

Who is Medea?
A Woman's Transformation
through History.

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ABSTRACT

CASSELLO, EMILY Who is Medea? A study of a woman's transformation through history. Department of Classics, June 2012.

This thesis explores the character of Medea among three different cultures: Euripides' *Medea* (Classical Athens), Seneca's *Medea* (Neronian Rome), and three adaptations spanning 19th to 21st century France.

There are important ideological influences at play in the character of Medea within Greek and Roman contexts. In particular, a conflict between normative female identity in classical Athens versus heroic ideals and also normative female identity in Rome versus Stoic philosophical standards. This mythological character made bold statements in conflict with accepted norms of the time, making her a revolutionary figure, but also making her a model for her contemporaries.

After the analysis of Medea in the context of these two different ancient societies, one may observe differences in more recent French versions of Medea. Beginning with early 19th century France, where Romanticism was the dominant artistic style, and moving to post World War II France, at the birth of existentialism, Medea transformed into completely different characters. Finally, a modern example from 21st century ballet creates yet another version of Medea.

From ancient Greece and Rome to modern France, Medea represented different paradigms to different societies. She has been hated by most, but one cannot label her simply a monster. Instead, one must recognize the complexity of her character. Closer examination reveals that there may be as much to admire as condemn.

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INTRODUCTION

Who is Medea? These three words pose a simple question, but they ask a question that is difficult to answer. Medea was a mythological Greek woman and ex-princess of Colchis. She was the daughter of King Aeëtes and was known for her magical powers, since she was a descendant of Helios, the sun god. Medea promised to help Jason steal the Golden Fleece if he agreed to marry her. Once the fleece was successfully retrieved, the two fled Colchis. To prevent King Aeëtes from catching them and regaining the fleece, Medea murdered and dismembered her brother, Absyrtus, to distract her father in his pursuit. Having escaped her homeland, Medea and Jason then traveled to Corinth, where King Creon welcomed them and promised to protect the couple. However, his promise of protection for the two soon changed to protection for Jason alone when Creon offered his daughter, Creusa, in marriage to the hero. Jason, of course enticed by wealth and the prospect of marrying a young woman, agreed and left Medea.¹

This is the point in the story where Euripides' and Seneca's tragedies commence. Medea, having learned that Jason is leaving her, is heartbroken at her loss. Her entire world has been flipped upside down, as the man she gave everything up for tossed her aside like garbage. Even worse, Creon does not trust her and has decided to exile her from Corinth. Now Medea must decide what to

¹ Apollonius, *Argonautica*, Books 3 & 4.

do. Leave Corinth in peace or avenge the dishonor she has suffered. In a pivotal scene where Jason reveals that their children are his greatest weakness, Medea knows she must punish him and their children are the perfect weapons. However, she must first destroy Creon and Creusa. Using her magical abilities, Medea covers a dress and crown in poison, which immediately sets Creusa on fire and eventually Creon when he tries to stop the flames. Once they have been destroyed, Medea murders both of her children as her final act of punishment for Jason. In the final scene, a chariot led by dragons appears and takes Medea away from Corinth.

However, this is just a brief overview of Medea's life and what drove her to marry Jason and eventually murder her children. The question of who Medea is and what the intellectual purpose was of creating such a violent female character still remains. She was a woman, wife, princess, witch, foreigner and murderer. Yet none of these words fully encapsulates Medea's inner character; they just describe the person she was publicly acknowledged to be during her (fictional) lifetime. Nevertheless, the names "monster," "murderer" and "evil woman" seem to be the epithets that have stuck most firmly to this woman's reputation. My question is why? She was a loving wife who made the ultimate sacrifice to be with the man she loved, so why was Medea not recognized primarily as a devoted partner? She had magical powers, comparable to that of a god, so why was she not treated as a semi-divine being?

As stated earlier, the answers to these questions are far from simple. There are countless examples of Medea being treated as a monster and the act of child

murder continues to be the defining act of her (fictional) life. Eubulus, a comic poet who was prominent in Ancient Athens, wrote an early example of criticism about Medea. Almost all of his work has been lost over time, but the following is a translation of a surviving fragment from one of his lost plays.

I wish the second man who took a wife would die an awful death. I don't blame the first man; he had no experience of that evil. The second man knew what kind of evil a wife was...Medea was an evil woman, but Penelope was a good thing...by Zeus, there must be another good wife! Who? Oh, poor me, I've run out of good women, and I still have so many more bad ones to talk about.²

In this quotation, women in general are presented as evil beings, but Medea is singled out above all others. Eubulus referenced her as simply evil, not a mother or wife. From her creation as a mythological figure, she was labeled as a monster. Thus, starting in ancient Athens, Medea was publicly condemned. "...She [Medea] was an easterner, a princess, and a witch, descended from the gods: she was hardly the Athenian girl next door."³ This is a quote from a modern author and it presents how this view of Medea as bad is still evident today. She was anything but the typical "girl next door," thus modern scholars tend to treat her as evil. Since her development in Euripides' tragedy, she has been remembered as nothing else.

However, in this thesis I will analyze the social contexts and ideological influences that may have impacted the character development of Medea. In doing this, we can develop a clearer image of who this mythological woman was and

² Eubulus, fragment from a lost play. As cited in Fant and Lefkowitz, *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Source Book in Translation* 29-30.

³ Waterfield 165.

then debunk the idea that she was solely a psychotic killer and irrational woman. In order to properly do so, it is necessary to examine multiple time periods in which the story of Medea was prevalent. By analyzing Medea during different time periods and cultures, we can observe how Medea was transformed according to specific norms. More importantly, we can also see how labeling her a monster can be hypocritical according to set standards. Therefore, we can begin to view her character in a different light. To begin, I will explore Euripides's *Medea* in relation to normative female identity as well as accepted heroic ideals during fifth-century Athens.

Heroes during the time of Classical Athens were celebrated and even had statuses similar to the gods. Their roles were specifically defined within Greek society. The most basic definition of an Athenian hero is a man who pursues dangerous endeavors and, much of the time, kills many men. However, do not assume they are similar to what modern society considers a hero. While today any person who performs a selfless act is without a doubt displaying heroic qualities, this was not at all the case in ancient Greece.

In fact, heroes were typically much more selfish and violent. For example, Achilles quickly became a hero because of his courageous and brutal fighting abilities during the Trojan War. He was lethal and showed no mercy, and all Athenians praised these qualities. Another example is Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. In this case, Odysseus faced deadly challenges, such as a Cyclops or the Sirens, and because of his wit, he became recognized as a hero. Classical Athens, like all Greek society, inherited and embraced these Homeric ideals. Thus, it is

quite evident that in order to be a hero in Classical Athens, it was necessary to place one's self in dangerous situations and then become bloodthirsty or exercise impressive intelligence. Above all, their pride could not be compromised in any way. If this were to happen, a hero would react. In fact, he was required to act. Using the same examples as we did previously, we can observe their dignity being compromised and the heroes' reactions. Achilles refused to fight in the *Iliad* after Agamemnon stole his spoils. Odysseus, on the other hand, after seeing all of his wife's suitors, went on a killing rampage upon his arrival home. Do either of these reactions seem reasonable or heroic in quality?

The answer is no, from our modern perspective. These acts seem far from the heroic ideal, yet the two continue to be recognized as heroes. So my question is, why was Medea so harshly condemned for murdering her children when she herself had heroic characteristics? She acted as any hero of the time would have and made a great sacrifice to protect her dignity after being wronged by Jason, yet she is still called a monster. In chapter one, I use the social constraints of the time to define the victim that Medea became within Greek society. After I have analyzed these social constraints, we can potentially formulate an answer for why she has never been considered a hero, even though she met the criteria for male heroic status.

Seneca's *Medea* presents a very different version of her character, yet it does not help her bad girl reputation in the least. Instead of Greek values being forced onto Medea, conservative Roman expectations are used. Above all, Stoicism was the primary force that Seneca used to create and critique Medea's

character. Seneca was a prominent philosopher as well as tragic poet, so his personal views on life were dominant in much of his work. Most importantly, he was an adviser to Nero. This is particularly interesting because, even though he was not a political leader in Rome, he did have some influence over Roman society. Since he was such an extreme Stoic, his philosophical beliefs became his life's passion. In particular, Seneca focused on an ongoing battle between reason versus passion and how this struggle would decide whether a person was living virtuously or not. We will learn how Medea became a vehicle with which he popularized these ideas in Stoic philosophy.

In chapter two, I use Roman ideology to build an identity for Medea where her actions were used as models to demonstrate Stoic philosophy. In doing this, Seneca created a new version of Medea that suited his own agenda. Nevertheless, Medea was still treated negatively and Seneca's tragedy just furthered her reputation as an evil, murderous woman. However, in the context of Seneca's own words, maybe we can discover a Stoic hero rather than a villain.

In Neronian Rome and fifth-century Athens, Medea was intrinsically evil. Seneca and Euripides definitely had social and moral reasons for treating her as such, and because of their ancient views, Medea is still known as a murderer today. In order to develop a more modern understanding of Medea's complex identity, I explore 19th to 21st century adaptations of her character and story in chapter three to learn what her role and influences have been in French culture. This chapter differs greatly from chapters one and two because Medea is treated in social contexts that people today can more easily relate to. In particular, the

French Medea is highly politicized, as we can observe in the context of various moments in France's history.

Instead of focusing on a single adaptation, I chose to examine three separate works created within the past 200 years that demonstrate a transformation of Medea's inner character. The first work is a painting by Eugène Delacroix. The painting is named *Médée furieuse* and it is a beautiful example of Romantic style. Through this work, I analyze what sort of power Medea had on French society as well as how 19th century France impacted her (fictional) character development. Above all, the Romantic style presented the most maternal and loving woman we have seen yet.

From the Romantic Movement, we move to post World War II France and instead of extreme emotions as a foundation for Medea's inner character, we turn to existentialism. In particular, I focus on Jean Anouilh's play *Médée*. In this version of the tragedy, we can learn to what extent existentialism impacted the presentation of Medea's character. Above all else, existentialism dealt with maintaining one's integrity regardless of the corruption occurring in the outside world. Medea is an interesting subject for such a philosophy, as many would argue that she lost her integrity when she stabbed her two children. However, I argue quite the opposite and I find that Anouilh's Medea is the epitome of a woman who protected her integrity.

