-white), and



the problems created by technological advancement imposed on less developed countries are stressed. These aspects will be discussed below, but it is noteworthy that Katha Naham Moun's fear of the corruption of her children by a fascination with technology is the decisive factor in precipitating their murder.

Structurally Lenormand has a long preamble to the main action which achieves little more than the introduction of the characters and the creation of a tense atmosphere. It is of some importance in the transition from Asia to Europe. The contrast between the two worlds is central in the drama and in the first act de Mezzana shows considerable changes in attitude the further Asia recedes and the closer Europe comes.

Although some of the traditional scenes have been retained in the second and third acts, there are a number of new scenes, i.a. to accommodate the larger roles of the children. The most important deviations from the dénouement in the ancient dramas are the omission of the death of the rival and her father and the suicide of the heroine. These aspects are fully motivated. The result of the diminution of violence (even the way in which the children are killed is evidence of the mother's love) is that more pity, but less horror, for the fate of the children and of Katha Naham Moun, is evoked. The omission of a confrontation with de Mezzana over the bodies of the children also contributes to the muted ending.

If the structure and characters are taken into account it is impossible to say that Lenormand was or was not influenced by Euripides, Seneca, Corneille or even Longepierre, or one of the later, less known French dramatic versions, such as that of Catulle Mendès (1898) or L. Duplessis (1901). What is clear is that this is a successful reworking of the basic elements of the story to create a new drama which may claim a high degree of originality, not least in its application to contemporary themes.

### THE PORTRAYAL OF THE MEDEA FIGURE - KATHA NAHAM MOUN

At first the title of this drama seems strange. Most of the dramas based on the myth use the name of Medea in the title. However, indirectly this is the case in Lenormand's version too, because "Asie" refers to princess Katha Naham Moun. She symbolizes Asia while her blonde rival Aimée represents Europe. This title therefore accords with the importance of the heroine's foreign origin. From her first appearance the emphasis is on how different she is from the Europeans, in speech and appearance as well as in understanding. Even the superficial normality of relations between de Mezzana and the princess is overshadowed by his confession to de Listrac that he sometimes longs for an orderly life and a French marriage.

However, the princess, just as she is despised by the Europeans like de Listrac (who, in spite of thirty years as a colonial administrator has no sympathy for, or interest in, the colonized peoples) also has contempt for the Europeans, their appearance and customs: "Toujours à parler avec ces hommes blancs, qui ont mêmes voix, mêmes figures . . . Je ne les reconnais pas!" (21). This same contempt is reinforced by sexual jealousy when she learns of de Mezzana's intention to marry Aimée: "Vingt-sept ans! Désirer une vierge qui, chez nous, pourrait être grand'mère, non: je ne comprends pas! Qu'est-ce que c'est? Sa peau blanche? Il y a de jeunes peaux blanches" (76).

She is not prepared to make any allowances for the culture of de Mezzana's people. She wants the children to be like children in her native land although they are exposed to a completely different environment. This is well illustrated by her refusal to use their "Christian" names, Vincent and Julien, her reaction to the children's questions about the ship's engines and to all the further interest the boys show in scientific pursuits. The children's preference for Aimée above their mother indicates how odd they find her and her obstinate refusal to adapt to French ways. De Mezzana, on the other hand, makes no allowance for his wife's feelings of alienation in a society unfamiliar to her. The clearer it becomes that he is rejecting her, the more steadfastly she clings to her own customs. When she first hears of de Mezzana's definite decision to marry Aimée and send her back to Asia she shuts herself weeping into her hotel room, chews betel and insists that the hotel servants should approach her

on their knees. Her own death and the deaths of the children are designed to reintegrate them into the primitive religious world of the Sibangs.

The princess, in the first act, says to de Mezzana: "Tu es plus intelligent que moi, mais je comprends plus de choses que toi" (47). To her intuitive understanding of people and nature de Mezzana opposes a cool rationality which seeks to serve his egocentric and materialistic ambition. In spite of Katha Naham Moun's sympathetic attunement to superhuman forces she is not shown as a sorceress. The only communication she has with the supernatural is her vision of the deaths of her children. The means of death employed by her are drugs concealed in mango jelly. The effects of the poisonous drugs are rationally acceptable, not divorced from reality as in the case of the administration and working of the drugs on her rival and the latter's father in the dramas of Euripides, Seneca and especially of Corneille and Longepierre.

The strength of Katha Naham Moun's love for de Mezzana caused her to betray her father and her brother, both of whom she loved. Her bitterness when de Mezzana implicitly denies this sacrifice and suggests that she has a murderous nature is understandable. Her gathering awareness of de Mezzana's scorn for her race and his disregard for the lives of non-Europeans and for all aspects of their culture convince her that by killing their children she will not only be punishing de Mezzana for his betrayal of their love but also pursuing the only possible way for the children to regain the purity of her native tradition.

There is no doubt that Lenormand's heroine loves her children. She kills them because they have become living symbols of her own perversion in establishing contact with a foreign civilization which she now sees to be pernicious. She has been deceived and now not only her children are threatened by the heartless forces of "progress" and "civilization" but even her country seems doomed. For her, death is the only refuge where she and her children may recover their identity in its original purity. Ironically, however, she is deluding herself, as is shown by her plunging to death instead of soaring aloft in the dragon-drawn chariot. Her triumph is totally subjective, for to the audience she represents Asia, and they know that as she has been exploited and cast off by de Mezzana, the forces of colonization are preparing to exploit her

country. Her fate is therefore a grim prelude to the suppression of her people and the destruction of their traditional beliefs and way of life.

#### THE PORTRAYAL OF THE JASON FIGURE - DE MEZZANA

Lenormand creates a history of bold adventure and reckless courage for de Mezzana to match Jason's heroic reputation as an Argonaut. The admiration and fascination he inspires in de Listrac and Aimée from the first scene bear witness to his stature as hero. In contrast to his wife who represents Asia, he is a proto-European from the shores of the Mediterranean: "[Je me sens] chez moi partout où l'olivier, la vigne et le cédrat jalonnent les côtes" (64). This description, so strong an antithesis to the humid jungles of Asia, could also be seen as valid for what is usually regarded as the cradle of Western civilization. The most important goal to de Mezzana, and by implication to the "civilized" Western countries, is however nothing more than the pursuit of wealth:

Il me plaît de créer une entreprise et d'essayer de la faire vivre. Les découvreurs de terres d'autrefois n'agissaient pas autrement. Quand ils avaient bu leur grand coup de l'aventure, ils fondaient des comptoirs et tâchaient de s'enrichir.

63

Thus Katha Naham Moun, who was necessary to his survival in her world, but has now become a hindrance, must be abandoned and an alliance contracted with Aimée in order to assure his acceptance in his new environment. This portrayal of de Mezzana as the ultimate survivor who adapts his feelings to his surroundings makes him an unsympathetic character to the audience and raises questions about the morality of the colonial powers in their relations with their dependent territories.

As the boat draws further away from the East and nears Europe, the conduct of de Mezzana is marked by a change of attitude in two aspects which are central to his relationship with his wife and children. The first change is in his attitude to Katha Naham Moun's faith in the gods of the Sibangs and the second in his attitude to those of a race different from his.

De Mezzana clearly experienced at least some sort of religious awe during his time with the princess in her native land. At that time he was moved by her communication with the "invisible world", but now he savagely mocks her beliefs and insists on the children being kept free from these barbaric superstitions. He does not understand how vital her religion is to Katha Naham Moun because he himself seems to be a thoroughgoing agnostic and a whole-hearted materialist. This leads to the catastrophe as he encourages the children in their interests in technology which is the decisive factor in their mother's decision to kill them.

The change in de Mezzana's attitude to those of another race is doubly remarkable if it is taken into account that he lived among the Sibangs for eight years, fought shoulder to shoulder with them, married their princess and had children by her. This involvement with the "barbarians" is in sharp contrast with the persuasion of de Listrac, the seasoned colonial administrator, that the colonized races are inferior and uncivilized. De Mezzana is shown as moving across the spectrum from active involvement and sympathy with the Sibangs to repugnance and scorn of those who are not of his race. It may be that this radical change is overstated and not sufficiently motivated by Lenormand but it undoubtedly plays an important part in the drama. The paradox that de Mezzana's own children whom he loves so dearly are of mixed blood leads to such statements as:

Je les garde, quoi qu'il arrive. Ce sont mes enfants, -  
mais pas encore mes fils. Ils ne seront mes fils que quand  
je les aurai séparés d'elle et repeints à la couleur de ma  
race. Une bonne couche de blanc et de rose, voilà ce dont  
ils ont besoin pour m'appartenir tout à fait . . . Tant  
qu'elle vivra près d'eux ils seront exposés à l'haleine des  
jungles . . . Deux petits singes perdus qui piaulent à la  
lisière de leur forêt. J'en ferai des garçons blancs.  
J'effacerai la sombre tache originelle . . . le péché de  
noirceur . . .

41

The quasi-religious terminology used by de Mezzana proves his adherence to the cult of racism. Ironically the children's blackness is the visible sign of their bond with their mother and the one characteristic which cannot be effaced, as the princess does not neglect to stress to de Mezzana: "Enlève-leur, si tu le

peux, la seule chose qu'ils tiennent encore de moi: leur couleur! Teins-les! Peins-les! Maquille-les!" (85).

De Mezzana's love for Aimée is the result, at least partly, of his new-found racial prejudice: "L'homme . . . sera toujours à sa place entre les bras d'une femme de sa couleur . . ." (74). De Mezzana's arrogant racism and contempt for the "barbarian" culture in which he passed eight adventurous and happy years but which, now that he is in Europe, seems "uncivilized", lies at the root of his rejection of Katha Naham Moun. The harshness with which he acts towards her alienates all sympathy from him. His love for his children does make him more human. Yet this love is not convincingly presented. It seems rather strained that de Mezzana should explain his determination to devote himself to the children as stemming from his realization that he has made a mistake in fathering half-castes and now wants to atone for it. This weakness is the direct consequence of Lenormand's creation of de Mezzana as an outspoken racist.

In spite of some flaws de Mezzana is an interesting twentieth-century reincarnation of Jason who now seeks to cover his mercenary ends under the cloak of bringing advancement to the "inferior" races whom he instinctively treats as deserving less consideration than "civilized" Europeans. He displays no inkling of the notions of justice and fairness which alone could have lent some credit to the colonizers in their meeting with "underdeveloped" countries. These values, to the existence of which the references to Christianity (the mission school and the nuns singing off stage) bring reminders, find only one champion in the drama, Aimée de Listrac.

#### THE CREON FIGURE - DE LISTRAC - AND OTHER MINOR CHARACTERS

De Listrac's role is somewhat larger than the traditional role of Creon in the sense that he spends more time on stage. However, his function in the development of the action is essentially still to sanction the marriage between his daughter and the returning hero and to expel the first wife who proves an impediment to the new union.

From the beginning de Listrac's hostility and contempt towards Katha Naham Moun are evident. He describes himself as "un homme d'ordre, un fonctionnaire-né" (19) and this limited personality of the colonial administrator leaves no room for the conception of love or affection for members of the colonized races. He therefore advises de Mezzana against taking his wife back to France. It is entirely consistent with this picture of thinly veiled scorn for the "inferior" races and fear of their barbaric cruelty that de Listrac does not hesitate to use his power as préfet of Marseille to banish the princess, especially as she is an obstacle to his daughter's happiness and may, in his view, even pose a threat to her life. His attempt to rationalize this action as his duty is however exposed by Aimée who calls it "un abus de force" (88) and points out the hypocrisy of his argument. In spite of his daughter's opposition de Listrac has the order of expulsion served on Katha Naham Moun, but by her appeal to his sympathy for a mother's love for her children and her promise to leave voluntarily the latter manages to secure a postponement of her departure. Thus in this drama too it is de Listrac who gives the protagonist the opportunity of punishing her faithless husband. Here his life and that of his daughter are spared. Thus attention is not distracted to their fate but focused fully on the princess and her children.

Aimée de Listrac follows the tradition, established by Corneille, of Créuse being a *dramatis persona*. She is however not an unsympathetic character, both because of her concern for her predecessor and her kindness to the children. As rival of Katha Naham Moun she represents Europe to the former's Asia and she is the only character who lends a measure of honour to the European tradition by her conduct. In spite of supplanting Katha Naham Moun in de Mezzana's affections she understands the pain the other woman is suffering. It would be unrealistic to expect that she should therefore break her relationship with de Mezzana, but she behaves as well as possible under the circumstances. She points out that her father and her fiancé are unjust in their treatment of Katha Naham Moun and that they cannot escape their guilt by dissimulating their true motives:

A nous trois, nous avons attiré sur sa tête une somme de calamités démesurée. Et nous sommes là, discutant, ergotant, comme s'il s'agissait de renvoyer dans les formes une domestique indélicate! J'aimerais mieux que vous disiez: 'Nous la chassons parce qu'elle nous gêne, parce qu'elle nous fait peur et que nous avons pour nous la loi écrite, l'autorité, les gendarmes! Oui, j'aimerais mieux que vous ne cherchiez pas à vous persuader que vous agissez par devoir! J'aimerais mieux que vous ne sortiez pas de ce drame avec une conscience agréablement nettoyée.

89

The refreshing candour of Aimée who refuses to veil the abuse of the powers of justice, in which she is an unwilling accomplice, in the pretence of duty, has no effect on the determination of de Mezzana and the caution of her father. All her entreaties to let Katha Naham Moun stay and have access to the children are without effect. This is the strongest depiction of female solidarity shown by a Créuse figure. Because Aimée is a woman she is the only character who comes close to understanding the devastating effect her rejection and the separation from her children will have on the princess:

Vous avez beau couvrir votre action d'une dorure de prétextes et de bonnes raisons, vous la chassez en lui enlevant ses enfants! A votre place, je redouterais un acte pareil à l'égal d'un meurtre. C'en est un. Vous le dites nécessaire, parce qu'il vous est utile. Mais si la nécessité n'est que dans votre pensée, dans votre hâte, dans votre peur? Oh, craignez les conséquences d'un acte pareil. Craignez-les . . . autant que celles d'un meurtre.

93-4

The fact that the children are depicted as genuinely liking Aimée also testifies that she is a "good" character. Vincent openly shows that he prefers her to his mother:

V : C'est bien sûr, qu'elle s'en va demain,  
maman?

J : Oui

V : Chouette!

132

Vincent expresses equal joy on hearing that "tante Aimée" is going to marry their father and live with them. Julien, the elder, tries to hide his preference because he senses that it is generally regarded as unnatural not to love his



mother most. This preference of the children for Jason's new bride is reminiscent of the scene in Grillparzer's *Das Goldene Vließ*<sup>5</sup> where the children have to choose whether they want to go with Medea or stay with Jason and Kreusa. They both choose to remain with their new stepmother and their father. This is a crushing blow to Medea<sup>6</sup> and causes her to hate her children as she hates Jason - they have all betrayed her. Lenormand achieves the same effect of suggesting that the children find their mother strange and even frightening, but his methods are subtler than the not altogether convincingly motivated scene of choice in Grillparzer. Furthermore, Katha Naham Moun is unaware of the children's feelings. She does not kill them out of hate but out of love. On the other hand, it is fitting that Aimée should be spared. Because she is a sympathetic character her death would seem gratuitous.

The expanded roles of the children in *Asie* abundantly illustrate the struggle between their parents for their souls. Furthermore their fate as half-castes is central to the theme of conflicting cultures. In the dissension between the parents about the education of their children each is absolute for one viewpoint: de Mezzana insists that they be brought up as French boys, while the princess wants them to have no part in understanding modern technology but to preserve the intuitive accord with nature, and even with the supernatural, which is the norm amongst her people. To the audience it is clear, however, that the children are fully at home in neither of the two worlds. They had to be sent away from their parents in the jungle to the mission school on the coast because they could not adapt to the climate as full-blooded Sibang children can. Thus, apart from the considerations of health, they have already been exposed to European and Christian influences for too long to accept their mother's tales of demons without critical questioning. This is shown, for instance, when Vincent challenges his mother to stop the record-player by means of a magic song. At first it seems as if the children would be more at home in the environment their father has arranged for them, but there

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5 Franz Grillparzer *Das Goldene Vließ* 189-371 in *Franz Grillparzer Werke v. I Dramen* 1971.

6 Cf. *loc. cit.* 349:

"Ich bin besiegt, vernichtet, zertreten  
Sie fliehn mich, fliehn!  
Meine Kinder fliehn!"

too difficulties arise. Aimée points out that they cannot concentrate on their school work for too long but grow tired and suggests that she should assume responsibility for their education for a while. A grave problem however is that they are the targets of racial prejudice. This is made embarrassingly clear by the unthinking words of the caretaker's daughter and the malicious mocking levelled at the boys by their fellow pupils with the tacit consent of their teacher. The visible proof of their mixed descent is a heavy burden to their father.

Although the children therefore fit into neither of the worlds envisaged by their parents, the way in which their mother resolves the dilemma evokes pity and horror. Her resolution stems directly from de Mezzana's attempt to annexe them totally for his culture and the contemptuous way in which he treats her both as a wife and a mother. The children provide dramatic relief, but also pathos, by the typically childish way they react to the events set in motion by the adults. The importance of their role is a consequence of the stress on the theme of conflicting culture, not only in the aspects of race but also in the aspects of technological advancement.