The final French adaptation that I examine in chapter three is *Le Songe de Médée*, choreographed by Angelin Preljoçaj in 2004. This ballet presents the most modern version of Medea that I examine within this thesis. It is particularly

important, as it will present a Medea as she is viewed by people of the 21st century. There are two goals of this section. First, to learn about conflicts between classical and modern ideas as portrayed through Medea. Second, to observe the function and the reception of Medea in modern French culture. Did the audience find her acts utterly appalling and immediately label her as a murderer? Or was she received as a victim that went down fighting?

As stated earlier, the main goal of chapter three is to learn about how she transformed within a single society over 200 years, rather than one specific point in a culture, as I did with Euripides and Seneca's plays. This chapter allows the best chance to not only discover who she is in modern context but also how Medea was treated for a long period of time, something I was not able to do as well for ancient Greece and Rome. At the end of this chapter, we will be most in sync with modern receptions and be able to understand that she was a powerful woman, not a monster.

Medea's greatest power was her femininity. She represented a threat to men in Classical Athens and Neronian Rome, and she has proved intriguing to French society. Medea was a beautiful and terrifying figure who has occasioned fascination and horror for more than 2,000 years. For these reasons, she has not been able to get rid of her bad girl reputation. My goal through this thesis is not to justify her act of murdering her two children, but rather to shine some light on different aspects of her fictional character. There are thousands of ways to interpret a work of art, but I feel Medea has been marked as a villain for far too long.

CHAPTER 1

Damned if She Does, Damned if She Doesn't. A Critical Analysis of Euripides' *Medea*

Medea has become immortalized as the woman who killed her children. This alone has been one of the most defining acts of her life. However, there is so much more to the character Medea. Branding her a child-slayer does nothing more than continue to harm a woman who has already been consistently abused. Aristophanes wrote in his work *Wasps*, "Do not judge before you have heard the story of both sides."⁴ This quote presents just how the audience should view Medea. Rather than immediately taking the side of Jason in the matter, it is necessary to truly evaluate just who Medea was. Euripides' set *Medea* at the point when she and Jason had already moved to Corinth, following the capture of the Golden Fleece. The story picks up when Medea learns that Jason has chosen to leave her for a younger woman, and this is where the strife begins.

Keeping the action of the play in mind, we may turn to the broader ideas that Euripides discussed. The young poet examined further the role of women in ancient society. Through Medea, he depicted a life lacking independence. In a sense, Medea became the voice of women throughout Greece at the time, as she behaved out of line with the expected norms of feminine identity. However, these

⁴ Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 725-726.

controversial actions – as I will argue – made her a hero, not a villain. She rose from the victim to the hero before the eyes of the Athenian audience. Yet, why, at the time, was she so hated, and, to this day, cannot seem to overcome her reputation? The social constraints on women in ancient Greece seemed to repress Medea until she broke. Once Jason left her, she had nothing, except for a broken heart and no status in any country.

“Much of this play is to be about men’s images of women.”⁵ Even if one accepts this idea as a fact, one must still evaluate Medea’s character. Who was she? She was portrayed in so many different ways that it is almost impossible to give her a single identity. Thus, it is necessary to take her away from the person men have turned her into, and to truly look at her actions and her emotions. In doing this, one can create a more complete picture of this infamous woman. Medea was not just a child-killing woman who behaved irrationally against her husband. She was a woman wronged who let her pride protect her, and she created an identity for herself completely different from the female stereotypes of the time. Though murdering her children cannot be justified, Medea’s rage can be and her character can also be given the honor it deserves.

Despite its fame for democracy, Athens treated women poorly compared to other states of the time. Euripides speaks about this issue through his work *Medea*. In Medea’s opening speech, she laments her unfortunate fate, but, more importantly, she complains about the struggles women must endure with men, especially in regards to marriage and childbirth. At the time, the conservative

⁵ Barlow, 160.

male audience would likely have been appalled by her complaints, but Euripides continued throughout the entire tragedy to evaluate the role of the woman. Arrowsmith writes, “There can be little doubt, for instance, that Euripides meant his *Medea* to end in a way that must have shocked his contemporaries, and which still shocks today.”⁶ It is quite evident that Euripides wrote *Medea* not only to shock but also upset the Athenian audience. He was bringing attention to topics that were generally ignored and caused uproar among men.

In *Medea*'s opening speech, she says, λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί, κακῶς φρονοῦντες: ὡς τρις ἄν παρ' ἀσπίδα στῆναι θέλοιμ' ἄν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.⁷ This had to be a controversial thought for a young poet to write, especially in a state where women were expected to remain hidden from public view. Euripides essentially stated that the life of a woman was more difficult by a factor of three than the life of any man. Euripides took a bold step when he wrote the play about a strong female character, and then he took it further by bringing controversial views of women into sharp focus. In order to bring destruction upon her husband and his new family, she destroys her own. While this is an extreme reaction to her predicament, it does portray a certain attitude towards women and their roles in ancient society. *Medea* brings into question just what sort of character was she? Was she simply a victim who took her fate into her own hands and brought about

⁶ Arrowsmith, 43.

⁷ Euripides, *Medea*, 248-251. Citations in Greek derive from the edition of David Kovacs (1994) as cited on the Perseus website. For details please see the list of ancient sources.

the destruction of her ex-husband? Or was she a hateful woman who allowed her emotions to take over and eventually cause herself greater grief than Jason had?

Euripides wrote the play *Medea* in 431 B.C., a time when women were expected to remain indoors, in the privacy of their own home. Waterfield examines a female's identity in her book *Athens: A History*, and, even though she does debunk the exaggeration that women never left their houses, she also recognizes a woman's seclusion. She writes, "A respectable woman would go out, if at all, only on necessary business."⁸ A female had to maintain a complicated role in ancient Athens, where she needed to maintain her purity in the public eye by, oddly enough, avoiding the public. The more private a woman seemed, the better. However, it is evident that women were allowed to go out on business, and expected to, but only if it was absolutely necessary. This created a difficult paradox for a woman where she could do little about how her neighbors judged her, aside from sitting in her house. It seems as though forcing a woman to remain behind the scenes was a means for men to control their women and neatly pack them into a single, ideal standard. Medea broke this perfect identity and forced the audience to reevaluate their society.

"In confronting Medea, we confront our deepest feelings and realize that behind the delicate order we have sought to impose upon our worlds lurks chaos."⁹ For this reason alone, Medea has the single most complicated female identity and caused the most outrage in the ancient world. As a strong female figure, she overstepped the expectations of a woman and, instead, became

⁸ Waterfield, 161.

⁹ Clauss and Johnston, 17.

something else. This was the sort of woman whom every man feared, a woman who was powerful and clever, and would act on her emotions. Medea destroyed the framework of the perfect Athenian woman. Her role was beyond revolutionary; it shook the very foundations of the Athenian society and caused outrage amongst men. “His purpose was, of course, not merely to shock, but to force the audience to the recognition that Medea, mortally hurt in her eros, her defining and enabling human passion, must act as she does.”¹⁰ While her acts impacted the audience, it had more important implications for women. Euripides caused Athenians to reevaluate and question what they believed about women.

Arrowsmith, above, chooses to focus specifically on the word *eros*, when describing where Medea was hurt. This word implies not just a romantic love, but, more importantly, a strong, sexual desire. Thus, Medea had more of an infatuation and longing for Jason than a committed, loving relationship. This is particularly important to realize, as it describes an overly emotional Medea, as well as a woman who put too much confidence in a weak marriage. “Binding herself to Jason through an exchange of oaths and the pledging of right hands, Medea acted as an equal partner in the heroic enterprise.”¹¹ It appears as though Medea and Jason were never officially wed, but in “exchanging oaths” and “pledging their hands” they recognized each other as partners. Medea, however, considered this as swearing fidelity to each other, yet Jason recognized he could easily escape if need be. This became the weak foundation of their marriage, as, in reality, the two were not actually married to each other. Regardless of their official status as a

¹⁰ Arrowsmith, 43.

¹¹ Mastronarde, 19.

couple, Jason led Medea into believing that they were married and that she, as a woman, had fulfilled her purpose. So, when Jason left Medea for another woman, he legally had a right to do so, since their marriage was built on infatuation and empty promises. Thus, it is important to recognize that, despite being a victim, Medea did put a lot of trust in a man and a marriage that were not sustainable. Even though she put all her faith in the wrong man, this does not make her the ultimate villain.

Thus, according to Waterfield, for a woman to be considered respectable, she had to remain loyal to her husband, no matter how difficult the marriage became. Did any woman truly enjoy this lack of independence, especially once there were marriage problems? According to Euripides, as spoken by Medea, women detested the life that they were given. They were treated incredibly unfairly and once married, they had no way of escaping, unless their husband felt so inclined to leave them. In Medea's opening speech, she also discussed the problems of marriage, for women in particular, when she says οὐ γὰρ εὐκλειεῖς ἀπαλλαγὰὶ γυναῖξιν οὐδ' οἶόν τ' ἀνήνασθαι πόσιν.¹² Here, Medea presented the issue of how it was not a respectable thing for women to leave their husbands but it was also impossible to refuse a husband. This created a difficulty for women where men could force a woman into marriage and then leave her on a whim. This description makes marriage for any woman in the ancient world seem to be a trap.

Euripides shows us women victimized by patriarchy in almost every possible way. A girl needs both her virginity and a dowry to attract a husband. Women are raped and bear illegitimate children

¹² Euripides, *Medea*, 236-237.

whom they must discard. The women are blamed, while the men who raped them are not. When marriages prove unfruitful, wives are inevitably guilty. Despite the grimness of marriage, spinsterhood is worse.¹³

Regardless of the woman's circumstances, she was always the guilty party. Men could live as they please, but women were stuck in a struggle to find themselves. Women had the option of marrying and being in infinite unhappiness, or living out their lives alone and being even unhappier. Medea married Jason for love, but she quickly learned that she fell easily into this trap. Her marriage deteriorated before her eyes and her distress was so unbearable that she had to get her revenge. However, once she was no longer with Jason, she still seemed to be living in a state of perpetual unhappiness, with no husband and now no children. Athenian women were being forced into an ideal, which was destroying them, and Medea was the epitome of this female identity crisis.

Did this make Medea a victim from day one in her marriage to Jason? While this would present a simple explanation for her irrational acts against her children, it does not fully solve the dilemma. Prior to settling in Corinth, Medea gave everything up for Jason. She murdered her brother, abandoned her father's kingdom and, more importantly, disowned her father. She left her entire life behind to be with Jason and helped him acquire the Golden Fleece in exchange for his word in marriage. She was head over heels for Jason and thought their marriage would be final. Unfortunately for Medea, as soon as a better offer presented itself, Jason left her. Here, Jason appears to be heartless and choosing money and status over his family, and this creates the image of Medea as victim.