The role of the Ayah is more restricted than that of the ancient Nurses. She is essentially still the confidante of her mistress and accents the exotic origin of the latter with her outlandish clothes and pidgin French. Her most important part in the development of the plot is when it seems possible that she may dissuade the mother from killing her children.

The other minor characters like the "boy" and the caretaker's daughter are of little importance in the action but add colour and verisimilitude to the play. Lenormand took pains to depict characters who would be convincing in their own context. He started with the traditional core characters but let them develop as the altered time, place and circumstances and his theme demanded.

### ASIE AND THE LITERARY STYLE OF LENORMAND

From the preface to *Confessions d'un auteur dramatique* it is clear that Lenormand saw his dramas as a break with the traditional French theatre.<sup>7</sup> Audiences familiar with the revolutionary style of Jarry would perhaps not concede Lenormand's claim to innovation, but if his assertion is interpreted as referring primarily to the subjects he treats and to his attempts to express the role of the subconscious<sup>8</sup> (especially in plays such as *L'Homme et ses Fantômes* and *Le Mangeur de Rêves*) it does have some validity. As is evident from *Asie*, the style and techniques of Lenormand's theatre follow the conventions of the "Théâtre d'Avant-Garde" rather than those of the "Théâtre du Boulevard".<sup>9</sup>

The chief difference between the form of *Asie* and the preceding Medea dramas which have been discussed is that Lenormand has fleshed out the spare framework of the core drama with a series of scenes which transfer the audience to a number of different locations. These "tableaux" require realistic stage décor and situate each phase of the action in a definite place. This creation of a semblance of realism of place demands a corresponding realism of time which is achieved by lengthening the traditional day (or night in the case of Anouilh's *Médée*) of the dramatic action into a period of several weeks or even months. In this way Lenormand endeavours to portray the gradual development of the conflict between de Mezzana and Katha Naham Moun, between civilized France and the barbarous East, between colonizing Europe and colonized Asia, to its catastrophic ending.

Complementing this representation of realistic locations and the realistic passage of time is the dress of the characters. Each one is to appear as befits his character and the period, e.g. Aimée's dress is described as "l'uniforme de gaze et de mousseline blanche que le climat impose aux Européennes" (7), while

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7 *Op. cit.* 12.

8 On Lenormand's interest in the theories of Freud and his attempts to give expression in his plays to the powers of the subconscious, see *Confessions d'un auteur dramatique* 261-71 and S. Radine *op. cit.* 61-92.

9 Cf. S. Radine *op. cit.* 56.

Katha Naham Moun wears golden ornaments on her ears and around her neck, thus enhancing her exotic appearance.

Equally realistic are the ways in which the characters express themselves. Lenormand does not aim for the elevated tone of classical French tragedy but for dialogue which has the ring of authenticity. Accordingly each character's words and tone are designed to convey his personality and position. Thus de Listrac's speech shows the limitations of the seasoned bureaucrat. Even in the interview with Katha Naham Moun he has nothing to offer her in her distress but clipped and dry official statements:

- De L. : Vous n'avez rien à craindre pour l'avenir de vos enfants. Toutes les dispositions . . .
- La Princesse : Hélas, je ne crains qu'une chose: c'est d'être séparée d'eux.
- D L. : Cela c'est inévitable. Même si vous restiez, la volonté de leur père est de les soustraire à votre influence. 100

The only occasions when de Listrac forgets his official manner are when his daughter's future is at stake (e.g. "Pourquoi diable ne lui avez-vous pas annoncé vos fiançailles?" (67)) and when he betrays his profound mistrust of his erstwhile colonial subjects: "Ah, cela commence à fermenter sérieusement dans la cuve jaune" (68).

In contrast to her father's rigid self-control Aimée's utterances show a wealth of emotion. At the start of the play she expresses warm admiration for de Mezzana's heroic deeds:

- A. : M. de Mezzana est un homme extraordinaire!
- De L. : Ah, c'est le mot.
- A. : Ce ne sont pas les clabaudages des fainéants et des ratés de la colonie qui peuvent te faire douter de lui! (Silence) Enfin, c'est un Savorgnan, un Livingstone, un Stanley! 8-9

She displays her feelings to de Mezzana in equally open and strong terms: "Les hommes comme toi . . . sont le délice et le fléau du monde. C'est par des hommes comme toi que tous les sangs de la terre se confondent" (75). The strength of her feelings displayed in her words is however not confined to matters which concern herself alone. Aimée's emotional language also expresses her belief that justice should be for all and that the weak are to be protected. She therefore champions the cause of her rival: "Vous avez beau couvrir votre action d'une dorure de prétextes et de bonnes raisons, vous la chassez en lui enlevant ses enfants!" (93). Her tenderness towards the children is reflected in these words of concern: "J'aime leurs menottes sombres, avides des trésors des blancs, leurs formes frêles qui rêvent de trop lourds fardeaux . . ." (75).

In contrast to the sympathetic emotions expressed in Aimée's words de Mezzana inclines towards boastful hyperbole:

Quand j'ai débouché dans leurs vallées, je venais de faire un mois de piste avec trois éléphants. Et pour qui connaît ces forêts de la frontière du Siam, le seul fait d'arriver debout là où j'étais arrivé atteste, croyez-moi, une remarquable vitalité! Rien que des montagnes couvertes de jungle. Des précipices de verdure à descendre et à remonter sans fin, sous des torrents de pluie, dont ceux de la côte ne donnent qu'une faible idée. Aucun abri possible. Un air pesant, puant putride. Une étuve chargée de miasmes. On frissonne et on brûle en même temps. La piste n'est qu'un chapelet de fondrières ou les porteurs pataugent dans la vase. J'en ai perdu six: *jungle fever*. Et rien à manger que des rats et des chiens sauvages.

14

This highly picturesque account of de Mezzana's adventure is calculated to intrigue and romanticize. In spite of the verbosity there are few precise details. The whole of this tale heightens the mystery and alien reputation of Asia and enhances the prestige of de Mezzana.

In addition to the central metaphor of Aimée representing Europe and Katha Naham Moun Asia, de Mezzana's language is rich in metaphor and simile, e.g.:

[L]'homme s'enivre d'inconnu et se trompe sur la nature de ses passions. Il prend ses curiosités pour de l'amour. Il s'enfonce dans une âme étrangère comme dans une mine. Il se grise de noirceur, de périls et de faux mystères . . . Quand il revient au jour . . . il sait qu'il aime le jour.

39

Here the images of inebriation and darkness and their opposites again effectively suggest de Mezzana's state of mind and his attitude to each of the two women.

Katha Naham Moun herself uses images drawn from nature to express her feelings. For instance, she thus expresses her utter dismay when de Mezzana informs her that he is leaving her: "Oh, c'est comme un poison d'herbes que tu verses dans ma bouche! C'est comme un feu qui marche dans mes veines! Oh! Oh! Je brûle!" (79). This imagery is consistent with her background and conveys her strong emotion effectively. There are other images of the same kind such as the princess comparing herself to a poisoned arrow in her resolution on vengeance (112) and to a snake. The latter image, first used by the Ayah when she learns of Katha Naham Moun's intention ("Haï! Haï! Quand je te vois dresser la tête et cracher tes paroles en l'air, j'ai peur, comme si j'avais mis le pied sur un serpent." (102)) is sustained. When she realizes that the children have died in their sleep she exclaims: "Tu as mordu! Sauve-toi dans les herbes, vite! Ou bien, on va t'écraser la tête!" (145). These images from the world of the jungle accord with the Ayah's background. Mention has been made of her pidgin French which is also used by the "boy" on the boat, e.g. "Bié, missé ministrateur". Here Lenormand's style seeks to give his dialogue the stamp of authenticity as in the case of the caretaker's daughter who exhibits the thoughts of an ordinary person in everyday speech.

In the same way, the vocabulary and expressions of the children are an attempt to represent realistically the speech of boys of Lenormand's time. Sometimes they are excited and interested, e.g. when de Mezzana is letting them look through his telescope:

- J. : Tu l'as repérée, dis papa, ma planète?  
de M. : Saturne? Oui, je l'ai.  
J. : Et l'anneau? Est-ce qu'on le voit?

- de M. : On le devine.  
V. : En quoi qu'il est, cet anneau?  
de M. : On ne sait pas.  
V. : Zut, alors! C'est tout de même malheureux. 125

Sometimes they betray in childish terms that even they have become conscious of the racial tension. Thus Vincent calls his mother "vieille guenon" and Julien, in spite of his almost adult realization that he must not cause his mother pain, confesses: "Eh bien, en France . . . une maman blanche, ce serait peut-être plus pratique pour voyager" (55).

Lenormand adapts his choice of words and expressions to suit the various characters in the drama. Because he has chosen to situate his play in a particular historical environment it is fitting that the style of the drama should reflect that environment.

#### LENORMAND'S PLAY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In his autobiography Lenormand confesses:

J'aurai été l'oiseau de malheur qui a obstinément croassé autour de l'homme du début du xxe siècle, de ses conquêtes sociales, de ses machines, de ses progrès et de ses perfections. En une trentaine de drames, dont les meilleurs ne furent pas les plus souvent représentés, j'aurai annoncé l'affreux cyclone qui dure encore. Mais il me semble parfois qu'une équivoque complicité m'unissait au cyclone, plutôt qu'à ses victimes. Je me vois comme un prophète suspect de trahison, un témoin pas assez révolté d'une société qui se défaisait . . . Du moins n'ai-je pas voulu devenir un facile marchand d'espoir, d'idéal ou d'héroïsme. Cette pharmacopée de l'âme, que connaissent les temps de misère et de corruption, me fait horreur.<sup>10</sup>

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10 *Op. cit.* 12.

Lenormand thus sees himself as a writer with a purpose, not a mere provider of amusement.

*Asie* clearly represents an attempt by the author to warn his contemporaries about certain aspects of the political, social and even commercial life of the period which he considered as being potentially fraught with disaster. For this purpose he boldly transfigures the mythical data of the Medea-Jason legend into seemingly realistic twentieth-century characters and events. By situating his drama in identifiable contemporary society Lenormand is able to comment on themes which are relevant primarily to that time and that society. It entails the risk of his play becoming dated. Nevertheless, more than half a century after its first production, the themes of *Asie* are still valid because the sophistication of transport and communications has made contact between developed and developing nations much easier. Consequently the opportunities for exploitation are greater, as are the dangers facing indigenous vegetation and "underdeveloped" peoples. The concern expressed by groups in the developed countries about the disturbance of the ecological systems of the world by industrialization is evidence of the relevance of Katha Naham Moun's fear that her people's natural environment will be destroyed by the forces of progress. Lenormand does not articulate the problem in minute detail as the ecologists of the late twentieth century do, but their concern confirms the validity of his warning.

On the human plane too, the relations between different races have been the cause of much strife in the twentieth century. Lenormand presents the racial prejudice in his drama as originating on the European side, especially in de Listrac and de Mezzana. One tragic aspect of this racism is that it produces a racist reaction, even to her own children, from Katha Naham Moun: "Les fils des traîtres blancs sont traîtres a tout ce qui n'est pas blanc!" (115). Although the conflict of colours is important in the action it is only an element in the clash of cultures. The decisive struggle is between de Mezzana's goal of technological advancement for his sons and the Sibang people and Katha Naham Moun's rejection of this "progress". There are several indications that de Mezzana's vehement opposition to the beliefs of the Sibangs is based on fear. It was fear of Katha Naham Moun's reaction which led him not to seek to leave her country alone and it is only in his own environment that he has the



courage to reject her. Furthermore, his policy of colonial exploitation seems based on the philosophy that profit should be made while it is still possible: "Vous verrez. Nous serons jetés à la mer par nos bons frères inférieurs munis des tanks et des mitrailleuses que nous leur apprenons à construire" (68), and "les sauterelles jaunes dévoreront le tout" (69). His definition of the attributes of the colonizers "son Christ, ses banques et ses fonctionnaires" (68) indicates a profound cynicism.

The catastrophic conclusion to the conflict holds no hope for a practicable solution. Radine judges the work of Lenormand thus:

H.-R. Lenormand est entièrement axée sur [la vérité qui abaisse], d'où sa force et souvent l'originalité des perspectives qu'elle nous entr'ouvre, mais d'où aussi ses insuffisances, ses faiblesses, d'où sa richesse psychologique, mais d'où également sa pauvreté spirituelle et morale.<sup>11</sup>

Lenormand offers no faith in humanity as an antidote to the pessimistic conclusion of the play.

At the end of the drama *Katha Naham Moun*, representative of Asia, lies crushed. She has first been exploited and then cast aside by de Mezzana. To compound the tragedy his conduct has brought her to extinguish the lives of their sons - the living product of the union between Asia and Europe. The message of the drama must therefore be a grave warning that the exploitation of one country by another of a completely different culture poses enormous problems.

The transposition of the mythical data to this specific context is an imaginative undertaking and testifies once again to the inexhaustible variety of themes to be derived from Greek myth. Lenormand has chosen to emphasize an aspect of the relationship between Medea and Jason which is not of paramount importance in Euripides' drama. Instead of only being a barbarian, *Katha Naham Moun* represents a whole continent of the undeveloped and consequently barbarous. Conversely it is all of Europe, all of the "civilized" world, which must be held accountable for the injustice she suffers and for the fact that she

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11 *Op. cit.* 73

is forced by love, albeit deluded love, to attempt to save the souls of her children by ending their lives.

CHAPTER 7

*THE WINGLESS VICTORY*  
BY MAXWELL ANDERSON

BACKGROUND

The theme of conflict caused by racial intolerance is dominant in the verse drama *The Wingless Victory* which was written by the American playwright Maxwell Anderson (1888 - 1959) and produced in 1936.

"Maxwell Anderson dominated the American theater of the thirties as Eugene O'Neill dominated that of the twenties" wrote Vincent Wall in his essay, "Maxwell Anderson : The Last Anarchist".<sup>1</sup> Wall goes on to support his statement by pointing out that Anderson deserves this reputation not only because he achieved popularity in the theatre but because he consistently raised issues which he regarded as socially or politically important. Anderson's eventful career, which included dismissal from various newspapers and from Whittier College for advocating liberal and pacifist ideas, bears witness that his own convictions are reflected in his plays. Thus two of his dramas, *Gods of the Lightning* and *Winterset*, deal with the injustice of the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti while *Key Largo* speaks out against fascism. Not all of Anderson's plays are set in contemporary society. *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Mary of Scotland* and *Journey to Jerusalem* employ biblical and historical material to illustrate universal human themes. *The Wingless Victory* is an adaptation and transposition of the story of Medea and Jason.

Anderson sets his play in Salem, a town in New England, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He thus transfers the action to a location familiar to his audience but endeavours to sustain the perspective provided by myth by keeping a certain distance in time. The choice of Salem may have been motivated by the notoriety of that region as a result of the trials for witchcraft in

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1 In *American Drama and its Critics* ed. Alan S. Downer 1965 147.

the late seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that Arthur Miller also chose Salem as the setting for his play *The Crucible*<sup>3</sup> in which the witch-hunts are used as parallels for the smelling out of communists in the McCarthy era.<sup>4</sup> In his reworking of the Medea drama Anderson shows how the fanatical racial prejudice of the Puritans causes tragedy for a couple who attempt to live normally in their midst.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Like Lenormand, Anderson makes use of the outline of the ancient dramas for the nucleus of his dramatic action but prefaces it with various scenes which give the necessary information and establish the mood of the play.

The first scene conveys the narrow-minded, loveless Christianity of the characters who collectively represent the Creon figure: the Rev. Phineas McQuestion, his mother and the elders of the church. Into their gathering the news is brought by Phineas' brother Ruel (a character invented by Anderson) that their brother Nathaniel has come back as the captain and owner of a five-master, the *Queen of the Celebes*, which carries a full load of spices. Nathaniel thus has the role of Jason. Ruel's words provide the ingredients of a heroic reputation. Nathaniel returns after seven years. He has acquired not only wealth but a black wife and two children. Ruel's deliberately provocative dialogue with his brother and mother reveals that the inhabitants of Salem have strong prejudices against people of a different colour. Thus the theme of racism is announced very early in the play.

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2 See, for example, Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* 1950 and Kai T. Erikson *Wayward Puritans* 1966, especially 137-59, for an account of these witch hunts.

3 1953.

4 "Although Miller had long been fascinated with the Salem story there can be little doubt that the immediate inspiration for the play was his perception of the effects of the atmosphere of terror inspired by the investigation of the communist 'conspiracy' in America in the late 1940s and 50s" Neil Carson *Arthur Miller* 1982 62.

Before Nathaniel's arrival it becomes clear that the attitude of Phineas and his mother towards Nathaniel will be influenced by two factors - their need of his newly acquired wealth, as they are financially ruined, and their intense opposition to his association with a black woman. The tension between their material greed and moral disapproval dominates the first act.

Despite a lack of warmth in the welcoming of Nathaniel by his mother and Phineas, he expresses his wish to settle in Salem and to invest his money in the family business. Phineas' vehement resistance to accepting his brother's wife nearly leads to a decisive break, but this is averted by the intervention of Mrs McQuestion. She clearly warns Nathaniel that he is courting disaster by bringing a black wife to Salem but says that they will accept her. Significantly, it is only Ruel who answers in the affirmative when Nathaniel asks whether they will make his wife happy. Left alone on stage Phineas and Mrs McQuestion imply that their feelings of antipathy towards Nathaniel's black wife are as strong as ever but momentarily suppressed.

So the stage is set for a meeting between the narrow-minded, professedly Christian, American family and the dark princess of Celebes. The audience knows that the only reason that she will be tolerated is because Nathaniel's family needs his financial support. There is thus an atmosphere of extreme tension when Oparre (the Medea character) enters. Significantly, she has been admitted through the kitchen door, thus again pointing up the general attitude in Salem that anyone who is not white is a servant<sup>5</sup> and increasing the feeling of inevitable conflict.

In a monologue, cast in the form of a prayer to an unnamed god, Oparre hints at dark deeds in her past. She expresses a deep longing that she and her

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5 In a review of the first production of the play in *Theatre Arts* 21 Feb. 1937 89-95 Edith J.R. Isaacs notes that the set-designer altered Anderson's directions and instead of a door to the right "at the centre back, placed a high square double doorway that swings wide to an outer hall, an elegant and friendly entrance". The other characters enter and go off through this door and the audience expects Oparre to come through there too "and, when, instead, she enters from the kitchen, you hardly need her line: 'It has been said in my country it's an ill omen to come by the wrong door' to know that a cruel fate hangs over this quiet, royal woman who has come among strangers".

husband and children may at last know peace and security. The great love she expresses for Nathaniel reciprocates the sentiments already indicated by him. The couple introduced here are devoted to each other in loyalty and love. This is in strong contrast to the traditional opening of the dramas based on the Medea legend and serves as a counterpoint to the intolerance manifest in the words and conduct of Phineas and Mrs. McQuestion. The latter's welcome of Oparre is so cold as to be insulting and even worse follows from Phineas. When Nathaniel rebukes Phineas for his rudeness he is unrepentant:

Take your choice,  
the woman or my friendship! But not both! 207

Oparre behaves with dignity and restraint but is disturbed by the hostility. When she asks for an explanation she is told by Mrs. McQuestion:

Your blood! The black blood in your veins!  
Isn't that enough? 208

To this uncompromising, naked racism Oparre responds with an account of her people and experiences of violence and bloodshed. She tells how she saved Nathaniel's life and pleads for acceptance because of her willingness to strive for goodness. The traditional tale of Medea's help to Jason is thus used by Anderson to paint Oparre's past and also to explain why she is eager to be assimilated into an orderly society. Her passionate appeal meets a response only from Ruel and that underlines the tension:

You bring your light with you lady,  
a lamb led in among butchers! 209

The situation is complicated even further by a warning from Faith that she too loves Nathaniel. Rivalry in love is thus added to the problems of race and financial dependence. However, Oparre reiterates her wish to adapt to American life and to leave the violence of her earlier life behind. Nathaniel prevents a detailed explanation of deeds in Oparre's past but the undertone of grim events in her history has been reinforced.

Just when it seems that Oparre and Nathaniel will leave because of Phineas' insistence that Oparre is unwelcome Mrs McQuestion intervenes. Her words raise the possibility that she will try to overcome her irrational prejudice. Oparre's accommodating response keeps that possibility alive.

The second act takes the plot to six months later. From the start it is evident that Mrs McQuestion's racism is as strong as ever. This indication that the pressures are building up is reinforced by a summons served on Nathaniel to show cause why he has not given bond "for two slaves". This deliberately provocative insult enrages Nathaniel especially since he has lent the judge seven thousand dollars. The signs that his attempt to buy social recognition or even acceptance have failed, pile up: Other members of the church to whom he has lent money ostracise him, and his mother hints that when his money has run out he will face difficulties. The local problem is aggravated by a rumour that Nathaniel may be held accountable for certain acts in his past. Ruel is told that the *Queen of the Celebes* was originally a Dutch ship, the *Nike Apteros* (*Wingless Victory*) and that a diary in Dutch which is in possession of one of the crew of the *Queen of the Celebes* may prove that the ship was stolen and the crew murdered. This implies that Nathaniel may be liable to a charge of piracy - a capital offence in terms of international law. Ruel will attempt to prevent this knowledge reaching Phineas' ears. However, the tension is increased by another factor. In a scene with Faith it becomes apparent that, although Nathaniel still loves Oparre, the hostility which surrounds them is becoming almost unbearable. The impression is created that Nathaniel may act rashly to escape from the constraints of his situation.

For her part, Oparre also seeks to break out of the isolation imposed on her. She has made herself a dress in the local fashion and longs to be accepted as one of the local wives. She still feels utterly alien and when Nathaniel points out to her that they will never be accepted in Salem she wishes that they could find a neutral country where they would both be happy. This new aspect may be explained by the fact that for the first time the Jason figure is still loyal to his wife. Nathaniel can, however, only make clear to her the full hopelessness of their plight. They cannot leave, even if they had a place of refuge, because all his money is sunk in the family firm. For her part Oparre is prepared to leave without money. Their love and their being together

is the most important to her. Nathaniel's attitude raises fear in Oparre that he may be becoming too materialistic.

In this highly emotional atmosphere a further blow falls. Phineas knows the story of the ship and her crew. In reply to his allegations Nathaniel reveals his version of the events. This implicates Oparre's father as the initiator of the capture of the ship by duplicity. According to Nathaniel the ship was forfeit in any case and he and Oparre sailed away in her. The Dutch crew were killed attempting to wrest the ship from him and Oparre. This version features Nathaniel and Oparre as having benefited from the opportunity presented by her father's action, but casts a shadow over her behaviour towards her father. Her betrayal now makes it impossible for her to go back to her native land. This fact assumes importance in Phineas' attempt to blackmail Nathaniel into sending Oparre back to her people in exchange for suppressing the evidence about the ship and her cargo. Phineas thus assumes the role of Creon but unlike his predecessors, does not have the power to banish Oparre (Medea) and has to resort to blackmail. This has the effect of concentrating all sympathy on his victims for his motives are despicable - they may be reduced to unbridled racism and spite:

You've held the whip,  
and pushed your black brood on us, and laughed to see  
how we took the stench! We'll wipe that laughter out  
one way or another!

233

Nathaniel's first reaction is an outburst of indignation against the hypocrisy of the churchmen who are prepared to benefit from what they call a crime but want to punish him for the same crime. It seems as if Nathaniel will defy them, but at the decisive moment when Phineas threatens to set the mechanism of prosecution into motion, Nathaniel gives in:

I say get it over! Send her back! You've wanted  
just that - and you've got it! And what was good in me  
goes with her! Make away with her if you must,  
but you'll not get what I have!

235

Nathaniel's betrayal of Oparre's love and trust is thus presented as a surrender to hatred and materialism. For the first time a Jason figure is shown in the



act of perfidy, but it is malevolence and avarice, not another woman, which cause him to abandon his wife. Although many of the other Jasons also choose to abandon their Medeas out of self-interest, marriage to the ruler's daughter is always the necessary concomitant. Because of Anderson's altered interpretation this is no longer the case. Nathaniel is not moved by the love of Faith because he still loves Oparre. His love is however outweighed by his hatred of Phineas and the pious, hypocritical Puritans who drove him away originally and now want to strip him of his hard won wealth. This is what brings him to agree to send Oparre away although he realizes he is acting dishonourably.

Oparre's reaction shows up the double standards of the churchmen and Nathaniel's disloyalty to her. In a plea for Nathaniel, which is rich in dramatic irony, she shows her own unswerving faithfulness to him. For a short time it seems that she may yet change Nathaniel's decision, but his proposal that he be given the means to exploit a spice island known to him in order to repay Phineas is turned down. It becomes clear that Phineas wants to separate Nathaniel and Oparre once and for all. His attack on her religious beliefs elicits the response that when she came to Salem she was a Christian but the evidence of the local interpretation of Christianity as a religion "of bitterness and wrath and eternal fire" has estranged her from Christ. In spite of Nathaniel's insistence on the hardships ahead of them if they leave together, penniless, Oparre is prepared to endure everything, even temporary separation, as long as their love and trust remain unimpaired.

As Nathaniel hesitates Oparre asks that they be left alone. In this pivotal dialogue Nathaniel discloses that he has been affected by the constant singling out of them as a mixed couple. He even alleges that she felt shame before her father for this reason. Oparre denies his allegations. It is apparent that although she has not been unaffected by the external pressures her love has the strength to survive while Nathaniel has given up:

It's not  
the money - or the ships - that's something, but  
when we're together we're in an empty world -  
we live nowhere - we're not counted - we're  
some kind of horrible presence they're always trying  
to explain away -

Oparre understands that Nathaniel has been forced to choose between the life of the inhabitants of Salem and life with her and has opted for the former. This is a destructive blow and leads to an emotional outburst in which Oparre renounces all that she has adopted since her marriage to Nathaniel:

Come in!

All these white frightened faces, come in and hear!  
We have news for you. I have been misled  
a long time by your Christ and his beggar's doctrine,  
written for beggars! Your beseeching, pitiful Christ!  
The old gods are best, the gods of blood and bronze,  
and the arrows dipped in venom! You worship them, too,  
Moloch and Javeh of your Old Testament,  
requiring sacrifice of blood, revenging  
all save their chosen! You vouchsafe no pity  
to the alien, and I'll give none. I have been a princess,  
and I remember that gladly now. I come  
of a race that can go mad and strike! Why, yes,  
you fear me, and you should! Your pallid lips  
and pallid hands and hearts, your milky hearts  
that know neither love nor hate, your weasel warren  
that squeaks and clusters! What could there be between us,  
between the eagle and the rat, save death - ?  
and we've bred together - it sickens me - we've bred -  
and I've been brought to bed of you! Your lips  
were on my mouth! Your rodent flesh on mine,  
in rodent ecstasy! I'll tear you out  
from my breast, tear my breast down to bone and hard  
till that shame's gone from my people!

241-2

This monologue is the equivalent to the first reaction of the Medea characters in Euripides and Seneca. Here it is openly delivered to Nathaniel and the inhabitants of Salem and the threat of violent revenge is coupled with racial disgust. The arrival of her daughter Durian is the embodiment of their union: While her presence forces Oparre to calm herself, it also calls forth ominous words:

[Y]ou are my love and hate  
at war, incarnate. Take counsel! Never look  
like him if you would live!

242

Oparre announces that she and the children will sleep on board the ship and leave in the morning.

The last act takes place on board of *The Wingless Victory*. Oparre, half-crazed with sorrow, is calmed by Toala. Her question as to whether she has harmed the children with her dagger immediately raises the tension. Oparre laments the day she fell in love with Nathaniel. She sees no other future for her daughters than the brothels of the East. She is restrained by Toala from killing herself and her daughters. Yet Toala reveals that according to their ancient religion a woman who has married against the will of her father must die, and so must her children. Oparre's request for the phial of poison Toala has brought from the Celebes in the knowledge that "the men of the West have not been true" (246), signals her complete return to her native beliefs and customs. Therefore she is calm as she rocks Durian to sleep and reflects on the happiness she once knew with Nathaniel. Her passion rises steadily as her thoughts turn to her present suffering but, like the princess in Lenormand's *Asie*, she carries her decision through with tenderness and lays the children down to sleep "for the last time".

The arrival of Ruel with his offer of devotion and assistance is a signal that Oparre has one supporter in Salem, but her refusal of any help signifies that it is too late for her to choose any way but the one her religion has prescribed.

As Oparre kneels and prays to her god she is interrupted by Nathaniel who has realized that he cannot face life without her. In a scene laden with tragic irony Nathaniel appeals to Oparre to forgive him because he has suffered too and now "it's to be as it was" (251). Oparre maintains that his rejection of her on racial grounds has made any reconciliation impossible:

You've been ashamed  
to call me yours - ashamed to say 'she's mine'  
in any company - and I'm ashamed  
to say that you were mine, and my dark body  
remembers you. I hold you free of blame.  
You're but one of a colourless tribe, a tribe that's said:  
those who are black are slaves, to be driven slept with,  
beaten, sent on, never loved. Beyond law, we are,  
reptilian, to be trodden. You I forgive,  
but not your tribe or race - or the white of your hands;  
the insult I have had the blood in me  
will not forgive. - It will be no man's slave,  
nor will my daughters!

Nathaniel still cannot understand that his moment of betrayal has changed Oparre's whole attitude to life. When he insists on seeing the children and finds them, as well as Toala, dead, his first reaction is rage and incomprehension, even when he learns that Oparre too has drunk of the hemlock. As she dies she confesses that she still loves Nathaniel and that she wanted to free him by the deed. Nathaniel assumes responsibility for her death. This is the first time that a Jason character admits that he bears the guilt of causing the catastrophe, but it is also the first time that a Medea dies with words of love for her Jason. The impact of this ending is to shift the responsibility for the tragic outcome to the intolerance of the Puritan community.

The play ends with Ruel's arrival and the decision that he and Nathaniel will sail away the next day. The only prospect ahead of Nathaniel is a life of longing for the love he has lost.

Maxwell Anderson has thus made considerable changes to the traditional structure of the drama as presented by Euripides and his followers. At the commencement of the play the Jason figure returns to his native town which he left in disgrace seven years before. The sole reason why he is accepted back is that his family needs the fortune he has amassed in the interim (his Golden Fleece). So desperate is their desire for his money that they are prepared to tolerate his wife and children although they have deep-seated objections to her being of a different race. In the context of nineteenth-century New England any person of a dark skin colour is treated as a slave. Euripides does not describe Creon's motivation in accepting Jason and Medea in Corinth. It is clear that Jason will derive considerable benefits from the marriage to Creon's daughter. In Maxwell Anderson's play, however, the inhabitants of Salem stand to gain materially from Nathaniel's residence there, while he hopes to buy a normal life for himself and his family. The accent on the barbaric and, more specifically, black and pagan origin of the Medea figure is stressed until racial intolerance becomes the dominant theme of the play. This theme is further underscored by the emphasis on the Christianity of the New Englanders. This is the first time that a dramatist has set the pre-Christian story of Medea in such a context. Significantly, the prodigal son, Nathaniel, who has been brought up as a Christian in Salem, rejects his family's brand of religion, while

the pagan Oparre, who has been guided by the words of the Scriptures, at the opening of the play respects the Christian religion but, as a result of her exposure to the behaviour of the practising Christians in Salem, radically alters her attitude in the course of the drama.

The dramatic tension of the first act is generated by the uncertainty as to whether Nathaniel and his family will be accepted in Salem. There is no break between husband and wife. Like Lenormand, Anderson creates his own background for the characters so that the development of the dramatic action is plausible. At the end of the act it seems possible that the struggle against intolerance may be won.

Yet there is no respite or a glimpse of a time of happiness. Six months have passed when the second act commences and the battle for acceptance is still being waged. Indeed there are indications that now that Nathaniel has been stripped of his financial resources he will become the prey of the bigoted and vindictive townsfolk who refuse to accept his wife. This conflict comes to a head with an accusation of piracy in connection with the acquisition of the *Queen of the Celebes* which is really the *Nike Apteros* or *Wingless Victory*. The way in which Nathaniel commandeered the vessel with the help of Oparre's betrayal of her father, evokes echoes of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. The revealed name of the ship has undertones which suggest that Nathaniel and Oparre's initial success may yet be doomed to failure.

The climax and the turning point in the drama is the extortionate demand of Phineas, who voices the feeling of his family and the community, that Nathaniel should abandon Oparre and their children in exchange for the suppression of the truth about the *Queen of the Celebes*. This manoeuvre precipitates the crisis of the rejection of Oparre by Nathaniel. Because the constancy of their love has been central, this reversal has a decisive impact even though it occurs much later in the dramatic action than in most other Medea tragedies. Oparre's emotional reaction encompasses not only distress because of Nathaniel's lack of loyalty but a total disillusionment with the Christian values as lived by the people of Salem.

The dénouement follows a somewhat unexpected pattern. Oparre shows similarities to Seneca's Medea in that she is virtually deranged with grief and nearly kills herself and her children. Toala succeeds in bringing her back to reason, but the tension about the fate of the children increases as Toala reveals that according to their religion both Oparre and the children must die. There is no motive of vengeance or punishment. Oparre who has rejected the Christian religion accepts the ruling of her old religion and further believes that she is saving her daughters from a future which holds nothing but dishonour. Here *The Wingless Victory* shows strong similarities to Lenormand's *Asie* in the ultimate acceptance by the mother that there is no place in the world for half-castes. Like in *Asie*, the means employed to end the lives of the children reflect maternal love and concern.

Anderson provides an original end to the drama. A repentant Nathaniel arrives - too late to save Oparre but in time to allow her to die in his arms expressing her love and forgiveness. By this means the strength of their love which has been such an important factor in the drama is highlighted, as is its powerlessness against the malevolent forces of racism. Thus for the first time the curtain drops on a Jason figure fully conscious of the responsibility he bears for destroying the wife and family he loved. There is some sympathy for him because the pressure (from his family and the Salem community) to which he succumbed was overwhelming. Yet, because he lapsed in his loyalty to Oparre, he will suffer for the rest of his life.

Noteworthy is that the horror has been largely removed from the drama. The persecutors are not punished and the death scenes of the children and especially of Oparre are designed to evoke pity. Oparre must surely be considered the purest and noblest Medea - in many ways almost the antithesis of the traditional conception of the figure.