¹³ Pomeroy, 110-111.

She did everything she was expected to as a wife, but Jason lost interest, and there was nothing she could do. While Jason definitely victimized her, it is hard to look past how quick she was in acting against her fatherland and family. Medea seems to act without thinking during this first meeting with Jason and not only fled the land that raised her but she murdered her brother. In performing these crimes, Euripides had Medea play into the Greek audience's view that women were unstable, emotional and irrational. There was a lack of thought in Medea's actions and one cannot help but wonder if her quickness to action was what caused her to be a victim, not just the actions of Jason. Medea says that married life is enviable if all is going well but, εἰ δὲ μή, θανεῖν χρεῶν.¹⁴ In other words, she would prefer death to a failed marriage, which seems extreme. She gave her whole previous life up for a marriage that she prayed would never fail. When it subsequently does fail, she completely loses her mind. Medea's irrationality took over full force and her main focus became revenge.

However, Medea was only acting in accordance with female stereotypes of the time. She acted in an overly emotional way and appeared as a wild threat to the men around her. Yet, this does not make her the crazy, violent woman she became known as. Euripides made Medea so volatile as a means of creating fear within the audience, thus intensifying the clichés of the time with regards to women. More importantly, we must interpret her behavior backwards in relation to how she had been defined in the past. Instead of her "quickness to action" making her the victim, her being victimized made her irrational. For some reason,

¹⁴ Euripides, *Medea*, 243.

men flipped their actions around on Medea, and they made her the enemy rather than themselves. This is an interesting point, as it demonstrates clearly the social constraints on women. Medea's character was classified as the "evil" before she ever had a chance to prove herself otherwise.

For women, this search for an identity never disappeared, and this was especially transparent for Medea. Upon her arrival in Corinth, Medea never fit the standard for women. She was always considered to be the "other," not only a barbaric woman, but also a witch and somewhat manly. Medea was well known for her "magic" and Creon even admits his fear of it, saying δέδοικά σ' (οὐδὲν δεῖ παραμπίσχειν λόγους) μή μοί τι δράσης παῖδ' ἀνήκεστον κακόν. συμβάλλεται δὲ πολλὰ τοῦδε δείγματα: σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις.¹⁵ Creon feared (δέδοικά) Medea because she was skillful of many evils (κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις). She was more than just a clever, wounded woman, she had experience in evil arts and he recognized that she was definitely plotting against him and his daughter. Medea exceeded the role of a mortal woman in this scene, but less than a god. She was caught somewhere in between the two, and instead of this being a positive attribute; it caused Medea to become even more ostracized. This creates a paradox, since a man would be praised if he were considered greater than a mortal but less than a god. Achilles, for example, in the *Iliad* received the epithet δῖος,¹⁶ meaning "godlike." Like Medea, he was not actually fully divine, yet his abilities made him beyond a mere mortal. However, Achilles was almost worshipped for

¹⁵ Euripides, *Medea*, 281-285.

¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 292.

this quality, while Medea was detested for it. Again, because Medea was a woman, and foreign for that matter, she was in the wrong.

Page best explains this phenomenon in his introduction

She is a woman scorned, depicted at that stage of emotion in which her first torment of misery has passed into vindictive hatred. And here it is important to understand that the poet has described not a Greek woman but a barbarian. Though her emotions are natural to all women at all times in her position, their expression and the dreadful end to which they lead are everywhere affected by her foreign origin...because she was a foreigner she could kill her children; because she was a witch she could escape in a magic chariot. She embodies the qualities which the fifth-century Athenian believed to be characteristic of Orientals.¹⁷

Medea was no longer seen as an Athenian woman, and for this reason, all of her actions were easily explained. She was an outsider with the ability to create magic; therefore she could never be Athenian. Despite her being born and raised in Colchis, she fled to Corinth with Jason, and there the two began their lives. Thus, it is quite interesting how the Corinthian people, in particular their ruler, were quick to disown her when she was the victim. Page makes a valid point in indicating her emotions are “natural to all women” if ever in this predicament. Medea seemed to embody the “other”, or a barbaric woman, when in reality she acted just as any other woman. She was ostracized for her overwhelming pain, yet her reaction was completely acceptable in the given situation. Any woman who has experienced this pain would be just as devastated, yet Medea was treated differently. She seems to be pushed out of her female identity and forced into the role of some monster.

¹⁷ Page xviii, xxi.

Along with being characterized as the other, Medea also received the identity of a man. She was portrayed as very masculine and her strong demeanor was something characteristic of an Athenian male more so than a woman. “Medea’s willingness to use physical means to gain her revenge would have been seen as a male trait by the Athenian audience, as their society endorsed rigid stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviors.”¹⁸ Medea’s “willingness to use physical means” in order to harm Jason is the central action of Euripides’ play and it is the driving force for the entire play. Since this was a masculine quality, Medea should not have received it. This complicates her identity even worse as now she cannot be considered a female, or just a foreigner, but she now is comparable to a man. It is interesting to note her role in contrast to Jason’s role. Jason was considered to be a mortal hero in any mythological story that he was in. He maintained the heroic ideal throughout all mythological stories he was included in. Yet, in this play, Jason was not the hero. He became almost a supporting character to Medea.

Keeping this in mind, if we look at how Medea was described by Euripides and portrayed in modern scholarship, she was also masculine. In particular, the words that Euripides used to develop her were characteristic of men during the time. For example, Euripides calls Medea βουλευούσα και τεχνωμένη¹⁹, which we may translate as “deliberating and contriving.” These two words are intellectual words, implying that the person, whom they describe, is clever and methodical. They describe Medea perfectly, as she planned out her

¹⁸ Griffiths, 73.

¹⁹ Euripides, *Medea*, 402.

revenge with the utmost precision. However, they are interesting epithets for Euripides to give to a woman. Women were considered weak and uneducated. In Aristotle's *Politics*, women were considered lower than men in intelligence and only slightly more intelligent than slaves and animals.²⁰ This implies that Athenian women as a whole were not at all considered contriving or clever, but rather illiterate and lacking wisdom. Therefore, in using such words as βουλεύουσα or τεχνωμένη, Euripides was building a masculine character for Medea. In doing this, Euripides added to her masculine persona, while diminishing Jason's. This is noteworthy because Jason should have been the character with intellectual epithets, yet Euripides made a point of giving them to Medea.

Medea's name even has intellectual implications. Medea can be derived from the verb μήδομαι, meaning "to plot" or "to contrive". The root μηδ- is clearly visible in the Greek name, Μήδεια. Thus, giving her this name "the one who plots" creates a very specific image. An image of a woman who is smart and not lacking the intellectual capabilities of a man, as Aristotle implied in his work. This is fascinating to examine, as Medea's name itself is related to a masculine identity rather than a feminine. Thus, since her name is uncharacteristic of a woman, it further complicates her female identity crisis. Aristotle discussed this idea more in depth in his other work, *The Poetics*. Aristotle wrote the importance of plot and intrigue and then continued on to discuss characters. In regards to women, he wrote, ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρεῖον μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἀρμόττον γυναικείω

²⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b, 10-14.

τὸ ἀνδρείαν ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι²¹ (“For a character [may] be masculine, but it is not fitting for a woman to be masculine or clever”). It is most important to note how Aristotle connected the words “masculine” and “clever”, implying a certain, intimate relationship between the two. A woman could not be masculine or clever; therefore any woman that had these attributes did not fit the ideal feminine standard. Medea was this exact woman. Not only can her name be derived from μήδομαι, a verb, which implies cleverness, but also her epithets were far from feminine.

Take, for example, the epithets Briseis and Hera received in Homer’s *Iliad*. Agamemnon called Briseis καλλιπάρηος²² (beautiful-cheeked) and Homer described Hera as βοῶπις πότνια²³ (ox-eyed and revered). Both of these female epithets focus on a physical characteristic of the female body and do not refer at all to intelligence. These were appropriate descriptions for women, as they related to beauty, a feminine attribute. However, Medea was never viewed in this manner. She maintained an intellectual, clever persona, something that women were not supposed to be described as, according to Aristotle. Thus, Medea was not a woman; she was a witch, a foreigner and a man. She did not belong, and for this reason she became the victim and the other.

When one examines the role of women in the ancient world in general, and compares Medea to these female standards, one cannot help but ask the question, was Medea a hero or a villain? Was she justified in her actions or did

²¹ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, xv, 4-5.

²² Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 184.

²³ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 551.

she behave completely out of line? It appears as though Medea was a victim from the start, but how could this ever excuse her crimes? The Medea that Euripides created was a strong willed woman who was excessively prone to acting on her emotions. Her marriage to Jason began with her overwhelming love for him and it ended with her overwhelming hatred for him. Medea allowed her vengeful nature to overtake her entire mind and there was no way to stop her. Before she even began to plot her revenge, Medea said γυνή γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα κακή τ' ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾶν: ὅταν δ' ἐς εὐνήν ἠδικημένη κυρῆ, οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρῆν μαιφονωτέρα.²⁴ Her passion was all consuming and she, herself, even admits here that when a woman is wronged in love, there is no mind more violent. She uses the adjective μαιφόνος, meaning blood-stained or bloody. This word is incredibly gruesome for Medea to use, but it just continues to demonstrate how hostile and vengeful she was. She was wronged by her lover and she was full of so much hatred that violence became the only solution.

Medea's grief was immediately apparent at the beginning of the play. Euripides wrote, κεῖται δ' ἄσιτος, σῶμ' ὑφείσ' ἀλγηδόσιν, τὸν πάντα συντήκουσα δακρύοις χρόνον.²⁵ She lies around fasting (ἄσιτος) giving way to pain (ἀλγηδόσιν) and wasting away (συντήκουσα) in tears constantly. Medea reacted here, as any wronged woman would have. Euripides developed the image of a hurt woman, prepared to die just to escape her nightmarish reality. Clearly in this scene, Medea was a rightful victim. She seems desperate and her body appears to be withering away, creating a gruesome sight of love gone awry. Here,

²⁴ Euripides, *Medea*, 263-266.