Maxwell Anderson's reworking of the Medea myth has not met with great acclaim<sup>6</sup> and that may be due, at least in part, to the redistribution of good and evil among the central characters of the drama.

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6 See J.L. Sanderson and E. Zimmerman (eds.) *Medea Myth and Dramatic Form* 1967 182.

### THE PORTRAYAL OF THE MEDEA FIGURE - OPARRE

Oparre is one of the most dignified Medea figures in the dramatic literature and also one of the gentlest. This makes the strong attachment of Nathaniel to her understandable and explains the great respect and love he feels for her:

I've taken a wife,  
from among the Malays, and she's more beautiful,  
and has a better head, and sweeter ways,  
and higher pride, and makes a better lover  
than any celery-top among you! Aye,  
and by God I'd trust her farther!

200

Anderson succeeds in creating an expectation of an exotic and mysterious woman before Oparre actually appears on the stage. Sympathy for her is created in the minds of the audience because of the consensus in Salem that anyone who is not white is of inferior character and should be treated as a servant.

She is introduced to the audience as a woman who has suffered much. She is conscious of treason and death in her past but hopes that the hardships she and her family have endured are sufficient atonement and that they may at last know peace. Paramount, however, is the impression of her great love for Nathaniel.

Oparre does not lose her dignity under the extreme provocation of the coldness of Mrs McQuestion and the crudely insulting behaviour of Phineas. Indeed her response is that of a warm, generous and open nature, in strong contrast to her husband's family. Significantly she forswears violence and expresses her intention to live like a Christian among Christians:

If I should answer  
as when I was a princess, I would say  
guard yourself well who take it on yourself  
to be enemy of mine! My enemies  
have suffered more than I! But in this place,  
still carrying in my heart the secret Christ  
by whom you live, I answer, I am your friend  
who have seen my husband as I see him. - Dark  
as your words have been, dark as your looks at me,  
evil as you may think you are, your evil  
is as the play of children to the world  
we two have left behind us. You are gentle  
even now in your anger. There is a kindness  
even in your abhorrence. Teach me that kindness.

210

Oparre's sincere desire to be accepted by Nathaniel's family and the community is proved by her appearance in a dress made by her according to the local fashion. She is prepared to tolerate the ignorance of the American ladies about her native country and its customs and even to be patronized by them in return for recognition as a fellow human being. Ironically the local population does not use Oparre's presence to find out more about the "heathen" people they saw and pray for. Their charity is in the abstract.

Nathaniel disabuses Oparre of the notion of their ever living a normal life in Salem. He believes they may succeed in gaining some form of recognition by ensuring that the community is financially indebted to them. Oparre, on the contrary, attaches little value to material possessions. To her the most important is that their love should remain constant. Oparre's fear that Nathaniel is changing and becoming obsessed by money like the people of Salem is voiced in her tale to Ruel about the beggar's palace which was destroyed by a single word. It implies that the loss of Nathaniel's love would be the end of her world.

Oparre's absolute dependence on Nathaniel's love is the cause of her vehement reaction when she learns that Phineas is using his knowledge about their past to force them apart or to ruin Nathaniel financially. Love is the decisive factor for Oparre but Nathaniel gives way because he has not been unmarked by the constant racialistic pressure and because he too attaches importance to material wealth. As her world crumbles about her Oparre proclaims that Christ has been driven from her by the behaviour of the local Christians. The obses-



sion with race and the discrimination against her spur her on to react in a similar way:

I come  
of a race that can go mad and strike! Why, yes,  
you fear me, and you should! Your pallid lips  
and pallid hands and hearts, your milky hearts  
that know neither love nor hate, your weasel warren  
that squeaks and clusters! What could there be between us,  
between the eagle and the rat, save death - ? 242

Although she often refers to the violence of her race and says that she could easily turn to violence, there is little indication of this barbaric side of her nature in her actions. Oparre does not plan vengeance against her enemies and the deaths she does cause are very gentle. She kills the children out of love, to save them from future degradation and her own death is due to the belief that she has lost Nathaniel. The last minute return of Nathaniel ensures that her distress is soothed before she dies. At the moment of death she reminds him of a moment of perfect love and happiness:

My sweet, my sweet -  
as it was by the coral edge - in the Indian sea - 253

These words are a deliberate echo of Nathaniel's earlier evocation of their love at its fullest:

. . . when I touch you  
this ground I stand on shifts away from me  
and we're alone on a certain coral edge  
where you turned to me and I kissed you. 224

It is fitting that Oparre should meet a happy death because the character depicted by Maxwell Anderson has no evil traits or even moral weaknesses. She is the victim of the racial intolerance and material acquisitiveness of others.

In keeping with this moral worthiness Oparre is not presented as a witch. If the Salem witch trials and the prominent role of Tituba, the black woman

from Barbados,<sup>7</sup> are taken into account this is somewhat surprising. The explanation must be sought in Anderson's concentration on the hypocrisy and double standards of the Christians and the antithesis their behaviour forms to that of Oparre. The only references to sorcery are those abruptly introduced by Phineas in an attempt to besmirch Oparre's character:

. . . the woman Oparre  
has hung her walls with idols, worships them  
in secret, corrupts your heart, blackens your mind  
and snares your body with her flesh!

238

These allegations are part of Phineas' obsessive repugnance for the idea of his brother's marriage to a black woman and do not reflect a general belief that Oparre manipulates nature and communicates with the supernatural as Medea traditionally does.

Anderson's heroine has lost much of the elusiveness of the classical prototypes of the Medea figure. In creating such a "good" protagonist, albeit with the betrayal of her father on her conscience, who takes her own life and the lives of her two children because of the moment of weakness of her Jason (Nathaniel) under the pressures of prejudice and avarice exerted by evil hypocrites, he has lost much of the force of the typical Medea figure who is fired by hate and the thirst for revenge.

#### THE JASON FIGURE - NATHANIEL McQUESTION

Nathaniel McQuestion too differs considerably from his predecessors in the Jason role. At first the emphasis is on his qualities as a dashing adventurer. This portrait which creates a background equivalent to Jason's career as Argonaut is confirmed by the panache with which Nathaniel makes his entry:

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7 See Starkey *op. cit.* 334-47 and Erikson *op. cit.* 141-4.

And so the sum and substance of it is  
I'm back, yes, and I never believed I'd get here -  
and I hardly believe it now. Damn my two eyes  
but this is a big world, mother!

196

The mixture of a sailor's pride and family bravado form a frank and hearty manner which contrasts sharply with the pious sarcasm of Phineas. On the other hand, the similarities between Nathaniel and Ruel, the current black sheep of the family, are marked.

In spite of the lack of warmth in the welcome of his mother and Phineas after an absence of seven years, Nathaniel expresses pleasure at being back. He shows no caution about managing his newly acquired wealth, but immediately declares his plans to invest it in the family business. In this way he plans to ensure that his wife and children are accepted by his family and in the community. The bitter reaction of his mother and Phineas to the news of his wife not being white, particularly the physical disgust evinced by Phineas (e.g. "You mate with some aborigine in a jungle / beget your children on her . . ." and "How do you wipe the smell off when you get up in the morning?") reveals an ineradicable racial intolerance which almost causes Nathaniel to leave. The intervention of Mrs McQuestion who is prepared to dissimulate the strength of her racial antipathy until they have secured the necessary financial support from Nathaniel prevents this. Yet Anderson's overemphasis on the fanatical bigotry of Phineas and his mother makes it hard for an audience to accept Nathaniel's decision to stay in Salem. The friendly reaction of Ruel and Faith contribute a little towards redressing the balance, but Nathaniel's confidence that his money will pave the way towards social acceptance seems naïvely optimistic.

Part of Nathaniel's flamboyant style is calculated to provoke the narrow-minded, outward piousness of his mother and brother. Thus he claims the devil as his patron saint and exclaims to his mother: "God deliver me from the followers of the lonely Nazarene, and their fake humility" (215).

Nathaniel discovers that he was seriously mistaken in his attempt to buy social acceptability. Instead of gratitude, he has earned resentment. This is

amply illustrated by Phineas' vindictiveness, when he obtains the proof which lays Nathaniel open to blackmail. Nathaniel's error was to suppose that his money would neutralize his family's racism, but their rancour at being under an obligation to him merely exacerbates their rampant prejudice.

Anderson takes care to prepare the audience for the fatal weakening in Nathaniel's love and loyalty to Oparre. Even before he is confronted by Phineas he confides to Faith that the discrimination against him and Oparre is placing him under severe stress:

I begin  
to hate these streets and the people on them. Yes,  
and hate myself. 219

Even more disquieting signs of mental strain and even of racism are mentioned:

- I'll wake some morning and find  
the bed-clothes stained with blood - and know I've killed her -  
her - and the children - and that damned negroid thing  
that waits on us - and not dare to look - but know  
I've done it. 220

Oparre's mention to Ruel that Nathaniel seems to be changing adds to this picture. The capitulation to Phineas' demand is therefore not unexpected. The attempt to convey his decision to Oparre shows up the difference between her and Nathaniel. Her forthright trust and loyalty almost shame him into following her example and devoting himself entirely to their love, but he is deterred by two factors, the first his reaction to the intolerance they have experienced everywhere and the second his refusal to give up his financial assets.

To Oparre, Nathaniel's words invalidate their entire relationship. Yet he has no word of comfort for her but harps upon his own suffering. This egotism is a familiar trait in the ancient Jason characters too. Nathaniel's insensitivity causes Oparre's passionate tirade in which she renounces all that bound her to Nathaniel. His next meeting with her is as she is waiting for death.

Finally, but too late to save his family, Nathaniel comes to the realization that he has made the wrong choice. He confesses his mistake to Oparre and

expects to be forgiven, but he still has no conception of the depth of her suffering as a result of his rejection of her. His words in their last scene together are thus laden with dramatic irony. When he discovers the bodies of the children and Toala his first impulse is to condemn Oparre, but, when she discloses that she acted out of love and had not wanted him to know, his expression of love ensures that she dies peacefully.

Anderson breaks new ground in presenting a repentant Nathaniel whose love is stronger than his self-interest. This must be understood in conjunction with the interpretation of Oparre and of the Puritans. It would be wrong for Oparre to die wretchedly, but, on the other hand, it would also be wrong for Nathaniel to be as racially biased and as materialistic as his brother Phineas. Nathaniel's reversal leaves him alone, not to gesticulate in impotence or bewilderment at his wife's cruelty and vindictiveness, but to mourn a mother who killed her children out of love and a wife who loved him more than he realized.

Like Oparre, Nathaniel is nobler than his counterparts in other dramatic versions of the myth. Nevertheless, it is the cracking of his resolution under the combined force of blackmail and ostracism which provoke the tragic dénouement.

#### THE CREON FIGURE AND OTHER MINOR CHARACTERS

Because of the altered plot Anderson's drama does not contain a character which corresponds precisely to the figure of Creon. The most important functions of Creon are his acceptance of Jason as his son-in-law and his order banishing Medea. She executes her vengeance not only against Jason but also against Creon and his daughter. With the omission of a new marriage for Nathaniel the first part of Creon's role disappears. The second part is assumed largely by Phineas who cleverly manipulates the various factors of the situation: Nathaniel's love for Oparre, his capital tied up in local investments, the allegedly criminal acts in Nathaniel's past and the ingrained racialism of the New Englanders. Phineas forces Nathaniel to choose between losing all his financial assets or losing Oparre. Thus, in effect, Phineas' manipulations achieve the

same result as Jason's betrayal of Medea and the banishment by Creon. They are the cause of the catastrophe.

As far as characterization is concerned, Phineas exceeds all his counterparts in unpleasantness. He professes his Christianity insistently but in his utterances and actions reveals a harsh and relentless nature which is in stark contrast with the Christian message of love and forgiveness. This is demonstrated in the opening scene of the drama where he is rigidly inflexible even though the life of a small child is at stake: "It would be as well if he were to die - and better for your soul" (185).

Phineas' concern with outward appearances is another aspect of his character which raises doubts about the genuineness of his faith:

There's disgrace enough.  
Even though I disown him, never see him,  
think of the fingers pointed at me: there's  
that preacher whose brother married a nigger wife  
and fetched her home! How much is a man of God  
expected to endure?

194

Perhaps the only positive aspect of Phineas' character is his refusal to dissimulate his hostility to Nathaniel and Oparre. He tells Oparre that it would be better for her if she had never seen Nathaniel and warns the latter to keep his money because it is all he has. Nathaniel will not be a friend of his as long as he does not renounce Oparre. Unbridled racialism is the motivating force which causes Phineas to scheme against his brother's marriage. The crude terminology he uses shows that he regards black people as animals, not human beings. There is no attempt to change his preconceptions when he meets Oparre. Initially Anderson shows him as a man who believes that he is advancing the cause of moral purity, but at the climax of the play there is no doubt that he consciously uses blackmail to attain his ends:

You see, it happens  
we have the evidence in our hands. If we  
are silent, then there's nothing said; you're safe.  
And we'll say nothing, burn the diary  
and the logbook - if you send the woman Oparre  
back to her people.

232

Phineas has no moral scruples about deriving financial benefit from what he classifies as a crime. Phineas is thus an evil man who is prepared to sacrifice the happiness and even the lives of others to preserve the outward appearance of Christian purity and harmony. His much-vaunted Christianity covers a perverted mind.

Mrs McQuestion, a character invented by Anderson, shares many of the traits of Phineas. She shows little maternal affection for her sons but has sympathy with Phineas because their attitudes to life are similar. She is determined that the family business should profit from Nathaniel's wealth and therefore intervenes decisively to prevent Phineas' hostility from driving Nathaniel away. Like Phineas she manifests an ingrained racism but she pretends to be willing to make an effort to accept Oparre. However, her racial prejudice breaks out involuntarily in physical gestures as well as in her words:

Your blood! The black blood in your veins!  
Isn't that enough?

208

She prides herself on running a "godly household" in a "godly town" but again her concentration is on appearances rather than on moral worth.

In the second act it is clear that she has not been won over by Oparre or her granddaughter and although she is aware of Phineas' plan she does not intervene. She is even hardhearted enough to taunt Nathaniel in his emotional conflict:

You want it yourself.  
You've wanted her away. I've seen it.

235

Nathaniel receives no support from his mother in his dilemma, but from another, unexpected source he does get disinterested advice. Faith urges him to leave with Oparre because if he stays he won't forgive himself. The dramatic irony of these words would not be lost on anyone familiar with the outcome of the story of Medea.

Faith's role corresponds in some ways to that of the daughter of Creon. She has a longstanding admiration for Nathaniel, and there is a suggestion that,

if he had not brought home a wife, he would have chosen Faith as his bride. Faith provides a human element in the depiction of Phineas and his flock. She displays the joy and excitement at Nathaniel's return one would have expected from his close relatives, but, like the rest of the town, she suffers from racial prejudice. Her reaction to Oparre is one of hostility based on instinctive racism. This brings her to shun Nathaniel, but because she knows that Nathaniel really loves Oparre, she has the generosity of spirit to urge him not to let Oparre leave alone. Faith thus represents, as her name implies, the better side of the local thoughts and beliefs.

The other character who shows natural human responses is the youngest brother, Ruel. His defiant refusal to espouse virtue conspicuously makes him an outsider in Salem. He discerns, through the veil of piousness, the underlying cupidity of Phineas and does not hesitate to tease him about it. In the same way he provides comic relief when he outrages Phineas and his mother by joking about Nathaniel's marriage to a black woman:

- P. : Where do these women come from?
- R. : I don't know. I have only the most alarming suspicions.
- P. : How long have they been with him?
- R. : I fear it's not an affair of the moment. There are two children.
- Mrs McQ. : Children!
- R. : Two children.
- Mrs McQ. : Black children!
- R. : Well, not black. Shall we say a faint coffee-colour? 188

Ruel is the only member of the family who sincerely welcomes Oparre and the one who tries to protect Nathaniel from Phineas' persecution. He remains loyal to his promise to be a friend. Oparre's refusal of his offer of protection does not deter him from joining Nathaniel at the end of the drama. It is fitting that they should leave Salem together as the tragic outcome of the action has shown that there is no place in the town for anyone who does not subscribe to the rigid and inhuman code of the Rev. Phineas McQuestion.



In comparison with the ancient nurses, and also those of Corneille and Lenormand, Toala has a relatively limited role. She supports Oparre because they share the feeling of being aliens in Salem. Because Oparre's thoughts and feelings emerge in dialogue with various characters there is very little interaction with Toala until after the break with Nathaniel. In the last act Toala plays the role of the confidante. Her acquiescence in death and the chosen mode of death confirms that Oparre, having been rejected by Christians, has returned to her own people's customs and beliefs.

Of the other characters the elders of the church support Phineas to the hilt while Happy Penny is on the side of Ruel and Nathaniel, but their roles are minor. The characters of the children, who for the first time are daughters, not sons, are not developed as in *Asie*. *The Wingless Victory* is however not primarily concerned with the fate of the children but with the love of Nathaniel and Oparre and what happens when this love is subjected to the callous bias of dogmatic Christians who are also inflexible racists.