²⁵ Euripides, *Medea*, 24-25.

her role as a victim is indisputable. The “monster” that she is later perceived as, is something completely unexpected from the weak woman she was during this moment. Medea epitomized in this scene the uncontrollable emotions women were characterized as having. Her hyper-emotionality continued throughout this scene so much so that she became almost deaf to the advice of her friends. ὡς δὲ πέτρος ἢ θαλάσσιος κλύδων ἀκούει νουθετουμένη φίλων.²⁶ Euripides compared her to such lifeless objects as a rock or a wave. Medea, herself, became an inanimate object, allowing life to pass by her. This presented an interesting side of the strong female character the audience will witness later in the tragedy.

More than any other scene in the play, this opening section revealed Medea as a woman. She was completely ignorant to the advice of others and her emotions overtook her. She fit the stereotype men created for women where their emotions were in control and, therefore, they needed to be kept in check. “One mode of reception of Medea for a typical male member of the fifth-century audience would be...to regard her with fear and disapproval and interpret her actions as a confirmation of the need to distrust and tightly control all women in real life.”²⁷ This further confirms how Medea was being forced into the female stereotype and, thus, became a threat. This was the case for all independent women during the fifth-century, aside from goddesses and whores. However, the difference between Medea and other Athenian women was how she handled her situation. She went from the victim to the hero, even if that meant making the greatest of sacrifices.

²⁶ Euripides, *Medea*, 28-29.

²⁷ Mastronarde, 26-27.

Medea was consistently ostracized and victimized by Jason and Creon, as would be expected by the conservative males of the time. Nonetheless, Medea managed to come out on top. Her actions against Jason made her the hero and him the victim by the end of the play. This role reversal (as men were typically expected to be the heroes) was revolutionary for Euripides. She took matters into her own hands and by physical means she got her revenge. Medea's main concern became her reputation. She was most concerned about how she would prove that she was not the victim. She said to herself, *vũn áγων εὐψυχίας. ὀρᾶς ἃ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν*²⁸ ("Now, it is a contest of good courage. Do you see the things, which you are suffering? It is necessary that you not be laughed at"). Medea recognized that she was the victim, but she became obsessed with protecting her reputation and making those that harmed her suffer. This was a characteristic intimately tied to heroes, where defending one's honor was the most important thing a man could do. Her conduct was comparable to Achilles' reactions to Agamemnon in book one of the *Iliad*. After Agamemnon demanded that Achilles give him his prize of Briseis, Achilles was infuriated. His heart was divided in two ways (*διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν*)²⁹ as Medea's heart was later in the play over whether to murder her children or not. Achilles' wrath then turned into the need to protect his reputation. If Agamemnon took away Briseis with no consequences, Achilles would have been dishonored, the greatest hit any man could take to his ego. This was the same problem that Medea faced. She was humiliated and now all that was left to do was make Jason pay: "...When Medea

²⁸ Euripides, *Medea*, 403-404.

²⁹ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 189.

espouses ‘masculine’ values (honour, courage, doing harm to enemies), she is assimilating herself to the heroic mould that Jason is supposed to personify.”³⁰ In this scene, Medea’s character greatly changed. She became the protagonist and she sets in motion “her whole system of friend-enemy relationships.”³¹ Finally, Medea gained her identity in this pivotal moment where she will no longer be a victim.

Her pride was an important quality for the entirety of the play. She even claimed that she would never have fawned on (θωπεύσαι)³² Jason if she would not have gained (κερδαίνοθσαν)³³ something out of their relationship. This quote has important implications on the character of Medea. She comes off as egotistical, something the audience would expect of a man. They are characteristic of a proud person, one who does not lend trust to many people. This statement makes it seem as though Medea has had her eye on Jason since day one, as the only reason she got involved with him was if he provided some benefit for her. Her confidence here was overbearing and she completely dismissed the idea that she was a victim of any kind. She was insistent on maintaining a certain appearance before the public. Medea did not want to seem feeble before the Athenians, yet women were not expected to go to such extreme measures to be perceived in a positive light. As stated earlier, a female’s public identity depended heavily on how private she was. So, it was a bold move for Medea to go into the public and act on her anger. She continued to focus heavily on this deep concern for her outward appearance

³⁰ Mastronarde, 14.

³¹ Mastronarde, 14.

³² Euripides, *Medea*, 368.

³³ Euripides, *Medea*, 369.

as she planned how she would harm Jason. She did not want anyone to think that she was φαύλην κάσθενῆ...μηδ' ἠσυχαίαν,³⁴ but instead βαρεῖαν ἐχθροῖς καὶ φίλοισιν εὐμενῆ.³⁵ She refused to be slight or weak, she wanted to be known the same way a hero would be known, “grievous to enemies and favorable to friends.”

Her role as a victim turned hero does create some complications. Medea acted irrationally as a victim, but these excessive emotions turned her into a hero. Her greatest feminine stereotype – emotionality – turned out to be what made her the protagonist of the play. This created another paradox in her identity. Not only was she a woman described with masculine epithets and heroic deeds, but her greatest flaw as a woman was also her greatest strength: “Nevertheless, at this point we realize that Medea’s “heroic” option ensues from her weakness, and we confront again the unsettling problem of her personality.”³⁶ It seems that every newly discovered identity for Medea just creates greater conflict and makes her overall role even more complicated.

Although we may now better understand her character, the unavoidable question of why she murdered her children remains. Sanity is the first thing we must question after a mother has destroyed her own children, as children are sacred to most mothers. With Medea’s track-record of proneness to anger, insanity might seem the simplest solution. The issue, however, was that she never truly desired to kill her children. In lines 1042-1048, Medea saw the faces of her

³⁴ Euripides, *Medea*, 807-808.

³⁵ Euripides, *Medea*, 809.

³⁶ Pucci, 99.

children and could not bear to cause such harm to them. She even admitted that the pain would be twice as bad for her than it would be for Jason; therefore, there was no overwhelming, personal benefit. At this point, she even claimed that she would not go through with the crime, but rather leave the land of Corinth. This amply demonstrates how difficult a decision this was for Medea. Insanity was not the reason for her actions.

Eventually, Medea decided that it was necessary to kill her children, but her maternal instincts never really disappeared. Towards the end of the play, when the time has finally come for her to do the deed, she still feels unsure of herself. She even tells her heart to arm itself (ὀπλίζου)³⁷ and even exclaims δυστυχῆς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή,³⁸ "I am an unlucky woman!" She hated herself for the crime she was about to commit, but there were too many other motivations to stop her. Her reputation again was the primary driving force for the action. Just as some have argued that Medea killed her children out of pure craziness, others have suggested that killing them would prevent Jason from taking them away from her, thus by killing them, she was trying to protect them. The best solution, however, is once again her pride. Medea wanted more than anything to live out her life with her children, but Jason's actions ruined their marriage, and with the marriage destroyed, their family could not survive. Thus, although Medea detested herself for what she would do to her children, there was a force that overpowered her maternal feelings.

³⁷ Euripides, *Medea*, 1242.

³⁸ Euripides, *Medea*, 1250.

“In the end she allows her very strong love as a mother, essential to her feminine nature, to be trampled by a heroic resolve which a man would normally direct towards military enemies.”³⁹ There was a conflict of interest between her maternal instincts and a hero’s needs. The needs of Medea as hero won out over her needs as a mother, and because she, as a woman, was expected to have reacted as a mother would have, she was in the wrong. Medea was a woman, mother and wife, but she was also, above all, a hero, and the Athenian people likely perceived this as a negative attribute. This was extremely hypocritical, considering that other male heroes would not be viewed in such a perverse light, but since Medea was a woman, witch and foreigner, she became a monster.

Medea was not a monster. She was neither a villain nor an irrational woman. Medea was a hero. Her tragic flaw was her emotionality, but this was also what motivated her to become the protagonist. “There is drive and resolve in her determination to avenge and to preserve her own honour and avoid humiliation. All heroic traits.”⁴⁰ She acted as any hero, fought for her reputation, even if that meant murdering her children. While killing one’s children can never be justified, Medea’s conduct can be understood with regards to her character and her situation. As a male hero would not allow a significant other to dishonor him, neither does Medea, and, as a woman in a conservative, ancient society, her children were her only weapons. This well illustrates the great tension between human resistance and societal constraints in the ancient world: Medea opposed the constraints placed upon her.

³⁹ Barlow, 167.

⁴⁰ Barlow, 162.

In making Medea, this strong, highly volatile character, the hero of the play, Euripides made a controversial statement on the role of women. He intensified this examination of gender roles to an even greater extent when he presented the play before his Athenian audiences. The purpose of doing this was to bring Medea's identity crisis to light, and, in turn, to bring attention to the ancient female identity crisis in general. Many other ancient societies of the time gave women much more freedom in comparison with the so-called democratic society of Athens. Thus, it was no coincidence for Euripides to bring such a bold play to the Great Dionysia. Euripides presented a controversial figure in a controversial manner, which made the overall shock amongst the audience even greater. In truth, it was an impressive move on Euripides' part and it added to the heroic elements of the play.

The modern saying "Damned if she does, damned if she doesn't" epitomizes the way society treated Medea. If she had done nothing and allowed Jason to ruin her life, she would have been in the wrong and considered a weak woman. Yet, in reacting as a hero, Medea was again considered a villain. Jason and Creon treated her as a victim, ostracizing and abusing her until she took hold of her own fate. Once she took control over her life, she was still considered an appalling example of a mother and woman. That is the beauty of Medea, though. Despite destroying the feminine ideal of the time, she developed a new and even better identity. She was not just a woman, or mother, or wife, Medea was simply a human being trying to come out on top. Medea will always be remembered as the woman who murdered her children, but she can no longer be condemned as a

crazy woman or a monstrous person. She made the greatest of sacrifices in order to protect her dignity and acted as any hero would. If society condemns Medea for her actions, it is necessary to then reevaluate all the heroes of antiquity.

CHAPTER 2

The Ultimate Stoic Bad Girl An Examination of Stoicism and its Relationship to Seneca's *Medea*

Many scholars have labeled Seneca's *Medea* a flawed copy of Euripides' tragedy. However, it is necessary to look into the broader cultural ideas of Seneca's time. In doing this, we can truly understand what his purpose was in writing *Medea* as well as distinguish the two works from each other. Once we have done that, we can look into what Seneca's purpose was when he wrote *Medea*. Were there any important implications within the work? If so, what did these implications mean for Medea's character? Throughout history Medea has been hated and berated, but was this well deserved? The ultimate goal is to discover what the inner character of Medea was, but finding this answer is not that simple. Keeping these questions in mind, let us begin with what affected Seneca during his lifetime.

Stoicism was likely the most important intellectual influence on Seneca. Throughout the play there seems to be an ongoing battle between reason and passion, more so than there was in Euripides' tragedy. This continuous struggle can be attributed to Seneca's Stoicism and it defines the character that Medea became within the work. First and foremost, it is necessary that we discuss what Stoicism was in the Roman world, and what role Seneca had in regards to it. While one could dedicate an entire book to the study of Stoicism, I will, instead,

paint a general picture of the philosophy and relate that broad picture to Medea and her identity within Seneca's play.

According to Stoic belief, there are two elements that play vital roles in the suppression of one's passions.⁴¹ The first is a human being's natural survival instinct, which is concerned with finding what is best for one's well being.⁴² The second element is a human being's ability to reason, something only human beings share with the gods.⁴³ These innate human characteristics combine and create the idea that through reason, a human being can find exactly what is good for one's self. It is necessary, however, to realize that Stoics wanted a "serene and controlled life through self-discipline;"⁴⁴ they did not seek a life full of pleasure and wealth. This is an important distinction between Stoicism and other philosophies of the time. Pleasure was not the ultimate goal, instead moderation through reason was. Through reason, a Stoic is then able to separate things that are "good," "bad" and "indifferent" in relation to one's self. These three categories are vital to creating the ideal Stoic. Virtues (justice, temperance) are examples of goods, as they are beneficial to one's self, while vices (greed, wrath) are bads, as they are things that are harmful. These two categories can easily be separated as they can be clearly defined and easily recognized.

The third and final category that a Stoic must deal with is indifferent things. Something that is considered "indifferent" is neither beneficial nor

⁴¹ Kaster and Nussbaum 4.

⁴² Kaster and Nussbaum 4.

⁴³ Kaster and Nussbaum 4.

⁴⁴ Price 104.

harmful to a person and, again, through reason, they can be readily recognized. Two examples of this are beauty and good reputation. While these two ideas are preferred and even praised among people, they do not bring any moral or reasonable benefit to an individual. In avoiding vices, exercising virtues and recognizing “indifferents,” a Stoic would live the most ideal life. However, this was considered an incredibly rare thing, and anyone who lived in such a way would be called wise or sage and he or she would be thought of as living the most in accord with nature.⁴⁵

This is the ultimate goal of any Stoic, to live one’s life as close to nature as possible. In doing so, a Stoic would have the most reasonable mind possible. Just as all Stoics, Seneca was deeply concerned with becoming the sage. “Seneca transforms the sage into an inspirational figure who can motivate others to be like him by his gentle humanity and joyful tranquility.”⁴⁶ Even though it may seem simple to live such a life, there are many problems that one must overcome before reaching this ideal. Passions and emotions are the most difficult barriers to overcome, as they are inevitable as well as volatile. Thus, people tend to give in easily to their emotions, ignoring completely what is considered virtuous.

Stoicism, as Seneca, himself, described it, depended on an intimate relationship between passions and ethics. If a person reasons properly and makes the correct ethical choices, passions will be suppressed. However, if reason fails, passions win, which can then lead to anger and revenge. “...passions themselves

⁴⁵ Kaster and Nussbaum 4.

⁴⁶ Kaster and Nussbaum xv.

[are] nothing but wrong judgments made one after another.”⁴⁷ This clearly implies how passions can be easily controlled by reason but, once one bad judgment is made, they can overcome any human. A passion can be eliminated (for example) if a person makes the conscious choice to not act on his or her anger and, by doing this, a person is showing restraint in temperament, something considered to be a virtue.

How exactly does anger work though? If all it takes to become more virtuous, in accordance with Stoic ideals, is to know when to restrain one’s passions, why is it such a difficult thing to become one of the wise? Seneca explained what anger is in his work *De Ira*, when he wrote

*...est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio adfectus et quaedam comminatio; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tamquam oporteat me vindicari, cum laesus sim, aut oporteat hunc poenas dare, cum scelus fecerit; tertius motus est iam impotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci vult, sed utique, qui rationem evicit.*⁴⁸

...First is an involuntary impulse, so to speak, a preparation of the emotion and some violent threat; the second [impulse] is accompanied with a defiant will, just as “I should be avenged, since I am harmed”, or “this man should pay the penalty, since he has committed a crime”; the third impulse is already uncontrollable, which wants to avenge, not if it is right, but, at any rate, it has overcome reason.

He described anger in three simple stages. The first stage, Seneca described as “involuntary,” implying that it is inevitable regardless of the human being. Thus, it is something characteristic even of the sage. This impulse is important, as it

⁴⁷ Kaster and Nussbaum 6.

⁴⁸ Seneca, *De Ira*, 2.4.1.

happens to everyone and there is no way to control it. The second stage of this passion is the most dangerous impulse that a Stoic must deal with. This stage gives causation to the rage, and thus it tells the person who has been harmed whether he or she has a right to get revenge or not. If a person does not act on this second impulse, then the person, according to a Stoic, would have made the most virtuous decision. However, this is not the only option.

If a person chooses to act on his or her anger, this leads to the third impulse. Seneca described this impulse as volatile and lacking control. It is also important to realize that this stage is not concerned with what is right and what is wrong. Instead, reason has been destroyed and the main goal is to get revenge. Thus, once a person has acted on his or her initial impulse and given causation to it, he or she is ignoring reason. This leads to a person living far from the Stoic ideal and giving way to his or her anger. We will see how these stages interplay throughout Seneca's *Medea* later in this chapter.

Kaster and Nussbaum best explain Seneca's definition of anger, writing "a strong desire for revenge when you judge that you have been unjustly harmed."⁴⁹ This clearly describes how Seneca viewed anger as not only an overwhelming passion, but also a passion that is self-centered and without thought. Anger, according to Seneca, derives from an intense urge to protect one's honor without the person truly evaluating the given situation. This disagrees with Stoic views because reason is supposed to be the most powerful force for a human. So, in

⁴⁹ Kaster and Nussbaum 6-7.

succumbing to one's rage, reason is eliminated. Anyone who acts on his or her wrath is living a life lacking virtue and, thus, does not fit the standard for a Stoic. This brings us to Seneca's *Medea*, and how her character was involved in Roman Stoicism as well as a reflection of a female's identity during this period.

Seneca lived in Imperial Rome, from 4 B.C.E. to 65 C.E., in the middle of the age of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian dynasty. This period was particularly important as it marked the height of Roman power and wealth. This era was also notable for how females were treated. "All women's lives were affected profoundly in various ways by the social ideology being articulated in laws and dynastic imagery by the emperor. From the 'best' of women to the 'worst,' the terms were set and debated within the frame of family and reproduction."⁵⁰ Thus, women were expected to maintain specific roles in ancient Rome, which were clearly defined by the emperor, whether it was Augustus or Nero.

Similar to the private lives women were expected to maintain in fifth-century Athens, women of Imperial Rome were held to high standards also. "Marital fidelity and harmony...are the expressed virtues of women both at the top and in the lower reaches of Roman society in this period...the public image of the Roman woman is dominated by private imagery."⁵¹ Thus, it is important to recognize that women must maintain a loyal relationship with their husband and, if things were to fall apart, maintain a harmonious rapport. Therefore, women

⁵⁰ Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy and Shapiro, 314-315.

⁵¹ Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy and Shapiro, 320.

were considered the most noble and respectable in the public eye when they kept a low profile. These expectations can be tied to Stoic beliefs for two reasons.

First of all, two important emperors of the time, Augustus and Nero, were influenced greatly by Stoic philosophy. Augustus had a Stoic tutor and Seneca himself was the adviser to Nero.⁵² Although this is not definitive proof that their Stoic beliefs had an impact on general expectations of female Roman identity, it would be foolish to say it was insignificant. Regardless of the leader, it is inevitable that one's personal beliefs and philosophies influence one's external actions, including legislation over a city. Thus, the moderation expected of women can be explained as partly strong Stoic rationality in the context of Augustan expectations. This is the second reason why a woman's identity can be linked with Stoicism. Women were expected to lead moderate and reasonable lives within society in order to be considered both morally and socially virtuous. This is rather similar to a Stoic's ideals, as virtues were sought through exercising a rational mind. Therefore, all women were expected to portray certain Stoic ideals and Medea will be no exception.

Now that we have discussed female identity in Imperial Rome in relation to Stoic ideals, I will discuss how the *Medea* that Seneca developed had a philosophical aim, unlike the original tragedy that Euripides wrote. Above all, the continuous battle between reason and passion distinguishes the Senecan version from the Euripidean one. In the beginning, she cannot blame Jason alone for

⁵² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Stoicism/>. Accessed on 1/2/12.

leaving her. Medea views the real enemy as Creon, and, being a wounded woman, she wants Jason to still be hers. This scene is significant because it depicts the second stage of her passion, where she is trying to put causation to her anger. According to Seneca's definition of passion, this stage is where Medea decided that she has the right and, in her mind, the obligation to exact her revenge. As stated earlier, this was the time when Medea could have chosen the more virtuous path, and not acted on her emotions. This, as we will learn, will lead to the third and final stage of passion, where reason is completely ignored and her emotions overtake her. However, instead of Jason being the enemy, she puts all the blame on Creon, and she initially plans to harm him. Even though Medea is still struggling to decide whom to blame for her distress, it is evident that she will punish someone and her second impulse of rage will be avenged.

Medea claims that Jason had no other option but to leave her for Creusa, as he was subject to Creon's authority (*iuris*).⁵³ In other words, Jason had no choice but to marry Creusa, because he could never turn down the king's daughter. Thus, Jason is just as much of a victim as she is. This is just another excuse to maintain Jason's innocence. Medea's naïveté causes her situation to worsen, and her grief quickly becomes a physical pain (*dolor*)⁵⁴ and she says, "If he can, may my Jason live as he was; if not, may he still live...all the blame is Creon's."⁵⁵ Medea's words here are some of the most beautiful of the entire play. They depict a woman deeply wounded, afraid of letting go of her husband, trying

⁵³ Seneca, *Medea*, 138.

⁵⁴ Seneca, *Medea*, 139-140.

⁵⁵ Seneca, *Medea*, 140-141, 143.

to find some means of escape from putting the blame on him. She even continues to call Jason “mine,” as though he still belongs to her. Medea is clearly a pained woman, but the more she dwells on this grief of losing her husband, the farther she falls into a life of vice.