#### THE LITERARY STYLE OF *THE WINGLESS VICTORY*

Maxwell Anderson had an elevated concept of what he was trying to achieve in the American theatre. This is evident not only from his choice of subjects and themes but also from his theoretical writings.<sup>8</sup> His ideal seems to have been a standard commensurate with the tragedies of classical Greece. In many of his dramas he attempted to present contemporary themes in contemporary dress but without the realism of prose dialogue. Anderson's preference for blank verse is one aspect of his aim to create poetic tragedy. By casting his dialogue in this form Anderson asserts the right of the characters to express themselves more poetically than in everyday speech. In the case of *The Wingless Victory* where

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8 See, for instance, the essay "The Basis of Artistic Creation in Literature" in *The Bases of Artistic Creation* by M. Anderson, R. Carpenter and R. Harris 1942 or "The Essence of Tragedy" in *Medea* ed. Sanderson and Zimmerman *op. cit.*

the setting is in the past this more elevated tone does not jar. Indeed the dialogue often seems very close to American contemporary speech:

Man, man, oh, man,  
I tell you our tea's been weak. 198

or

O : Why did he wish  
to speak with Nathaniel?  
R : He? I don't know. Oh - Happy -  
nothing in special. Some rumour. Some trade, I guess -  
business, no doubt. 227

Although there are more examples like the above, the general tone is less colloquial. Indeed in her review of the production of *The Wingless Victory* Edith J.R. Isaacs<sup>9</sup> criticizes the length of Oparre's speeches. She contends that in his desire to give Oparre's language something of the Oriental fullness and richness Anderson went too far. The criticism of Anderson's "wordiness" is made by other writers too.<sup>10</sup> At its best this facility with words leads to the lively depiction of character and mood:

I've had enough of this washing up and down  
across salt waters. There's too damn much salt water  
on our terrestrial pumpkin, and now I'm here  
with two feet planted on New England rock  
I want to shake off my sea legs, sink my pile  
in our old chandlery business - McQuestion Sons -  
and take root where I'm remembered. 198

As this extract of Nathaniel's words shows, Anderson makes use of picturesque but uncomplicated images from nature to enliven his speech. Nathaniel and Ruel transmit their exuberance in their speech which often verges on the blasphemous:

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9 *Loc. cit.* 94.

10 E.g. J.W. Krutch *American drama since 1918* 1957 291: "Mr Anderson . . . seems at times to suffer under the even more painful inability to find ideas for the words which flow almost unbidden."

Why should I make it easier for you? No,  
we'll out with it once for all, by Judas - make it  
a proclamation to the citizens  
of Salem - Jesus junior here and all  
his sycophant apostles! 229

These words deliberately chosen to shock the Puritans represent the counterpoint to their biblical references and pious platitudes, e.g. "God is not bought, nor weighs your value by your having" (206); "God deliver you from your pride" (215); "I wash my hands of you" (234). Apart from other phrases with a biblical connotation, such as the "seven lean years" (187) and "the second coming", the cautionary tale told by Mrs McQuestion (200) and Oparre's tale of the beggar whose palace was destroyed by a word (227-8) conjure up respectively American folk wisdom and the mystery of Oriental legends.

Some of the most striking images and vivid use of language convey the depth of the racial revulsion of the Puritans:

You've held the whip,  
and pushed your black brood on us, and laughed to see  
how we took the stench! 233

But sometimes this physical disgust is expressed in very ordinary words:

Must she - touch my chair? 203

In general the simplicity of language in moments of strong emotion, e.g.

There's such a thing as a love  
that holds the world well lost - I thought it was ours -  
perhaps it was only mine. 238

is far more effective and moving than the more turgid periods or purple patches of which there are too many. Such precious diction as in the following words of Oparre show how uneven the style is:

Ten little nudities  
caught somewhere on an island, grouped in a ring  
all innocent of costume. 223

The verbosity of some of the speeches together with the exaggerated characteristics of some of the characters contribute to the atmosphere of melodrama rather than of tragedy and go some way towards explaining why *The Wingless Victory* is not counted among Anderson's best plays.

## CONCLUSION

Mention has been made of Maxwell Anderson's attempts to deal with important social and political ideas in his dramas. In *The Wingless Victory* he has chosen the universal and timeless story of race prejudice.

In Anderson's immediate social context race prejudice was, as it still is in many countries, a bitter and dehumanizing phenomenon. Instead of becoming embroiled in emotional reactions through a play set in contemporary society, he therefore elected to obtain the perspective of a historical setting. For this purpose the community of Salem which had become notorious as a result of the witch-trials served well. The Puritans of this region are part of American history. The story of Medea and Jason was therefore transferred and adapted to convey a message to Anderson's contemporaries of the heinous effects unbridled prejudice may have. For good measure there are also stern warnings against materialism and censure of religious bigots whose lives do not reflect the high ideals of their faith.

In spite of Anderson's attempts to give his theme timeless and universal applicability his play seems strangely dated, if compared even to Lenormand or to other modern treatments such as that of Anouilh. The reason for the ultimate lack of conviction in his handling of the theme must lie in his overstatement. The characters are caricatures of the qualities they represent and strain credibility. Although Anderson's attempt to rework the Medea story in his own way is interesting, he has lost much of the impact of the drama by taming the heroine.

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CHAPTER 8  
*AFRICAN MEDEA* BY JIM MAGNUSON

BACKGROUND

Jim Magnuson is a contemporary American playwright. His reworking of the Medea myth, which was first produced in 1968, is a very interesting transposition of the conflict to Portuguese colonial Africa. At the time of the play's first production sporadic incidents of protest against the colonial overlords had already begun in the Portuguese colonies in Africa which were to receive their independence in 1974. However, in another part of the world, the armed forces of the United States were engaged in a drawn-out and bloody war against the attempts of the Vietnamese to throw off the yoke of the imperialist powers. In the United States the Civil Rights Movement was seeking to break the pattern of racial separation and prejudice in the southern states. The Vietnam war and racial discrimination within the United States were the two issues which dominated American public life in the late 1960s. There is no doubt that Magnuson's *African Medea* could be interpreted as a protest, not only against the Portuguese colonial administration, but also against imperialism and racial prejudice in general. Thus the play could be read as criticizing the official policy of the American government in Vietnam and supporting the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A.

The fact that Magnuson's plays of this period were produced mainly by college, community and street theatre groups<sup>1</sup> confirms his position as a writer engaged in the cause of social and political reform. He falls outside the mainstream of American commercial theatre, unlike his older compatriot, Maxwell Anderson, whose plays were regularly produced in Broadway theatres. The two playwrights have in common, however, that they both transfer the dramatic action of the Medea legend from the ancient Greek world to a different time and place in order to point out universal aspects of human behaviour which are of contemporary relevance. Like Anderson, Magnuson maintains the perspective provided by myth or legend by setting his drama in an earlier period: "the

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1 Cf. *New American Plays* v. IV ed. W.M. Hoffman 1971 153.

early part of the nineteenth century". He chooses not to tie the action of the play to a precise historical event or even location - neither the name of the colony, nor the "large African city on the West Coast" is specified.

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Magnuson has made minor changes to the characters of the drama, but he has followed Euripides very closely in his plot. Medea is a princess of the Bono, a distant tribe in Africa. Her Nurse is an old slave woman. Jason is a Portuguese adventurer, slave-trader and dealer in ivory, while the Creon role is transformed to that of Barretto, the Portuguese governor of the city. His daughter, Cecilia, is not a *dramatis persona*. The Tutor of the two boys, who have small speaking parts, is an old black man, while Adago, the king of yet another country in Africa, has the role of Aigeus. The chorus consists of "poorly dressed African women". A soldier plays the role of the Euripidean messenger, while a blind beggar, a character invented by Magnuson, represents certain elements of the native population.

The play is divided into two acts, but the action throughout takes place in front of a "large European house" belonging to Jason. Magnuson thus preserves the unity of place typical of classical tragedy.

Already in the opening exchanges it is clear that there is revolution in the air. The blind beggar, who is asking for alms outside Jason's house, is told by the chorus of ragged African women to show more respect. He replies that he does respect their "Portuguese masters" because their "many kindnesses weigh on our hearts like stone" (155).<sup>2</sup> The irony of this statement is underlined by his defiant exclamation: "I won't be still any longer. Why should we be silent? Because our masters sleep? Slumber on soft pillows behind those white walls, dreaming that they are in Lisbon. Awake, masters, for you are in Africa! . . . Your many kindnesses to us - slavery, death, disease, are soon to be repaid. The time is near" (155). The chorus does not deny the validity of his charges

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2 All references are to and quotations from *African Medea* 154-90 in *op. cit.* ftnt 1 above.

against their masters, but offers only the advice that he is powerless to accomplish anything and that Jesus tells them to love their enemies. The beggar's reaction is that religion is used by the white men to sanctify the bonds they impose. He will never forgive them and Jason "slave-trader, dealer in ivory" will be among the first to pay. Thus the introduction of Magnuson's version of the Medea-Jason conflict first sketches a background of general disharmony between black and white, between indigenous Africans and Portuguese overlords. The background strife, which develops parallel to the final quarrel between Medea and Jason, thus adds an extra dimension to their personal struggle.

The audience is told that Jason has left his wife Medea and that he is about to remarry. The entry of the Nurse decisively transforms the Euripidean situation to the problems of colonization. She wishes, not that the *Argo* should never have gone to Colchis, but that the "long slave ships had never passed down the Congo" (157). Then the Nurse and the chorus would still be free and Medea would never have fallen in love with Jason. Although Medea was happy with Jason at first, all is changed now: "Hatred hangs in the air" (157). Jason has abandoned Medea because the marriage was not a Christian one and is to marry the blonde daughter of Barretto, the governor of the city. Medea, as in the tragedy of Euripides, lies weeping within the house, and will not eat or drink or speak to anyone, but cries out to her native gods to rescue her. The chorus and the Nurse are apprehensive about the safety of Medea's children. They fear her violent nature. She has killed for Jason's love before.

These thoughts are contrasted with the arrival of the Tutor and the children. The Tutor shows genuine concern for his charges. He sees their future as that of Africans, but the Nurse reminds him that they are half-Portuguese. The children's innocent demands for stories and their unconsciousness of the laden atmosphere provide a few moments of relief from the gathering tension, but then the Tutor reveals the rumour that Medea and the children are to be sent away. The audience therefore again knows about Medea's exile before she does. As the voice of Medea is heard calling out her wish to die, the Nurse sends the children off with the Tutor.

Medea calls on the Sun goddess Nyame to let her die, but also to bring pain and death to her hated husband and his bride. Medea's savage tribe, her

theft of the Golden Fleece, the betrayal of her father and the murder of her brother are all mentioned before she is at last persuaded to come outside. She refuses the sympathetic solidarity of the chorus. They have accepted their position as slaves and have thus become accomplices of the oppressors. She sees herself as utterly forsaken, a refugee hated in her native land and now deserted by her husband.

Barretto arrives and brusquely announces to Medea that she must leave the city at once with her children. He has two grounds for fearing her: First, that she may use her powers as a sorceress (he bluntly accuses her of being a witch) to harm his daughter, and, secondly, that because of her popularity with the black inhabitants of the city she may take advantage of the explosive political situation to incite them to open rebellion. When Medea's appeal to his better instincts fails, she demands that he kill her - that would be the surest way to forestall the danger she represents. Just as in Anouilh's *Médée*, his refusal to carry out this request demonstrates to Medea that he lacks resolution. Thereupon she asks for a day's delay - ostensibly to make the necessary preparations to leave with the children. At length Barretto gives in.

Medea is now resolved to wreak vengeance upon her enemies - Jason, his bride and her father. The beggar brings the news that the chief of the Mbamba, Adago, has arrived and is staying at the governor's house. The Nurse thinks he may provide a way of saving Medea, but she is interested only in planning her retribution. Before the Nurse can take the matter further, Jason arrives. The scene between them is shorter than in Euripides' tragedy, but, like Euripides' Jason, he blames Medea for causing her own banishment and for spoiling the future he was planning for the children. Medea counters by accusing him of treachery and ingratitude for all she has sacrificed on his behalf. Jason justifies his action by saying that it is a mistake to trust in a passion like love. He has chosen to be pragmatic. His new marriage will ensure his freedom and security. Medea accuses him of destroying her future and her past. There is clearly no possibility of a solution acceptable to both of them. Jason goes off enraged because Medea refuses to let him see his sons.

As the chorus comments on Medea's struggle between love and hatred, Adago, who has been summoned by the Nurse, arrives and greets Medea warmly.



He has come to the city for advice about a cure for his barrenness. His great desire to have children indicates to Medea that through their children Jason could be dealt a crippling blow. In spite of Adago's cordiality it is clear that he does not want to antagonize his hosts by becoming involved with Medea.<sup>3</sup> He does, however, offer to receive her in his land if she makes her own way there, and from there he will give her passage to a safe country. In return she promises to cure his childlessness.

The chorus rejoices<sup>4</sup> that Medea is now assured of a place of safety, but she says that she is planning dark deeds. When they warn her not to endanger herself, she pretends to accept their advice and says she will send the bride golden gifts as tokens of her love and forgiveness. She instructs the Tutor to summon Jason to fetch the gifts and say farewell to his children. In spite of Medea's apparent wish for reconciliation, the Nurse is tense, and, as drums beat in the distance, the chorus fears trouble in the night. On this double note of strained expectancy the first act ends. Although Magnuson has followed the plot of the Greek tragedy very closely thus far, the change he has made in letting Medea conceal her true plans from the chorus and the Nurse, raises the possibility that she may indeed have decided to forego her vengeance.

The suspense is maintained in the next act until Medea is alone on the stage and prays to her goddess, Nyame, to invest the presents with deadly power. The scene is reminiscent of Seneca's scene of invocation, but much shorter. Medea thus shares her plans for vengeance only with the audience. This change obviates the necessity of explaining the silence of the Nurse and the chorus on the matter. Her earlier request to the chorus to keep a possible plan of revenge quiet therefore appears unnecessary.

When the Tutor returns with Jason, Medea expresses her wish that they should be friends. She asks the children to greet their father. Their reluctance to do so shows that he has lost contact with them. When Jason raises the question of the children's future and possible education in Europe,

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3 In Eur. *Med.* 729-30 Aigeus says that the Corinthians are also friends of his.

4 The description of the land to which Medea will be sent by Adago, may be compared to Euripides' chorus' praise of Athens.

the Tutor points out that they are "mulatto". Jason insists that they are his sons and that he is determined to look after them. Medea reminds him that they have been exiled. The Tutor urges Medea to take the children away as the situation in the city is dangerous. Medea's words about the children assume an ambiguity which is filled with dramatic irony. As with Euripides, her emotions cause her to weep. She explains her tears as having been caused by the decision that the children must stay. For the first time the details of her plan are told.<sup>5</sup> The children are to take the gifts to the governor's daughter and ask her to intercede with her father to allow them to stay in the city. Medea brushes aside Jason's objections that his bride does not need gifts. The children leave with explicit instructions from Medea to let no one else touch the gifts. Jason is thus again an unwitting accomplice in the destruction of his bride.

The words of Euripides' chorus (976-7) proclaiming that there is no hope left for the children now, are given to Medea by Magnuson. Only now does the chorus realize that she is still intent on vengeance and the full extent of her planned revenge. Medea insists that the death of the bride will not be enough. As she goes into the house to await news of the outcome of her plan, the chorus indicates that a revolt has started in the city. The violence instigated by Medea thus takes place against the background of general upheaval. The beggar brings wild tales of chaos in the city and incidents of disorder he has "seen". The police have been ordered out, but many have mutinied. The beggar urges the fearful chorus to join the revolution and gain their freedom. It accuses the beggar of already having assumed the attitude of a slave-driver in his desire to inflict indiscriminate death. The Tutor and the chorus expect more terrors before the night is over, but, ironically, their fears are momentarily relieved by the return of the Nurse with the boys.

The gifts have been accepted and the boys will be allowed to stay. Medea's reaction of despair baffles the Nurse who is not aware of her real purpose with the gifts. When the Nurse has taken the boys off again Medea suddenly exclaims that her children have a home while she is roofless. She rationalizes that their Portuguese blood has ensured their acceptance: "I want no

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5 In Eur. *Med.* the plan is outlined to the chorus and the audience immediately after the departure of Aigeus.

whiteness, no tenderness, near my heart. I will cut it off like fat from lean meat" (183). As she utters these ominous words one of Jason's soldiers comes to warn her that she must escape the consequences of her terrible deed. Medea insists on being told how her magic took effect. The soldier describes in vivid detail the bride's horrible death just as she was approaching Jason at the altar.

The chorus and the Nurse plead with Medea to be satisfied with the deaths of Cecilia and her father, but as the drumbeats grow louder, she instructs the Nurse to bring the boys to her. She declares prophetically: "Our people, black people, have a future. The black man will live freely in Africa one day and possess a future all his own . . . But you and I . . . there is no future, no choice . . ." (187). Medea then takes the children indoors telling them, "Night is for sleep. You are going to sleep now" (187). In desperation the chorus calls first on Jesus and even on Medea's goddess Nyame to stop her, but the death cries of the children ring out from within the house.

As the Nurse, Tutor and chorus lament the butchering of the children, Jason storms in, armed and eager to punish Medea for the death of his bride and her father. The chorus immediately accuses him of being responsible for the horror, but he does not yet grasp the full implications of their charge. He insists that he must protect the boys against the wrath of Barretto's men seeking to punish Medea, but the Nurse tells him they are dead. Jason refuses to believe her. Even when Medea mockingly appears in the doorway and shows him her bloodstained hands, "For you my hands have always shone with . . . blood of my brother, blood of my sons, most precious wine" (189), he still demands to see his sons so that he may protect them. As Medea replies ambiguously and tauntingly, Jason draws his gun, but Medea says her power as a sorceress will protect her against his bullets. The snakes at her feet are poisonous and will assure his death if he attempts to attack her physically. When she has thus rendered Jason helpless, she flings open the door and reveals the bodies of the boys pinned against the Fleece.