This scene is important for the play because it creates a foundation for who Medea was. She was not the hateful woman that many believe her to have been, but rather she was the most faithful and loving wife a man could ask for. Even though Jason has abandoned her, Medea still hopes that he is innocent. Thus we can view Medea as we view any woman, not categorizing her immediately as the villain she became in history. Despite these feminine attributes that are characteristic of any woman, Medea’s rationality has already been overtaken, and in this moment, her femininity disappears. Her wrath must be avenged. However, she just does not know yet who to take it out on.

While Medea continues to hate Creon, she does decide that her greatest enemy is instead Jason. Rather than making excuses for Jason, she realizes that he chose to be unfaithful. Creon cannot take all the blame now, and Jason has become the guilty party. Having accepted that Jason no longer wants to be with her, Medea’s anger towards him now approves her revenge. She has now put all her wrath onto Jason and, in doing this, Medea feels as though she has every right to punish him: *levis est dolor qui capere consilium potest et clepere sese; magna non latitant mala. libet ire contra* (Light is the pain that can form a plan and

dissemble; great pains are not concealed. I want to go face to face!).⁵⁶ With the conclusion of these words, Medea has completed the second “impulse” of anger, as described by Seneca. She has given herself a reason to punish Jason, and, since her pain is so great, it cannot go unnoticed. Now she has begun the third and final stage of passion, as Seneca defined it. Medea has chosen to act and has no regard for right versus wrong, therefore all reason has been destroyed. She has thus chosen to be irrational and unwavering with regards to her need for revenge. With this decision having been made, Medea, according to Stoic standards, is no longer leading a virtuous life.

However, what is most interesting about Seneca’s play is how the struggle between reason and passion does not end once she has decided to harm Jason. It is a continuous, motivating force throughout the entire tragedy. There are countless examples of Medea trying to justify her hatred while also trying to restrain it. For example, Medea struggles between her disgust for Jason and her maternal care for her children. “My heart beats with dread (*horror*), my limbs grow numb with coldness and my breast trembles. My anger (*ira*) disappears and the mother (*mater*) returns, with the wife (*coniuge*) having been totally expelled.”⁵⁷ Medea is more than just a wife seeking revenge. Medea is also a mother, and it is necessary to recognize this identity. She realizes that the act of killing her children is horrendous and she, herself, even experiences pain from it. Her motherly love encompasses her moral reasoning and even hinders much of her actions

⁵⁶ Seneca, *Medea*, 155-157.

⁵⁷ Seneca, *Medea*, 926-928.

throughout the play. Seneca wrote beautifully how, as the angered wife is driven away, the mother within Medea returns. These two conflicting identities maintain themselves through the remainder of the play and mimic the battle between her reason and passion.

Just as soon as the mother in Medea returns and we feel comfortable that the children will be safe, Medea, the avenger, decides the children must die.

*quod scelus miseri luent? scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus
Medea mater. occident, non sunt mei; pereant, mei sunt.*⁵⁸

(What crime will the miserable [boys] pay for? The crime is Jason as their father and the greater crime is Medea as their mother. Let them be slain, since they are not mine; let them die, because they are mine.)

Medea both claims her children as her own and also denies them. She has developed complicated emotions because they represent Jason's greatest weakness. Yet she bore and raised them, so they are also sacred to her. Medea wants to kill her two children because they are a piece of Jason, and she cannot bear the thought of his existence. Yet, they also represent a piece of Medea, and to murder them would mean to kill a piece of herself. Even more noteworthy, Medea says that since she is their mother, this is a "greater crime" than Jason being their father. It is clear that she hates the woman that she has become; yet her rationality is not strong enough to win out over her hatred. The destiny of her children has been decided; there is no stopping her now.

⁵⁸ Seneca, *Medea*, 932-935.

Medea readily recognizes her inner battle and she prays for her maternal love to vanquish her rage: *meum cor fluctuatur: ira pietatem fugat iramque pietas. cede pietati, dolor*⁵⁹ (My heart is restless: anger drives off my [maternal] devotion and maternal devotion [drives off] my anger. Pain, cease to my love). Here, both anger and love are playing equal roles in troubling Medea. She is devoted to her children, thus murdering them would make her a monster. However, she must avenge her pride, and her children are the perfect weapons. Medea's struggle between reason and passion define her as a mother as well as an avenger. Even though her final acts of murdering her two children are terrible, the battle within her defines her as a strong female character, since she does have the capabilities to reason. Even though her passions take control of her rationality in the end, a Stoic would need to at least acknowledge this fact that she can separate right from wrong. According to a Stoic, however, moderation is the key to virtue and it appears as though Medea's greatest downfall is her inability to moderate her emotions.

Medea's inability to moderate her emotions is defined by her excessive love for her children in addition to her utter hatred for Jason. The chorus acts as the voice of reason throughout her indecisiveness and they describe best the inappropriateness of her love: *frenare nescit iras Medea, non amores; nunc ira amorque causam iunxere quid sequetur?*⁶⁰ (Medea does not know how to bridle her anger, nor her love; now, anger and love have joined their cause. What will

⁵⁹ Seneca, *Medea*, 942-944.

⁶⁰ Seneca, *Medea*, 866-869.

follow?). In this scene, the chorus describes how Medea's anger lacks control. Medea, herself, cannot even maintain these emotions and the chorus uses the word *frenare*, meaning "to bridle" in order to describe just how wild Medea's feelings have become. A person would bridle a horse by placing head gear on the animal so that they could lead the horse in the desired direction. This word is particularly important because it is typically used to describe the training of a horse, not a person, so having chosen this word, Seneca was making a very important implication. The implication that Medea's emotions are just as wild as the instincts of a horse, more importantly an animal, makes Medea not just a distraught woman, but rather a woman deeply detached from a human being's reality. Medea's greatest problem is not simply her emotionality, but rather her inability to moderate her emotions. This is completely opposite to how a proper Stoic should behave.

A second time where Medea's inappropriateness with regards to her rage occurs earlier in the play. Her rage (*furor*)⁶¹ is described by the nurse as welling up (*exundat*).⁶² Just as before, this scene depicts Medea as a wild force. The image created is comparable to that of a wave gaining momentum and strength, until, finally, it hits the shore and breaks. Medea's anger is continuing to grow here, starting to overflow within her, and it will not "break" until she has exacted her punishment on Jason. These two scenes make Medea into a wild force that

⁶¹ Seneca, *Medea*, 392.

⁶² Seneca, *Medea*, 392.

cannot be controlled. Her passions keep growing excessively and she represents, according to Senecan values, a woman who has chosen the least virtuous path.

Why is it important that Medea is treated as a wild force that cannot be maintained? How does this relate to the philosophical aim that Seneca had when he wrote *Medea*? This idea is important to the play as a whole particularly because it makes Medea the complete opposite of what a sage should be. As stated earlier, Seneca treats the sage as an “inspirational figure who can motivate others to be like him.”⁶³ Thus, since Seneca made Medea into the complete opposite of how a sage should behave, she represents what a Stoic should not try to become. Unlike the sage, who is supposed to encourage Stoic ideals and virtuous acts, Medea is the horror story that scares you away from irrational behavior. In a sense, Medea would have encouraged a young Roman to lead a virtuous lifestyle because her life (thanks to her actions) became so horrendous. One could even claim that Medea’s story was used as a scare tactic for Romans.

Medea’s hyper-emotionality continues as an overriding theme throughout the remainder of the play. Even more interesting than how she acts is how Seneca depicts her visually. She does not receive the beautiful characterizations typically given to women of the time, but rather Medea is treated as a witless animal. The majority of the scenes where her appearance is described, Medea does not appear as a woman, or even a human. Medea represents for Seneca the most extreme

⁶³ Kaster and Nussbaum xv.

version of a person who has chosen vice over virtue, and thus, at times, a wild beast.

For example, earlier in the play, before she has set her mind on what punishment exactly she plans to perform, she is depicted completely erratic.

*recursat huc et huc motu effero, furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.
flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat, proclamat, oculos uberi
fletu rigat, renidet.*⁶⁴

(She hurried back here and there with savage motion, bearing, in her frenzied face, signs of rage. Her face glowing, she rouses a far-fetched breath, she cries out, she weeps copious tears, she smiles.)

Quite easily, this depiction makes Medea seem insane. Her emotions are so scattered and bizarre that someone could simply label her crazy and move on. First, she is unable to maintain a single location, scurrying around like a lost puppy. However, her movements are not gentle, but rather they are “savage,” comparable to a beast. Next, Medea’s face is frantic. There is no sweet, loving mother or sad, hurt wife, but instead a woman thinking psychotic thoughts. Finally, she makes painful noises, denoting a woman suffering the greatest of pains. Medea takes deep breaths, she yells and she cries. Worst of all, to top off her strange actions, she smiles, as though all is all right.

Above all, this smile creates the most discomfort within the audience. Medea is suffering so much physically and emotionally, but she ends her rage with a simple grin. What is the importance of this gesture? Her smile here shows just how irrational she can become. So much so that she even finds pleasure in not

⁶⁴ Seneca, *Medea*, 385-389.

only her own personal pain but also in the pain that she will return to Jason. Medea appears as a sick woman who is unable to separate her anger and her love, creating a complex figure that seems morally inept.

Another scene where Medea becomes so infuriated that her rage is visible in her appearance occurs after she has used magic: *huc fert pedes et illuc, ut tigris orba natis cursu furente lustrat*⁶⁵ (She moves here and there, as a tigress bereft of her children, she wanders with furious speed.) The representation of Medea in this scene makes her out to be a passionate mother figure. It is as though Seneca wanted us to realize that Medea was not pure evil, but rather a mother who has lost her children and is furious yet deeply saddened at the same time. However, it is interesting that Medea is compared to a tigress for a number of reasons, but mostly because it gave her the persona of a strong female figure. A tiger, especially a female one, is easily one of the most dangerous animals in the world, but also one of the most caring and maternal. There is a deep sense of pride within them, yet they can act aggressively and, from a human standpoint, excessively violent. Seneca could not have chosen a more perfect animal to describe Medea because she is a proud mother who would give everything up to protect her dignity.