Medea refuses to give up the bodies to Jason. She will leave with the spirits of the night while her magic still holds. She advises Jason bitterly to

go and mourn two small bodies among the corpses of the slaves he has captured.

As Medea leaves, the fires and other signs of revolution have disappeared. Like her, they have spent their violence for the moment. Jason collapses in front of his house and the chorus chants a curious dirge which discloses their uneasiness about her future in the sanctuary she has been promised. The ordinary women are prepared to huddle together and wait for whatever the morning sun may bring, but the Golden Fleece which has been blackened by blood is an ominous portent of brutality to come.

From the above summary of the structure it is clear that Magnuson has relied primarily on the tragedy of Euripides for the outline of his plot. His dialogues are considerably shorter, mainly because of the realistic prose style he has chosen. Because *African Medea* preserves the mythical names of Medea and Jason and much of the traditional background information, Magnuson did not need to create a new past for his protagonists as is the case in *Asie* and *The Wingless Victory*. He has made the changes necessary to accommodate the altered location and period. Medea's country of origin has been changed, but the details about the betrayal of her father, the murder of her brother and the theft of the Golden Fleece retain their importance. Indeed, the significance of the holiness of the Fleece is emphasized throughout and brought to a grisly climax in the final scene.

Like Euripides' Medea, the African Medea never falters in her hatred of Jason. The scene with Adago is pivotal, because, once she is certain of a place of refuge, Medea proceeds with her plans for revenge. The background of racial tension and political unrest lends even more urgency to the execution of Medea's vengeance and makes the governor's eagerness to be rid of her more understandable. The violence brooding within the city is more disturbing than the action threatened by Acastus in Seneca's *Medea*. The addition of the beggar's role provides a second perspective on the feelings of the ordinary black people in the city. He is a rebel, in contrast to the poor black women who accept their hard lot submissively. It is because of their submission that Medea declines to see them as allies. Two significant deviations from Euripides' plot are, first, that Medea does not take the Nurse and the chorus into her con-

fidence and that a bond of complicity is thus established between her and the audience; and, secondly, that the wedding has not yet taken place at the beginning of the drama. Thus Cecilia may be pictured as suffering her ghastly end at the moment the marriage to Jason is about to be solemnized.

Magnuson's altered ending, with Medea leaving "with the spirits of the night", is an attempt to find an acceptable substitution for the dragon-drawn chariot, but lacks its theatrical splendour. The last words of the chorus effectively convey the utter chaos and despair caused by the completion of the dramatic action: "We watched helpless as violence raced violence, as evil mated evil" (190). There is no hope for ordinary people left behind in the strife-torn city now deprived of its governor, while Medea's future is also uncertain. Magnuson's conclusion is the most unequivocal of all the Medea dramas discussed so far, that wrongs or injustices repaid in kind will provide no lasting solution.

#### THE PORTRAYAL OF MEDEA

The African Medea created by Magnuson corresponds in many ways to the Medea of Euripides. Her passionate love for Jason, which caused her to betray her father and kill her brother in order to help Jason steal the Golden Fleece, has turned to implacable hatred at his rejection of her. The murder of Pelias is omitted from her past history. Instead, Jason is even more indebted to her because she has made his father young again.<sup>6</sup> Initially she was happy with Jason in the colonial city but the news of his betrayal has prostrated her with grief and she longs for her own people to whom it is impossible for her to return. The Nurse and the chorus are afraid that she may wreak dreadful vengeance because "she is a strange and dangerous woman" (158). Nevertheless they are sympathetic towards her because not only is she a black woman like them, but she represents a symbol of hope - the only black woman who is not a slave: "Medea was like a queen to us. She was the only nobility some of us had" (161). Nevertheless Medea refuses to rely on their friendship. They ac-

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6 Here Magnuson uses a pre-Euripidean aspect of the myth, cf. ch. 1 above.

cept their servile position but to her this is unthinkable. She is thus alone by choice, because to adopt any cause other than resistance would prevent her from accomplishing the retribution which dominates her thoughts. Her arrogant response to Barretto's equally arrogant words emphasizes the difference between her and the other black women who bow humbly before the governor. At no stage does Medea show any inclination to engage the solidarity of blacks against the colonial oppressors on her behalf as Barretto fears may happen. This again underlines that she regards her vengeance as her own private cause. The only incidental benefit she derives from the cause of black solidarity is the defection of one of Jason's soldiers who warns her to escape in time to avoid his master's revenge. She does not heed this warning.

In the first confrontation with Jason she reminds him of her past sacrifices on his behalf, but also of the love they shared and which he has now destroyed. She wants no part of his practical arrangements. In her absolute demand for love she has some of the single-mindedness of Anouilh's *Médée*. The realization that there is no future for her with Jason and the promise of help from Adago are the factors which bring her to give definite form to her plan of vengeance, but she cunningly conceals her intentions from all the other characters while she sets the plan in motion.

Medea's communication with the supernatural is shown in the scene where she invokes Nyame the Sun god/goddess. In the first part of the play her reputation as a "good witch", who cures and helps, receives some mention, but the gruesome success of the magic she prepares against Cecilia proves that she does indeed possess powers for evil too. The claim to Jason in the final scene that his bullets cannot harm her (189) should perhaps not be taken literally, but rather as an indication that she now controls Jason, while the poisonous snakes protecting her confirm her bond with primitive forces.

The presentation of Medea as sorceress does not dominate her portrayal as a woman, as happens in the last parts of the plays of Corneille and Anouilh. The emphasis of her erstwhile love for Jason which has turned to relentless hatred and her maternal love are strong humanizing factors, as is her longing for her native land. Medea's hesitation before killing the children is, however, somewhat abrupt and not as movingly presented as by Euripides. The racist

motive for the killing (183) which is added to the motive of punishing Jason is not well justified but is revealed very suddenly. Medea's refusal to surrender the bodies of the children to Jason may be explained partly by her desire to intensify Jason's suffering, and partly by her own desire to bury and mourn the children she loved. The fixing of the bodies to the Golden Fleece, the holiest of her tribe's sacred objects, suggests an attempt to reintegrate them into the world of her native religion and to underline to Jason the enormity of his unthinking dismissal of her sacrifices on his behalf in his quest for the Fleece.

The uncertainty of Medea's future suggested by the chorus at the end of the play serves as censure of the excessive nature of the punishment she has administered to Jason. The implication is that evil and violence will inevitably provoke evil and violent reactions: "The future promises no refuge from our deeds . . ." (190).

### THE PORTRAYAL OF JASON

The Jason depicted in *African Medea* has all the bad characteristics - cynicism, self-interest and a disregard of others - which mark his Greek predecessor, but, instead of being a heroic adventurer he has become a slave-trader and dealer in ivory.<sup>7</sup>

The chorus' report in the opening scene that Jason's reason for abandoning Medea is that it was not a Christian marriage, shows how shamelessly he subordinates love and trust to expediency. The chorus and the Nurse are not duped, but know that the real cause is his ambition (157). This is confirmed by Jason himself in the first meeting with Medea. He actually hopes to succeed Barretto as governor. His indifference to Medea's distress and his self-declared opportunism in marrying the governor's daughter alienates all sympathy from him. Further evidence of his insensitivity is the reproach, based on that of his Greek counterpart, that Medea has never thanked him for introducing her to

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7 This description is the first "new" information about Jason supplied to the audience (156) and its prominence proves Magnuson's emphasis on the callous aspects of Jason's character.

"European culture and refinement" (170). This hollow claim is even more evidently spurious amid the overwhelming indications of the European exploitation and suppression of the Africans.

Jason's obsession with gold is mentioned by Medea early in the play:

My husband Jason has left me to marry again . . . But how well you know that, women! A golden-haired Portuguese girl, child of the governor. How Jason loves gold! Gold hair, gold skin, golden future . . . The Fleece was golden once too, bright as the sun . . . And you know what I did for this gold lover, this dealer in slaves and ivory, sacker of villages.

163

Jason's disregard of human lives, represented by his trafficking in slaves, and his materialism make him blind to the deeper significance of the Golden Fleece. He was once prepared to risk his soul, and Medea's too, to obtain it, but once he had it in his possession it seemed to be nothing special. He is unable to appreciate its symbolic value in the religion of Medea's people. His disenchantment with the Fleece is a precursor to his rejection of Medea. The contempt for her love and for the holiest laws of her people this implies, causes Medea to remind Jason gruesomely of the real importance the Fleece has to her and her people.

Jason's insensitivity makes him an easy dupe of Medea's pretended readiness to effect a reconciliation. His disregard of his wife's true powers leads him to become an unwitting accomplice in his new bride's destruction. Even with his children Jason has an unnatural relationship. The spontaneity with which they talk to their Tutor is in sharp contrast to their lack of response to Jason's forced attempts at conversation. However, in the last scene Jason's genuine attempt to protect the children from possible attackers shows that he has true paternal feelings for them.

Nevertheless, at the end of the play there is not much sympathy for Jason. He has provoked the catastrophe by his selfish and brutal treatment of Medea, while his record as a slave-trader which is explicitly evoked at the end by Medea (190), to some extent redresses the balance of horrors between them.



### GOVERNOR BARRETTO AND THE MINOR CHARACTERS

Barretto plays the part of Creon, but, because he is a ruler imposed by a colonial power on an unwilling population, does not have the unchallenged authority of his Greek counterpart. The lack of trust between him and the ordinary people is shown by his arrogant reaction to the chorus' bows as he enters: "You needn't pretend to be so servile. I know a sham as well as you" (164).

The insecurity of his control of the city causes him to fear that Medea may find support in her struggle for her rights from the dissatisfied black population. In spite of his autocratic action, he does not want to appear inhumane and therefore grants Medea the day's delay. A new motive comes into play here - Barretto prides himself on belonging to a nation of enlightened colonial administrators: "We Portuguese are not cruel and barbaric with the blacks like the English" (167).

An aspect of Barretto's character which fits in with the theme of colonial dominance and racial exploitation is his condemnation of the deterioration of what was once "a small proud European city - the finest in Africa". He does not comprehend the paradox contained in this statement. Similarly he criticizes the brutality of some of the slave-traders, but fails to condemn the practice of slavery. It is clear that his policy of acting for the immediate future as he does in the case of Medea, will not meet the long-term needs of the city and that his kind of colonial rule is doomed to failure.

In contrast to Barretto, Adago is an indigenous African ruler. Because of his distinguished reputation he has been invited, as the only black guest, to attend the wedding. He has made use of the opportunity to consult the local priests about his barrenness. The beggar recounts Adago's shame as he observed the mass of black beggars around the palace of the governor. From his own words it is clear that, in spite of his position as an important guest, his relations with the Portuguese are strained: "Even a chief must be cautious. If I were to be found transporting exiles we would risk waking up one morning with a forest of guns in our faces" (173). Thus no one in Africa may act hon-

ourably without first considering the implications. This explains Adago's reluctance to be completely frank with Medea about the reason for his presence in the city. The tense situation in Africa is the reason why Adago does not promise Medea a permanent home in his country, but instead promises her a passage from there to an unnamed country, across the sea. "A land of hope where you could be safe and free" (173).

The Nurse in Magnuson's play does not have as close a relationship with Medea as the Nurse in the Greek tragedy has. She realizes the violence of which Medea is capable and is responsible for creating much of the tension in the drama as she warns that Medea's revenge will be awful. She links the vengeance to harm to the children early in the play already. The Nurse is nevertheless devoted to Medea. She summons Adago because she realizes he may offer Medea's only chance of a refuge. It is in the conversations between the Nurse and the Tutor that an impression of family life is obtained. This perspective is conspicuously lacking in Seneca's drama and in the followers of Seneca.

By his loving care of the children and his refusal to let them be classified as "half-Portuguese" the Tutor shows a wisdom beyond racism. Nevertheless he is the one who points out that they are "mulatto" when Jason talks about educating his sons in Europe (178). The Tutor feels that they are African children who belong in Africa where they were born. The Tutor urges Medea to take the children to safety because the city is becoming dangerous but does not understand her answer: "I will find them a darker refuge. Where no one will harm them anymore . . ." (178).

The blind beggar is the only representative of the revolutionary faction who takes part in the dramatic action. His pronouncements help to set the mood of the drama and give the information necessary to understand the background Magnuson has created for the dramatic action. The beggar's antagonism towards the colonial rulers is in contrast with the docile acceptance of its lot by the chorus. The beggar preaches revolt in order to gain freedom, but it is clear from his behaviour and words when fighting has broken out, that one kind of violence is being replaced by another. The killing he so avidly propagates is

wholly indiscriminate and there is no way in which he can know whether he is killing an enemy or a friend, an oppressor or a fellow-sufferer.

The mindless violence pictured by the blind beggar is the reason why the chorus is opposed to any action to "liberate" them from their position as slaves. These poor women fear to be plunged into worse troubles. This explains why, in spite of their relative misery, they propagate the theme, well-known from antiquity, that security lies in moderation.

The children do not emerge as having definite personalities of their own. Although the potential for a struggle as to whether they should be considered "African" or "European" is suggested, this theme is not developed as in Lenormand's play.

The gravest objection to the portrayal of the characters is that they have not been adequately remoulded to reflect the very different environment in which the drama is set. This is perhaps the reason why the play ultimately leaves one with a feeling of disappointment.

#### **THE LITERARY STYLE OF THE *AFRICAN MEDEA***

One of the most striking features of the *African Medea* is the wealth of images which are not only functional in expressing thoughts and emotions vividly, but also contribute to giving the play a cohesive and convincing African atmosphere.

Similes are sometimes used in a way reminiscent of Homeric style, yet with an earthiness appropriate to a primitive African society: "[T]he beggars mass at the kitchen door like flies on fresh meat, fighting for scraps of food" (168); "Only death waits for Medea now . . . and I will stride on it like a leopard and die with my teeth at its throat" (168); "Love and hate here struggle and grow together like an evil vine" (171); "Our prayers fell from the sky like broken doves" (190).

Magnuson makes effective use of contrast to emphasize the conflict of cultures, for instance the oxymoron, "this Christian city, this slave port" (157), captures two of the dominant influences of the colonizers on the local population. These two influences should be contradictory but it is suggested that they often are not. A similar antithesis, in the words of Barretto, "a small proud European city - the finest in Africa" (165), explains the reasons for the unrest which runs parallel to the development of the main plot, while Adago's utterance, "The black man fears the dark, the white man fears the sun" (173), vividly sums up the lack of trust between the races.

The dialogue abounds in metaphor which often conveys a complex emotional reaction in a shockingly realistic or concrete way. The Nurse, when told by the Tutor about the big wedding Jason is planning for the evening, asks: "How can he spit in her face this way?" (160). Thus a primitive gesture of contempt is given literary form. The chorus is worried about Medea's refusal to talk to her friends and expresses its concern graphically: "Solitude is a cave full of unseen dangers" (162). The chorus also expressively conveys the uncertainty of the position of ordinary Africans: "Death is too close already. He lurks in every shadow, in every slave-trader's smile . . ." (161).

It is interesting that although Magnuson adopts a style of prose which is contemporary in its choice of words and turns of phrase, it is not easily identifiable as American. He eschews overt Americanisms as well as colloquialisms and the consequent sobriety of tone is well suited to the gravity of the theme. Indeed, sometimes there is a galvanizing tension between the matter-of-fact words and the enormity of what they describe. For instance, when Jason at last accepts that his sons are dead, a final dialogue between him and Medea follows. The following is an extract from it:

- J. : My sons . . . dead, dead, dead.  
M. : It was a disease they caught from their father.  
J. : But you feel no pain, no sorrow?  
M. : Yes, but finally my sorrow is one that you cannot mock.

J. : You have no pity!

M. : My love was too great for pity, Jason. You betrayed  
that love. 190

In contrast to the restraint of these short sentences, unadorned by adjectives and very simple in structure, are some of the passages of choral dialogue where it seems as if Magnuson tries to compensate for the loss of ancient lyricism. A good example is the passage close to the opening of the play where the Nurse is wishing that "the long slave ships had never passed down the Congo".

Ch. : The trees that made her mast and oars would still  
wave in the jungle and the baboon and the birds still  
live in their branches.

N. : I wish that these powerful white traders and  
adventurers had never travelled to the heart of  
Africa. We would all be happier now.

Ch. : We would still be free.

N. : Medea would never have seen Jason, never loved him,  
never murdered . . .

Ch. : We would still be free. 157

The refrain, "We would still be free", gives the chorus' words something of the quality of a hymn, while the references to the unspoiled jungle draw a powerfully evocative picture of a paradisiacal past before contact with the colonizers. The parallel between the position of Medea and the slave women is also clearly drawn by the intermingling of the dialogue of the Nurse and the chorus. It takes over Medea's tale from the Nurse in the next reply and in tandem they recount the story of Medea's past.

The chorus' refrain about their lack of freedom is picked up again when it fills the interval between the dispatching of the children with the gifts and the beggar's arrival with news of the revolt, signs of which the chorus already notices: "To be free, an old man said, to be free we will slay our masters.

But sitting here, alone in the dark, hearing Death so close, we feel not very free. Not very free" (180).

It has been remarked that Magnuson follows Euripides closely in the structure of his drama. It is interesting to note that he sometimes, in small details, borrows directly from the Greek drama. For example, Adago says that the priests whom he consulted about his barrenness "muttered something about how I am not to loosen the hanging foot of the wineskin . . ." (171) which is the same enigmatic message Aigeus reports having received from Apollo's oracle at Delphi<sup>8</sup>. Similarly the Nurse, in bewailing Medea's unhappy lot, expresses herself in terms which are equivalent to a Greek aphorism or a Latin *sententia*: "Greatness has no profit in it. The anger of the gods strikes first at those who stand tall" (161).<sup>9</sup>

The dominant impression of Magnuson's style is of a lucid and cohesive originality which serves his interpretation of the conflict between Medea and Jason well. The following extract illustrates these strengths: "We struggle, Lord, struggle to shut our eyes, struggle to awaken, watching the wounded lioness turn on the hunter, hearing the roar, deep as a dream, deep as death. Look at her, her eyes filled with the dream of nothing, and of dark night" (171).

## CONCLUSION

The themes of cultural conflict and racial exploitation raised by Magnuson in his interpretation of the Medea story are applicable to any situation where less developed people are colonized by more sophisticated nations, or the weak subjected by the strong. Jason's rejection of Medea and her consequent vengeance is the story, in microcosm, of the exploitation and enslavement of the indigenous African population by the Portuguese empire. Just as Medea's revenge is bloody and terrible, but ultimately achieves nothing positive, the erupting

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8 Eur. *Med.* 679.

9 Cf. Eur. *Med.* 125-8.

revolution of the enslaved black population risks creating anarchic confusion. Magnuson has interwoven these two conflicts, thus situating Medea's struggle for vengeance against the background of the striving for justice by the indigenous Africans. The drumbeats in the distance, which signify the call to active resistance of the oppressed black population of the city, coincide with the planning and execution of Medea's vengeance. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether this secondary action is really functional in the development of the plot. The force of Medea's act lies in its unique and terrible character and this is dissipated by the broader perspective of retribution for past wrongs.

The theme of the role of the Christian religion in the process of colonization is raised, but not developed systematically. This theme too is not well integrated into the basic plot. The suggestion is that the Christian message is used by the colonizers to reconcile the dispossessed to their plight. The chorus seems to have accepted Christianity, but despite its prayers, derives little comfort from it, while Medea and the blind beggar who resist the ruling regime, both reject the Christian message.

The beggar's dream of a violent overthrowing of the local order is contrasted with Medea's goal of reaching "a land of hope where [she] could be safe and free" (173). Both these ideals are shown to be unrealistic. Moreover, the terms in which Medea's utopia is described, "a land where men have died to win their liberty, and freedom stretches as far as the mountain's horizon" (174), evoke the popular image of the United States of America. The implication of the chorus' final words is that Medea will not reach that land, that it may, in fact, not exist.

Thus Magnuson's play ultimately points to the impossibility of achieving freedom and justice by unjust means. But in order to gain this wider perspective he has sacrificed something of the compelling force of Medea as a lone figure struggling against the injustice she has been made to suffer.

## CHAPTER 9

PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSPOSITION  
OF MYTHIC MATERIAL

In the preceding three chapters three plays, all based on the Medea myth but transposed to different cultural and social environments, have been discussed. Although a dramatist's decision to make such a transposition is deliberate, the process inevitably entails certain problems. For instance, playwrights like Lenormand and Maxwell Anderson, who changed not only the ancient context and location, but also the title of the play and the names of the characters, were constrained to delineate new backgrounds for their dramas. Jim Magnuson, on the other hand, merely by preserving the names of Medea and Jason, immediately linked his play into the rich mythical tradition of the Medea legend. Its various elements became the background of his drama, although he selected and altered certain aspects to suit his theme and characterization.

Because Lenormand and Anderson have both chosen total transposition, it will be interesting to examine how they dealt with the altered context and characters. The problems they faced may then be compared to those encountered by Magnuson who chose a middle course.

The designation of the respective heroines as Katha Naham Moun and Oparre opens up perspectives of other civilizations and different socio-cultural environments and effaces the traits which mark the ancient witch-princess. The task of each playwright was to create a new background and new characters which would form a convincing and logical backdrop to the development of the plot, which in both the dramas may be reduced to the presentation of how a mother, because of insupportable stress, comes to murder her own children. This is the salient and most important correspondence between these two plays and the traditional Medea myth as shaped by Euripides. In spite of this similarity, the analysis of these two dramas has shown that their themes and characterization differ from each other and from the other dramas based on the same myth.



Nevertheless, there are certain structural similarities between the dramas of Lenormand and Anderson. Both devote a first act to introducing their characters, fill in the stories of their past and bring the plot almost to the point where the dramatic action of the dramas of Euripides and his successors starts. Consequently the decisive break in the marriage occurs much later in the drama, and the conflict which gives rise to the catastrophic outcome develops in the second half of the plays. Here there is however a marked distinction between the methods of Lenormand and Anderson. Lenormand evokes the past of his characters and their circumstances in meticulous detail. The audience knows how de Mezzana spent his eight adventurous years in the kingdom of the Sibangs, and how he and Katha Naham Moun met and fell in love. Details about their children and the way of life in the jungle are provided, so that, although Lenormand has discarded the rich field of reference of the myth, he has created a credible and vivid framework for his dramatic action. Enough particulars are given, even about de Listrac and Aimée, to make the utterances and actions of the characters understandable.

The tension between Katha Naham Moun and de Mezzana is gradually built up during the first act so that the rupture is not unexpected. Furthermore the themes of racism, colonialism and the attitudes towards technological progress form part of the strains in their relationship. Katha Naham Moun's decision to save the children from the evils she imagines in store for them in de Mezzana's world is therefore fully substantiated in the drama. Lenormand's fine sense of the dramatic possibility of a minor aspect of the myth is shown by the way in which he adapts the murder of Medea's brother. Katha Naham Moun bitterly regrets that she killed her brother whom she loved dearly in order to save de Mezzana's life. Her children are killed in the same way as her brother, by eating poisoned mango jelly, and to ensure their reintegration into the primitive world of the Sibangs she dresses them in her brother's "langouti". Thus Lenormand, while following the outline of the conflict, has selectively used certain aspects of the myth and adapted them to amalgamate with his altered context.

Anderson, on the other hand, has departed further from the traditional outline. In the first part of his play the two protagonists are still devoted to each other. The main suspense is provided by their struggle against the racial

bigotry of the Puritans. When Nathaniel eventually, late in Act II, under great stress, elects to abandon Oparre, it is not very convincing, even though Anderson prepares the audience for Nathaniel's decision. One of the main problems caused by Anderson's presentation of the background of the play is that, although he gives particulars about the situation and atmosphere in Salem which bring them into focus, Nathaniel's adventures in the East remain blurred. It is not clear exactly how Nathaniel and Oparre gained possession of the ship. This is a serious flaw because the consequences for the plot are decisive. Equally nebulous are the ways in which Nathaniel loses control over his huge fortune within six months. Although these details may be considered as petty, they do leave one with a nagging sense of dissatisfaction. When one compares the vagueness of Anderson's sketch of Oparre's past to the minute details of Katha Naham Moun's world drawn by Lenormand, the source of the dissatisfaction becomes apparent. Anderson has abandoned the traditional mythic data, but has failed to substitute an adequate alternative.

There are two important divergences from the traditional outline where Anderson's innovations seem to me to have met with limited success. First, he changed the essential character of the heroine. Oparre starts off with the reputation of being Christian and civilized, despite her pagan origin. Her responses to outrageous insults are courteous and restrained. Although she often mentions the violence of her nature, there is scant evidence of it in her acts. In addition to reversing the heroine's nature Anderson has shifted the conflict. First Oparre and Nathaniel jointly struggle against the prejudice of the Puritans. Then, when Nathaniel abandons Oparre, he forfeits all the sympathy he has gained with the audience, only to claim it anew when he comes to realize his mistake. This blurring of the conflict, which is so sharply defined in the traditional plot, is one of the main reasons why Anderson's drama lacks conviction.

The motive of an irresistible desire for vengeance is the dominant theme of the traditional Medea dramas. Allowing Oparre no room for vengeance and replacing it by the sacrifice of her children to avoid them suffering further discrimination and injustice, leave the field clear for the triumph of the evil of racial prejudice. The bigoted Puritans thus succeed in all their aims: they gain control of Nathaniel's fortune and they succeed in expelling him and his family

from Salem. If their blind self-righteousness is taken into account, the likelihood of their suffering a twinge of remorse for the catastrophe they have caused is remote. Although it may be argued that in the traditional Medea dramas the vengeance is out of proportion to the injustice inflicted upon her, Anderson's version leaves the perpetrators of injustice to go scot-free. The fundamental failure of the "good" characters being punished and the "bad" emerging triumphant indeed runs contrary to what Anderson himself defined as one of the essential rules of playwriting: "The protagonist of a play must represent the forces of good and must win, or, if he has been evil, must yield to the forces of good, and know himself defeated."<sup>1</sup> Another remark of his underlines this belief: "The moral atmosphere of a play must be healthy. An audience will not endure the triumph of evil on the stage."<sup>2</sup>

One must conclude that Anderson was misguided in selecting the Medea myth's basic outline as a vehicle of protest against racial prejudice, and then letting the victims of racism go under, without their oppressors being affected in any way. Comparison with Lenormand and Magnuson shows that their denunciation of racism has far greater impact. In both instances the Medea figure is abandoned primarily because of racial considerations and her vengeance is directed at those who caused her betrayal. Although the slaying of Aimée and de Listrac is avoided, there is no doubt that de Mezzana and his fiancée will suffer because of Katha Naham Moun's desperate act.

Magnuson, by openly linking his play to the Greek mythic background, has at his disposal the wealth of detail associated with the Medea-Jason legend. He follows the outline of Euripides' plot and makes use of some of the traditional details, notably the Golden Fleece and the role of Aigeus (Adago), but also adds elements of his own to create an African environment and to broaden the scope of the drama to encompass the themes of colonial and racial oppression which add a new dimension to the personal vengeance of Medea. Both these aspects, the changed locality and the political tension, are presented very effectively in the opening scene already and sustained throughout the drama. References to

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1 "The Basis of Artistic Creation in Literature" in *The Bases of Artistic Creation* 1942 9.

2 *Ibid.* 10.

white and black, master and slave, Lisbon and Africa, portray the colonial situation vividly, while mention of heat and dust, jungles and wild animals evokes the physical environment. Magnuson uses the chorus effectively to engage in dialogue with various characters and so to fill in the background and contribute to establishing the mood in the city. The inclusion of the blind beggar gives the perspective of yet another sector of the population. The extended significance of the Golden Fleece<sup>3</sup> and its horrific function at the end of the drama are well integrated into the dramatic action. In this way the African Medea's barbarous cruelty and also her attachment to her native religion are highlighted. Thus Magnuson has reverted to picturing a cruel and unnatural mother. The central enigma of Euripides' tragedy remains - how may a mother who loves her children be induced by her hatred for her perfidious husband to kill, not only those whom she hates, Kreon and Glauke (or Barretto and Cecilia), but also those whom she loves, her own children. Many modern playwrights, for instance Lenormand and Anderson, have avoided this issue by presenting the slaying of the children as euthanasia, and therefore expressive of the natural maternal function, to love and to cherish. They alter the act of killing to one of killing in order to save. However, in order to achieve this altered ending, the dramatists have had to make changes in the selection and interpretation of the mythic material.

Magnuson endeavours to limit Medea's triumph at the end of the drama by suggesting that her apparent victory may not lead her to safety. This ending effectively undercuts the traditional triumphant departure, but is not as drastic a solution as Medea's suicide which remains the only way out to the heroines of Anouilh, Lenormand and Anderson.

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3 The only other author who emphasizes the significance of the Golden Fleece in any way is the Austrian, Grillparzer, in whose trilogy, *Das Goldene Vließ*, the Fleece serves as a potent symbol of glory and happiness. At the end of the third drama, after the children have been murdered and Jason is wandering as a homeless refugee, he meets Medea wearing the Fleece around her shoulders. She is on her way to restore it to Delphi from where Phrixus once stole it.

The changes these dramatists have made to the basic mythic data confirm Gilbert Highet's statement: "Every writer who attempts to create anything on a basis of myth, must add, or subtract, or alter."<sup>4</sup>

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4 *The Classical Tradition* 1967 533.

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SECTION IV  
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 10  
"THE INCENSED HURT OF WOMEN  
CONTINUES TO FIND VOICE VIA MEDEA"<sup>1</sup>

FURTHER VARIATIONS

The dramas discussed thus far in this thesis have shown that the mythic material dramatized by Euripides in his *Medea* has been renewed in different ages by playwrights who sought to express their own artistic goals, or artistic goals combined with social objectives. There are some of the dramas in the latter category which deserve mention as they deal with themes which have not been prominent in the dramas discussed in detail. These themes are usually to be found in the seemingly inexhaustible complexity of Euripides' treatment of the Medea myth.

One aspect of his *Medea* which could be expected to receive attention from modern dramatists in the atmosphere of growing interest in feminism, is the revolt of Medea against the female lot. Yet this aspect has drawn surprisingly scant attention. Euripides does not sustain the emphasis on this side of his protagonist throughout the drama, but it is certainly striking enough in Medea's first great speech (214-66) to have captured the imagination of dramatists with feminist sympathies. Yet this does not appear to be the case, although Mimoso-Ruiz<sup>2</sup> mentions an adaptation of Euripides' tragedy by the well-known feminist author, Gloria Albee, which was staged by the Wesbeth Playwright's Feminist Collective in 1975. The reason why this aspect of Medea's position has received comparatively little attention may lie in the fact that, with a few exceptions, the playwrights who have written *Medea* dramas have been men. Other dramatists who have lent some emphasis to Medea's position

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1 George Steiner *Antigones* 1986 129.

2 *Médée antique et moderne* 1980 167.

as a woman, have concentrated primarily on social aspects of their time. Thus in *Moderne Médée* (1901) Leon Duplessis transposed the myth to the milieu of reactionary Prussian society where the heroine is smothered by the authoritarianism of her mother-in-law and her advocate husband, Karl Romberg, who prevent her from raising her son according to her ideas as a Frenchwoman.<sup>3</sup> Willy Kyrklund's drama, *Médée l'Étrangère* (1967), set in contemporary Corinth, provides the perspective of Médée (an African from Mbongo) on modern housewives as prisoners of the consumer society which emphasizes material comfort to the exclusion of all else.<sup>4</sup> Anouilh, whose Médée's revolt against her sexual dependence on Jason has been discussed in Chapter 5 above, comes closest to representing the Freudian concept of a female castration complex which is cardinal to many feminist theories.

Feminism is an important public issue in many countries today, but the broader and more conventional questions about morality in politics retain their validity. These questions have also been addressed by some of the dramatists who have made use of the Medea myth. Thus the theme of the perversion of law and order, which is already of some account in Euripides, is elaborated by some subsequent authors. Creon welcomes Medea as a refugee in the full knowledge of her past, but then later uses this knowledge to condemn her. Seneca's Creon has no justification for drawing a distinction between Medea and Jason in their responsibility for their past crimes. Corneille's Créon is guilty of the same hypocrisy in ascribing all guilt for the past crimes to Médée.

In Lenormand's *Asie*, however, the duplicity of the authorities presents itself in a new guise. De Listrac acknowledges that certain of de Mezzana's actions in the kingdom of the Sibangs are comparable to acts of ". . . pirates qu'on a fusillés sans jugement et qui n'en avaient pas fait davantage" (9). Yet he recommends de Mezzana as a pioneer who incarnates "la droiture, le courage, le désintéressement" (9). De Listrac's lack of principles is further demonstrated by his submission to personal interest (the marriage of Aimée to de Mezzana), and avarice (the commercial exploitation of the kingdom of the Sibangs by the return of the princess to her people), in expelling Katha Naham Moun from

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3 Cf. Mimoso-Ruiz *op. cit.* 162.

4 Cf. Mimoso-Ruiz *op. cit.* 163.

France. It is Aimée who denounces the hypocrisy concealed under the cloak of the "devoir de préfet" (88).

This example of the relativity of the conception of justice and the importance attached to preserving the appearance of fairness, while allowing licence to opportunism, has been expanded to become the dominant theme of the most recent dramatization of the Medea myth: the *Medea* by Johan Boonen.<sup>5</sup>

### A MEDEA DRAMA FOR OUR TIME

In the preface to his drama Boonen makes it clear that he consciously sets out to grapple with the problems confronting modern man: "Er grijpt een konfrontatie plaats - niet alleen tussen Medea en Jasoon, maar tussen de 2 werelden die zij vertegenwoordigen: die van de Kaukasus en van Korinthe, die van de authenticiteit en van de dekadentie, die van de emotie en van het in-telekt. Onze tijd is Korintisch voor zover hij - gewoonlijk in functie van macht - systemen ontwikkelt die koel, rationeel, gekomputeriseerd zijn en waarvoor wij - Medea's - van geen tel zijn. Er zijn naamloze machthebbers voor wie de onderdanen gebruiksvoorwerpen, pasmunt zijn".<sup>6</sup> In Boonen's interpretation Medea's deed is thus the reaction of modern man when he becomes the victim of the coldly calculating forces of the state.