Now that we have examined scenes where Medea acts and appears extremely passionate and unreasonable, we must decide how this adds to her overall character. Hunter gives us an interesting thought on what the purpose of

⁶⁵ Seneca, *Medea*, 862-864.

this hyper-emotionality meant for Seneca. “When Seneca’s slaves of passion are taken over by inhuman or anti-human emotions they are released from human responsibility, and in this sense ‘happy’ has its own ghastly appropriateness.”⁶⁶ It appears that in following her emotions, Medea loses her mortal identity and becomes a savage “other.” This idea of the “other” is something that I discussed in my first chapter, where Medea has the capability to kill her children because she is not Greek. However, there is a different idea presenting itself in Seneca’s work. Medea is not simply a foreigner, witch or some type of manly woman. Instead, Medea is a witless animal that is incapable of registering rational thought. So instead of her being an outsider, she has become something of lesser intelligence than the people of the audience. In doing this, it seems as though Seneca gave the audience an ego boost. In other words, by lowering the identity of Medea, Seneca allowed the audience to feel more important and rational, and, thus, he gave them the idea that Stoic philosophy is something they could believe in and follow, since they would never behave in the same manner as Medea. Once again, Medea loses not her female identity, but also her mortal one.

Thus, it seems that Medea does not need to follow human standards of life, and because she lacks the intelligence of men and women alike, she is happy with her circumstances. This explains the smile we discussed earlier as well as the proud tiger she is depicted as. Medea is a savage that would find pleasure in such a disturbing situation, and from here, we watch as Medea spirals out of control into the least virtuous life that a Stoic could lead. However, Seneca, as did

⁶⁶ Hunter, 174.

Euripides, gave Medea a complicated character. As soon as we feel as though we have discovered who Medea was, Seneca presents a different woman and forces the audience to rethink her character.

As stated earlier, when I discussed what Stoic philosophy entailed, I mentioned how it was important to recognize the difference between the ideal life for a Stoic versus followers of other philosophies. I wrote how a Stoic was concerned mainly with living virtuously through moderation and not gaining wealth or pleasure, as many different philosophies of the time sought. Keeping this broad definition in mind, one would expect Medea, the ultimate bad girl living a life separate from Stoic values, to seek money and unnecessary pleasures. However, this is not the case.

Medea portrays certain Stoic values, turning her savage persona into a hero. This seems somewhat hypocritical (how can a wild animal convey heroic qualities?), yet Seneca does just that. From the beginning to the end, Seneca added in little snippets of Stoic heroism.⁶⁷ At the very start of the play, Medea and her Nurse are discussing her current situation. After her nurse tells her to calm down, Medea, unexpectedly, replies *fortuna opes auferre, non nimum potest*⁶⁸ (Fortune can sweep away my wealth, not my spirit). In these six words, Medea sums up the most basic idea of Stoic philosophy. Ultimately, it is not necessary to live a pleasurable life with great power and wealth, it is about maintaining a

⁶⁷ Nussbaum, 225.

⁶⁸ Seneca, *Medea*, 176.

virtuous soul. This is completely in sync with Stoic values, but why does Seneca have Medea, the seemingly most irrational, least Stoic character, say this?

The answer to this is not simple. In fact, I am not even sure of why he would give her two conflicting personalities. However, I believe that, just as Euripides' Medea, Seneca's Medea is a complicated figure. There is no single label that we can give to her and feel fully comfortable with it. Medea was savage and untamable, yet she conveyed certain Stoic ideals, such as seeking the most virtuous life possible and discovering her selfhood. Thus, we cannot ever fully understand her character, and it is that simple. Medea defied both Stoic and feminine expectations of the time and became a being all her own. She was a mother, wife and woman who committed a horrible atrocity, yet she had an innate heroic demeanor.

“She sees her murderous acts as appropriate, in some sense correct, responses to her loss...And above all, he (Seneca) depicts her as one who understands how deeply her own virtue, her selfhood, is identified with externals.”⁶⁹ This quotation presents two notable points. The first point, being her unmanageable acts and excessive emotions make her appear irrational, we have discussed at length. Much of her actions were in conflict with Stoic philosophy. The second point, however, is the contrary of that thought and could easily solve the dilemma of who Medea is. Here, Seneca made it impossible for Medea to gain her virtuosity and her “being,” without committing these acts and undergoing

⁶⁹ Nussbaum, 225.

these emotions. This again makes Seneca hypocritical. In order for Medea to lead the most virtuous life, she must “identify with externals” and react in such a way. Yet that would be contrary to Stoic expectations because that would mean she needed to act on her emotions. So what is the point?

The point is that Medea naturally has the persona of a hero. While Seneca wrote at length how she does not act like a proper Stoic, he also acknowledged that she maintained certain, innate characteristics that would have been praised among followers of Stoicism. Medea’s identity depends heavily on this idea and we can watch the transformation from the beginning of the play all the way to the end.

Through her personal journey, Medea goes from not having an identity to earning one, to the point that she becomes unrecognizable. The beginning of this voyage begins at the start of the play, when her Nurse calls her name and Medea replies *fiam*⁷⁰ (I will become her). This response is before Medea inflicts any punishment on Jason, and it represents how, now that Jason has deserted her, she no longer has an identity. Thus, for her to regain her self and lead a virtuous life, according to her personal beliefs, she must exact revenge on Jason. Medea regains her identity after having heard the news that Creon and his daughter have perished from her bewitched presents. She says, *Medea nunc sum*⁷¹ (I am now Medea). Having begun her violent revenge, Medea now feels vindicated as a woman and she rediscovers who she is. After murdering her two children, she even becomes

⁷⁰ Seneca, *Medea*, 171.

⁷¹ Seneca, *Medea*, 910.

unrecognizable to Jason and reinforces her selfhood. Medea asks *coniugem agnoscis tuam?*⁷² (Do you recognize your wife?). The Medea at the beginning of the play is completely different from the final Medea. Even though passion wins out over reason throughout the entire play, a Stoic would have to applaud her at the end of the play for this transformation and her need to maintain control of her self.

Like moderation, control is vital for a Stoic. To choose reason over passion, demonstrates a certain amount of control within a person. Especially if the person is extremely infuriated, if they have control, they will choose reason in place of their emotions, leading to a virtuous life. Nussbaum writes, “Medea, like a good Stoic hero, values control; she defines her selfhood in terms of certain aims and activities that are very important to her, and she views it as a diminution of her selfhood if these things should be invaded or controlled by another.”⁷³ Excluding her passions, Medea demonstrates this important Stoic value of control that would be characteristic of the sage. More importantly, she refuses to be “controlled” by Jason or Creon, and she will create her own destiny.

Yet, Medea makes terrible decisions, allowing her dignity to overtake her actions. Nussbaum continues, writing “But she loves. And any person who loves is opening in the walls of the self a hole through which the world may penetrate.”⁷⁴ Thus, Medea followed Stoic ideals, but she had a tragic flaw, as does

⁷² Seneca, *Medea*, 1021.

⁷³ Nussbaum, 231.

⁷⁴ Nussbaum, 231.

every hero, and this flaw forced her life into the least virtuous direction. Medea's flaw is her love. This emotion was so powerful that it suppressed her control and destroyed her ability to reason.

Medea did not live a life of moderation or rationality. She did what she felt was the most reasonable decision in order for her to feel as though she is living the most virtuous life possible (within her own standards). A Stoic would be disgusted with her excessive actions, yet, in certain moments, she acted as a Stoic hero, and this further complicates her role. Therefore, Seneca made her a villain with impressive Stoic qualities. Thus, the goal was not to simply scare the audience, but also convey certain values through her character. This was particularly important during this time because women were expected to behave in a fashion similar to Stoicism. This means that Medea became the iconic model for women of what not to do in addition to representing a strong female figure that held important values. In the end, Seneca did a wonderful job in complicating her identity (just as Euripides did in his version) while including certain Stoic qualifications.

Finally, Seneca's decision to write the play as a tragedy was important because it made this wildly violent and magical figure into a woman easily recognizable. Seneca took a terrible story and made it something that any Roman woman could potentially relate to, making it even more horrifying. It would be a stretch to say this work had political implications, with a claim that it was a tool used to teach women proper behavior, but to call it a philosophical work aimed at teaching Stoic morals would not be so hard to fathom. Seneca made a powerful

statement on women's lives as well as on virtue for any person, regardless of the sex. Many critics may detest his work, but in delving in deeper, it is easy to realize the implications Seneca was hiding within the text, something less characteristic for Euripides. It is a play about love and revenge, but it more importantly can be treated as Stoic propaganda. Medea may not have led the proper Stoic life, but through her personal morals, she made her life into what she felt would be the most virtuous. In the end, she was a hero that Stoics would be forced to acknowledge.

CHAPTER 3

Le pouvoir de Médée: Une analyse de Médée comme elle est perçue dans la culture française.

Qui est la Médée française ? À travers l'histoire, Médée a été classée meurtrière pour son acte de tuer ses deux enfants, mais est cet événement la seule chose qu'on doit attribuer à son caractère ? « Médée...est livrée à un penchant irrésistible. Elle est femme : changeante, faible, violente, incapable de contenir sa rage, lucide mais dominée par la soif de la vengeance. »⁷⁵ Ces adjectifs décrivent quelques traits de caractère de Médée, mais ils n'éclairent pas qui elle est dans le contexte français. Elle est une mère, un amant, une princesse et une sorcière aussi, mais beaucoup de sociétés ne lui associent pas ces épithètes. Pourquoi ? Tous les autres héros d'antiquité étaient célébrés après ses batailles héroïques, mais Médée a été condamnée.

Tout d'abord, quelle est l'histoire de Médée ? Médée est une femme mythologique de la Grèce antique et la fille du roi Éétès, de Colchide. Elle est reconnue pour sa magie et est une femme très puissante de naissance à cause de cette capacité. Un jour, le héros Jason va à Colchide pour faire l'acquisition de la toison d'or. Médée l'aide à récupérer la toison tant qu'il se marie avec elle. Ce couple épouse et, après qu'ils récupèrent la toison, les deux fuient de Colchide. Le

⁷⁵ Lebel, 141.

roi Créon les accueille et promet la protection en Corinthe (où il règne). Toutefois, la fille de Créon, Creusa, tombe amoureuse avec Jason et Jason abandonne Médée. En punition de ses actions, Médée tue Créon et Creusa avec la magie. Comme son acte finale, elle tue ses deux enfants pour faire mal à Jason autant que Jason faire mal à Médée. Dans l'histoire originale, Médée est emportée par un char tiré par les dragons et elle parte de Corinthe pour toujours.