Although Boonen explicitly aims at illustrating the deviousness of rulers in our time, he has chosen to retain the setting of ancient Greece,<sup>7</sup> thus ensuring that his audience is free from the preconceptions a modern ambience would in-

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5 1982. All references are to and quotations from this edition.

6 *Op. cit.* 6.

7 The setting of the play is nominally ancient Greece, but there is no attempt to give a realistic picture. Certain details reflect Roman customs rather than Greek. Thus the aim seems simply to be to create a general impression of an ancient world background. There are anachronistic elements too, such as the depiction of Kreüsa as a business entrepreneur.



volve.<sup>8</sup> Boonen retains the traditional characters - Medea, Jason, Kreon, the Nurse and the children - and has added an adviser, a weaver, a slave, a eunuch and three actors who are used for a short play within the play. Kreüsa once again takes part in the drama.

Structurally Boonen follows much the same pattern as Lenormand and Anderson. He devotes his first act to establishing the background and atmosphere in Corinth. The second then follows the outline of Euripides' drama. Boonen's first act is dominated by the tension between appearance and reality. Outwardly all seems well in Corinth. Medea is preparing for a feast planned by Jason to celebrate their seven years' sojourn in Corinth. Medea and Jason are regarded as a distinguished couple. She is admired for her exotic charm and Jason for his heroic reputation and his excellent relationship with Kreon. Despite this happy situation and Jason's demonstrative affection, Medea feels melancholy and uneasy. As the show of normality and cordiality intensifies, with Jason and Medea receiving a visit from Kreon during which he compliments her gallantly and extravagantly, Medea's uneasiness grows. She becomes aware that there is a complicity between Kreon and Jason regarding Kreüsa whom Jason also wants to be invited to the feast. Medea voices her feelings about the ambiguous situation in the following paradox:

Ze praten met woorden die hun gevoelens versluieren.  
Maar ze praten perfekt.  
En hoe klaar ze hun gedachten ook formuleren  
ze verzwijgen hun gedachten.

22

In a scene between Medea and the king's adviser, who has been sent to Medea, not with any specific message, but subtly to unnerve her, Medea shows that she is able to cope with the sophisticated techniques of "Western" diplomacy. This is again evident in a later scene where Kreon has manipulated an encounter between Kreüsa and Medea with the sole purpose of demoralizing Medea. This scene is laden with dramatic irony as Medea is the only one who

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8 Boonen, in his preface at 6, cites the former U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, as a particular example of the kind of Machiavellian power-monger his Kreon and the adviser represent. It is however self-evident that actually introducing Kissinger would provoke mixed emotions among the audience, as well as tying the dramatic action to a particular period.

does not have definite knowledge of the planned marriage. Kreoon has informed Jason that his proposal that Jason should marry Kreusa is an offer not to be refused.

The tension mounts as Jason seems to cling to Medea for comfort when they are alone. In their several scenes together in the first act, Medea's love seems the steadiest, in spite of Jason's passionate avowals. Indeed, his guilty conscience almost betrays his perfidious design as he smashes Medea's household gods because he feels they are hostile to him.

A scene between the slave and the eunuch, who are preparing the room for the festive banquet, provides comic relief, but, at the same time, their allusions, such as "Jason vrijt met twee" (40) or "Kreoon is de sluwste" (40) keep the dramatic action in the minds of the audience and show that even the common people see through Kreoon's elaborate façade.

The central and pivotal scene of the play is the feast. Jason welcomes the guests - Kreoon, Kreusa, the adviser, the Nurse and the children. He introduces a loving toast to Medea who has adapted so well to the different world. Kreusa follows with a toast:

En laten wij drinken  
op de politiek op de vrouwen  
op het geluk dat zo broos is.

42

This raises the tension markedly, but the atmosphere is charged even more by the sudden appearance of three actors who act out the scene of Jason's arrival in the Caucasus to obtain the Golden Fleece. The function of this interlude is to expose the elaborate hypocrisy in the style of Corinthian social intercourse by the strong contrast with the direct expression of simple but violent emotions:

Jason 2	Koning Aëtes boze koning die de volkeren besteelt en hun gezanten wilt vermoorden ik ben doorgedrongen tot de navel van uw rijk.
Aëtes	Wie zijt gij pochende man - snoeshaan.

Jason 2	Ik ben Jason van Thessalië.
Aëtes	Wat komt gij doen?
Jason 2	Gij vraagt wat ik kom doen - gij spot met mij. Maar als gij het wilt horen: ik eis de huid van de gouden ram. Geef hem terug - hij behoort ons toe.
Aëtes	Ik roep mijn wachten en zij zullen u doden.

44

In addition, the playlet illustrates the formidable power of Medea and the claim she has upon Jason. At the end of the playlet Aëtes is left for dead as a result of Medea's use of her magic. Medea and Jason leave with the Golden Fleece. The brutal end of the playlet is followed by a stunned silence broken by the Nurse with a song with the sinister theme of the birth of death. Then Kreüsa dances, and, like the daughter of Herodias,<sup>9</sup> is offered anything she desires. Her demand is direct and unambiguous: "Ik wens Jason" (46). On this climax the first act of Boonen's play ends. Medea's example of straight talk has at last elicited the truth of the situation, but, as the further development of the plot shows, has not put an end to the typically Corinthian way of conducting negotiations by means of profoundly menacing insinuations cast in the form of civilized intercourse.

Act II commences with a speech by the Nurse modelled on the opening speech of the Euripidean tragedy. If Jason's ship had never reached Aëtes' country, Medea would not now be suffering in "civilized" Corinth. The Nurse warns that Medea feels insulted and depressed and may be provoked to cruelty such as that of her father. Medea herself is bitter. Her only reward after years of taking second place is a Corinthian feast with a new bride for her husband. She proclaims her resolve to avenge this injustice.

Jason's attitude is even more arrogant and self-righteous than in Euripides. He advances the same arguments, notably the gratitude due for her introduction to the civilized world. His cynicism is well captured in the advice to Medea not to be jealous of Kreüsa. He does not love her, but marriage is a

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9 *The Gospel according to St. Mark 6 23.*

modest price for a kingdom. The scene ends like the similar one in Euripides' drama. Medea's response is a bare, "Ik haat je Jasoon" (50).

The scene where Creon traditionally banishes Medea is used in a new way by Boonen. Kreoon has a twofold aim - to obtain certainty of Jasoon's complete separation from Medea and to ensure that she makes a public declaration voicing her approval of and acquiescence in the new arrangement. Instead of employing open threats to force Medea to depart from her standards of integrity, Kreoon and the adviser dress their ultimatum up as an appeal to support Jasoon in this new step in his career. Medea's response shows that she understands the implication of the subtleties of flattery and menace proffered by Kreoon and his adviser, but, when she is alone again, she expresses her true purpose forcefully to her gods:

Gij hebt mij de kracht gegeven hem te strelen  
zodat ik morgen zijn nek kan breken

58

Medea uses the stratagem originated by Euripides of bringing death to Kreüsa and Kreoon by means of poisoned gifts carried by Jasoon and the children. The scene in which Medea convinces Jasoon about her change of heart has added point because of Boonen's emphasis on the hypocrisy of Kreoon, the adviser, Jasoon and Kreüsa. Medea is shown applying their own tactics against them with consummate skill.

Medea engineers the deaths of Kreoon and Kreüsa as revenge for the betrayal and humiliation they have forced upon her with the pretence of promoting Jasoon's interests and those of her children. Her decision to take the lives of her children is presented as an attempt to save them from harm caused by others. They should die while they are still happy. The Nurse refuses to countenance this unnatural act and Medea is left alone to await news of the first part of her revenge. The adviser enters to thank Medea for the presents on behalf of Kreoon and Kreüsa. He invites her to the wedding which, in true Corinthian fashion, is to be a feast of reconciliation. Hardly has he uttered his words when the weaver appears with the simple statement:

Mijnheer - mevrouw.  
De koning en Kreüsa zijn dood.

66

Now Medea reiterates her resolve to save the children she loves by ending their lives. Like Katha Naham Moun and Oparre, she sees their deaths as a release. Medea prays to her gods to remove reason from her heart. As she seems to go into an ecstatic fit, the slave and the eunuch rush on to the stage. They are the shocked auditors of Medea's attempt to steel herself for the murder of her children. The eunuch argues that Jasoon will protect the children as he will now become king. Medea rejects this argument. Jasoon has become just as untrustworthy as the Corinthians. By entrusting the children to Jasoon she will be saving him, not them. This is the antithesis of what she envisages - namely to pursue what she vividly describes as a scorched earth policy against Jasoon. The eunuch then tries to appeal to Medea's maternal feelings, but she ignores his words, takes a knife and walks off to meet her children.

The slave and the eunuch watch through the door and give an eyewitness account of Medea's welcome of the children and her loving games with them. The slave is overjoyed, for he is convinced that Medea has altered her resolution. Thus it seems that this drama may have a less horrific outcome. The slave tries to persuade the eunuch to call on the gods to ensure a happy ending, but the eunuch's nervousness causes the slave to peep again at what Medea is doing. What he sees causes him terror. At last he recovers sufficiently to say that Medea has slaughtered her children. He stresses that they felt no pain. The slave's insistence that the eunuch do something, only results in the eunuch strangely assuming the personality of one of the children. While he seems to experience the death the children suffered, he still loves his mother. Medea returns to the stage. She appears to be under the illusion that the children can see and hear her. She addresses them:

Lieve kinderen -  
jullie zien er wel tevreden uit.  
Waarom lachen jullie?  
De Krekels?  
Het is een groot koor - dat van de krekels  
en ze blijven maar zingen.  
Waar gaan jullie naartoe?  
Als ik de weg kende zou ik hem wijzen.  
Zal ik wuiven - zoals de matrozen?  
en lachen?

The drama where ambiguity between appearance and reality has played such a great part therefore ends with the appearance of reality no longer being accepted by Medea. She has carried out the deed which she has felt to be required, both for the sake of the children and in order to punish Jason, but the traumatic experience has rendered her incapable of distinguishing between reality and illusion. Therefore she accepts the illusion that the children are departing on a happy journey.

The ultimate result of the manipulative game of deception played by Kreon and Jason is thus the total derangement of a human being of strong feelings to whom love, trust and loyalty are of vital importance. In his preface Boonen identifies his Medea with the ordinary people of our society. The end of his drama must therefore be seen as a warning that we, the ordinary people, risk losing all touch with reality because of the constant stream of disinformation fed to us by our rulers who are interested only in promoting their own interests.

The theatrical stratagem of the eunuch and the slave witnessing the final scene between Medea and her children, the moments of suspense when it seems that the bloody solution may yet be avoided, and the account of the murders are presented with great technical flair. It is an effective way of avoiding the presentation of the murder on stage. There is no encounter with Jason after the deed. There is no taunting him with the effects of the vengeance, because Medea is so traumatized by her deed that her reason has become unhinged. This is Boonen's equivalent of the escape in the dragon-drawn chariot which belongs to the realm of magic and fantasy. Despite early emphasis in the play on Medea's knowledge of witchcraft, little use is made of her control of the supernatural. Medea uses magic only where it has become traditional - in the killing of Kreusa and her father. The only way in which the Medea, who has been the victim of the relentless calculation of Kreon, Kreusa and Jason, may escape from the consequences of her act of revenge and resistance, is to quit the rational world and enter the world of delusion. She does not need a chariot, but escapes by finally abandoning her grip upon reality.

Boonen's drama is thus a grave indictment of the results of the heartless

manipulation of a human being, by implication all modern people, by ruthless rulers pursuing their carefully worked out designs for the future.

Boonen warns against the inevitable inclination to compare his drama with that of Euripides: ". . . hoewel, behalve ons beider belangstelling voor Medea, er weinig gemeenschappelijks te vinden is: de opzet, de filosofie, de vormgeving, de tijd en het land van beiden, zijn erg verschillend" (6). In spite of Boonen's protestation and his altered interpretation of the conflict, the substratum of his drama is once again derived from Euripides. He adds his name to those of scores of other dramatists who have been directly or indirectly influenced by the profundity and sensitivity of Euripides' portrayal of the witch-princess, murderess of her own children, to attempt to recreate a Medea who reflects something of the author's own approach to the fundamental problems of life and of his time.

## CONCLUSION

Although the phenomenon of the literary fecundity of ancient Greek myth is well attested, there is no single satisfactory explanation of why these myths should, like Philemon's jug, never fail to provide inspiration to those who seek sustenance from it. Even as polymathic a scholar as George Steiner, who, in his recently published *Antigones*, set out to study "the unique, unmatched compulsion which Greek myths and personae exercise on the roots of our being",<sup>10</sup> confesses the impossibility of determining, with any degree of exactitude or truth, the reasons for the fascination Greek mythic material exercised and continues to exercise on the literary imagination: "Why [is it] that Antigone, together with a handful of other figures - Orpheus, Prometheus, Heracles, Agamemnon and his pack, Oedipus, Odysseus, Medea - should constitute the essential code of canonic reference for intellect and sensibility across Western civilization[?]"<sup>11</sup> He concludes his book by saying: "All I can be certain of is

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10 *Op cit* 198.

11 *Ibid* 121.

this: what I have tried to say is already in need of addition. New 'Antigones' are being imagined, thought, lived now; and will be tomorrow."<sup>12</sup>

The same holds true for new "Medeas". The facility with which Medea may be portrayed as contemporary to every age has been demonstrated. One may confidently expect that, as new circumstances arise, new treatments of this myth will provide insights into the perennial mysteries of the human condition.

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12 *Ibid* 304.



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**APPENDIX**

**LIST<sup>1</sup> OF MEDEA DRAMAS DERIVING FROM THE MYTH AS EURIPIDES  
TREATED IT IN 431 B.C.:**

**Ancient Greece**

Euripides

(Dikaiogenes)<sup>2</sup>

(Suidas)

(Karkinos)

(Diogenes of Sinope)

(Neophron)

**Ancient Rome**

(Ennius)

(Pacuvius)

(Accius)

(Ovid)

Seneca

Hosidius Geta

Buchanan	towards	1500	Latin
La Péruse		1535	French
Galladei		1558	Italian
Lodovico Dolce		1560	Italian
S. de Abril		1570	Spanish
Binet		1577	French

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1 This list has been compiled from works cited by L. Mallinger, H. Hunger, W.-H. Friedrich, M. Fuhrmann and W. Kleinhardt. D. Mimoso-Ruiz has been an especially useful source for modern treatments. The *Lexikon der Weltliteratur* (v. I ed. Gero von Wilpert 1975) has also been consulted.

2 The names of authors whose Medea dramas are not extant are in parentheses.

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M. Zoppio	1602	Italian
H. Nini	1622	Italian
P. Corneille	1635	French
Jan Vos	1665	Dutch
Longepierre	1694	French
Glover	1761	English
F.W. Gotter	1775	German
Clément	1779	French
B. Lidner	1784	Swedish (opera?)
F.M. Klinger	1786	German ( <i>Medea in Korinth</i> ) <sup>3</sup>
V. Alfieri	± 1800	Italian (opera?)
G.B. Niccolini	1810	Italian <sup>4</sup>
J.v. Soden	1814	German
F. Grillparzer	1822	German (part of trilogy)
Damrosch	1843	English (USA)
E. Legouvé	1854	French
H. Lucas	1855	French
J.A. Heraud	1857	?
O. Marbach	1858	German
M. Heron	1861	?
G. Konrad (G.v. Preussen)	1870	German
W.G. Wills	1872	English
Tsereteli	1892	Russian
S. Arnaud	1893	French
C. Mendès	1898	French
J. Gastambide	1898	French
L. Duplessis	1901	French ( <i>La moderne Médée</i> )
Broadhurst	1905	English (USA)
A. v. Bernus	1912	German ( <i>Der Tod des Jason</i> )
H.H. Jahn	1926	German
J. Tralow	1924	German
H.-R. Lenormand	1931	French ( <i>Asie</i> )

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3 Where the drama has a title other than a simple *Medea* or *Médée*, etc. it has been provided.

4 An example of insufficient or contradictory data! Hunger gives Niccolini's *Medea* as a drama while Mimoso-Ruiz cites it as an opera.

G. Marfond	1931	French ( <i>Médée la Magicienne</i> )
C. Cullen	1935	English (USA)
M. Anderson	1936	English (USA) ( <i>The Wingless Victory</i> )
P. Bouisson	1938	French
E. Porquerol	1942	French ( <i>Jason</i> )
J. Anouilh	1946	French
R. Jeffers	1946	English (USA)
F. Th. Csokor	1947	German ( <i>Medea Postbellica</i> )
C. Alvaro	1949	Italian ( <i>Lunga Notte di Medea</i> )
F. Forster	1949	German ( <i>Die Liebende</i> )
F. Mouren	1954	French
M. Braun	1958	German
W. Kyrklund	1967	French ( <i>Médée l'Étrangère</i> )
J. Vauthier	1967	French
J. Magnuson	1968	English (USA) ( <i>African Medea</i> )
P. Pontes	1975	Portuguese (Brazil) ( <i>Gota d'Água</i> )
J. Boonen	1982	Dutch

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