Évidemment, Médée vit une vie pleine d'aventure. Elle est une amante loyale et une femme fidèle, mais la majorité de sociétés ignorent ces attributs le moment elle tue ses deux enfants. Donc, la question que je vais examiner dans cette thèse est qui est Médée et comment est-ce qu'elle influence la société française, et inversement ? Aussi, comment est-ce que le caractère de Médée a transformé à travers l'histoire française ? Finalement, j'examinerai le rôle de tragédie dans la culture française. Pouvons-nous apprendre de la tragédie d'antiquité ? L'antiquité est très différente d'aujourd'hui, donc comment peut un artiste modern utiliser et changer l'histoire de Médée pour adapter aux besoins du public modern ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, j'examine trois moments dans l'histoire française où il y avait les adaptations françaises de Médée qui étaient importantes. Pour commencer, j'analyse *Médée furieuse*, un tableau qui était peigné par Eugène Delacroix. Pour cette partie de ma thèse, j'utilise le mouvement Romantique pour comprendre mieux ce que Médée a représenté au dix-neuvième siècle. Dans la deuxième partie, j'examine *Médée*, une pièce que Jean Anouilh a écrit en 1946. Cette interprétation était influencée par l'existentialisme et la fin de

la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Donc, le message fondamental de cette pièce est très différent que l'œuvre de Delacroix, et l'idée de mauvaise foi définit les actions de Médée.

Finalement, j'examine un ballet qu'Angelin Preljocaj a chorégraphié en 2004 qui s'appelle *Le songe de Médée*. Surtout, ce ballet n'interprète pas Médée comme un méchant. Au lieu de sa malveillance, Preljocaj choisit à concentrer sur une Médée peinée qui regarde son monde se désagréger. Aussi, il y a un conflit entre le ballet classique et le ballet postmodern. Donc, nous pouvons voir Médée dans un monde très modern. Une analyse de ses trois artistes et périodes démontrera que Médée est traitée différemment dans la société française. De plus, nous verrons le pouvoir de Médée dans un contexte modern pour apprendre son rôle dans la société plus que 2,000 ans après qu'Euripide a créé son histoire. Médée n'est pas un « monstre, » elle est une femme qui a été traitée injustement pour trop longtemps. Cette thèse ne justifie pas ses actes, cette thèse donne une différente compréhension dans le contexte français.

Le Romantisme n'était pas seulement un style artistique, c'était un mouvement de passions. Ce mouvement était populaire à la fin du dix-huitième siècle et le début du dix-neuvième siècle, en particulier comme réponse à la Révolution Industrielle et aux contraintes sociétales associées. Il est notable pour son contraste au style Classique, où l'art avait des indications très spécifiques. Surtout, les artistes du temps avaient l'occasion de peindre ce qu'ils ressentaient, pas ce qui était demandé par les exigences intellectuelles du temps. Ils refusaient

d'établir des normes,⁷⁶ sauf peindre avec la liberté complète et utiliser les émotions pour l'inspiration. Pour un peintre Romantique, la nature représentait la véritable liberté et tous les artistes de ce temps n'oubliaient pas cette idée. Donc, la société formelle, scientifique et Classique est devenue l'ennemie pour les Romantiques et il y avait un rejet des exigences sociales et historiques dans l'art. Au lieu de ces restrictions, il y avait des émotions et de la liberté de peindre ce qu'ils voulaient.

Il y avait beaucoup de peintres Romantiques qui influençait les personnes françaises et la société en général avec leurs styles passionnés. Pour cette analyse de Médée, je concentrerai sur Eugène Delacroix, surtout son tableau *Médée furieuse*. Delacroix était très célèbre pour ses œuvres Romantiques. Il a vécu pendant l'apogée du Romantisme et tous de ses tableaux étaient pleins de passion et d'émotions. Donc, Delacroix était un Romantique fondamental. Cependant, Eugène Delacroix était élevé sur les idéals Classiques, qui présentent des conflits dans ses œuvres et, pour Médée, ce conflit est extrêmement important.

*Médée furieuse*⁷⁷ est un beau tableau avec un peu de mystère. L'image représente la scène dans la tragédie d'Euripide où Médée va tuer ses deux enfants. Cette scène est cruciale parce que c'est le moment où elle devient un « monstre. » Médée a un couteau dans sa main et les deux garçons essaient d'enfuir sa prise. Mais, malgré la nature violente de l'histoire, le tableau de *Médée furieuse* semble

⁷⁶ Hannoosh, 450.

⁷⁷ Consultez la référence des images à la fin de cette thèse.

maternel et désespéré. Regardez son visage. Ses yeux sont agrandis avec la peur. Médée n'est pas folle du tout. En fait, elle semble triste, comme si elle ne veut pas tuer les deux garçons. Ce moment l'a fait un « monstre », mais, apparemment, Delacroix avait quelques différentes motivations. Oui, il y a plein de désespoir et de peur, mais la scène est très douce pour une scène si violente. D'abord, il faut de considérer les caractéristiques Romantiques pour comprendre mieux le contexte artistique de *Médée furieuse*.

La première chose qu'on voit dans *Médée furieuse* est la couleur, ou le manque de couleur en particulier. Autre que la doublure de la robe rouge sur Médée et les teints pâles des trois personnes, toutes les couleurs sont sombres. L'arrière-plan est un mélange de noir et de bruns doux. La terre qui entoure les pieds de Médée est noire et brune, avec un peu de verte. Quel est le but de ces couleurs sombres ? Delacroix décrivait dans son journal le rôle des couleurs dans l'art quand il écrivait « Les peintres qui ne sont pas coloristes font de l'enluminure et non de la peinture... Ils doivent masser avec la couleur comme le sculpture avec la terre, le marbre ou la pierre. »⁷⁸ Surtout, la couleur est essentielle pour illustrer les caractères sincèrement et pour créer les émotions dans la scène. Dans les mots de Delacroix, la couleur établit le caractère d'une œuvre, et on peut voir cette idée dans cette interprétation de Médée. Avec la couleur, tout est possible pour un artiste. Cependant, dans *Médée furieuse*, Delacroix utilisait seulement un peu de couleurs vives. Pourquoi ?

⁷⁸ Delacroix, 2 février, 1852.

La raison pour ce manque de couleurs est pour éclairer Médée contre un monde très sombre. Le monde autour de Médée est devenu noir à cause de l'avidité de Jason. Il la trompait avec une autre femme plus puissante que Médée et plus jeune, au prix de détruire Médée. Puis le but du manque de couleurs est pour intensifier la réalité de la scène où Médée est une victime qui est perdue dans un monde terrible. Comme établi plus tôt, le visage de Médée est effrayé mais serein. Médée déteste qu'elle va tuer ses deux enfants, mais elle vit sur ses émotions et elle doit les assassiner. Cet emploi de couleurs et cette représentation de son visage intensifient les émotions de la mythologie de Médée. Plutôt que créer une scène violente avec Médée, Delacroix la présentait comme une personne sans foyer et famille, qui est désespérée de changer sa vie. Dans le tableau, Médée devient une personne que tout le monde peut s'associer. Elle semble comme une femme qui essaie d'échapper sa réalité malheureuse, pas le « monstre » qu'elle a été classée.

Ce traitement personnel de Médée était révolutionnaire parce qu'elle a été détestée au cours de beaucoup d'histoire. Maintenant, on devient pitié d'elle, mais ce n'est pas la seule réponse qui est développée dans ce tableau. « Cependant, le Romantisme des Romantiques ne définît pas simplement une 'famille d'esprits' qui ignorerait les frontières des siècles.»⁷⁹ En fait, le Romantisme avait quelques objectifs intellectuels. Plus que tout, il y avait l'objectif de se découvrir. Ici, Médée devient le catalyseur pour que tout le monde puisse se découvrir et aussi mettre en doute les normes spécifiques du temps, en particulier les

⁷⁹ Roy, 13.

contraintes Classiques. À cause de ses actions violentes où Médée a tué ses deux enfants, elle remettait en question le rôle de la femme française et les exigences sociétales. Delacroix provoquait la société française de mettre en doute les normes du temps. C'était la beauté du Romanticisme. Il pouvait inciter les émotions inconnues et, avec l'aide de l'histoire d'épouvante de Médée, procurer de l'intrigue.

Un autre aspect du Romanticisme qui est évident dans *Médée furieuse* est les coups de pinceau. Ces coups sont libres et légers, pas formels, comme était typique du style Classique. Tout de ce tableau semble comme un rêve. C'était une caractéristique fréquente du Romanticisme. Un style qui « advocated formal freedom, a mixture of high and low language, spontaneous expression, hybridity, abundance, colour, movement, and sketchiness. »⁸⁰ Donc, Delacroix utilisait la liberté formelle pour créer le mouvement et l'idée d'un rêve. Cette liberté d'expression, de couleur et de texture ajoute au caractère de Médée. Ce manque de structure développe l'idée aussi que la vie de Médée est devenue un désastre.

Les coups de pinceau ajoutent à cette idée que son histoire n'est pas d'une réalité mais d'un cauchemar. La qualité onirique de cette version de Médée continue à influencer la complexité de son identité. Donc, cette complexité avait un impact sur le public parce qu'elle créait la confusion. Ces émotions puissantes ont créé une incertitude dans le public où la réalité et le rêve ne pouvaient pas être séparés. Donc, l'identité de Médée devenait confuse parce qu'on ne peut pas

⁸⁰ Hannoosh, 454.

de décider si elle est un « monstre » ou seulement une femme triste. Cependant, c'était naturel pour le Romantisme. Ce style n'illustre pas seulement des émotions dans les œuvres mais aussi dans les personnes. Contrairement au style Classique qui disait ce qu'on doit ressentir, le style Romantique l'un permet de ressentir ce qui est normal pour un être humain. À cause de cette Médée, une personne peut ressentir quelques nouvelles émotions et éprouver les réponses qui sont naturelles pour un être humain. Ainsi, une personne peut voir le monde d'une différente façon.

« Le Romantisme, c'est...le sentiment préféré à la raison, l'individu à la société. C'est l'affectivité l'emportant sur la logique, la « spontanéité » valorisée davantage que l'organisation. C'est la confusion volontaire du 'rêve' et de la 'réalité'. »⁸¹ Contrairement aux valeurs Classiques, l'imperfection de la forme était la perfection pour les artistes Romantiques. L'imperfection est naturelle dans la vie, ce n'est pas une création artificielle. Donc, un artiste peut créer une confusion, une ambiguïté ou un grand malaise dans les visiteurs, mais, pour lui, cette ambiguïté est la plus naturelle pour un être humain. Cette confusion est évidente clairement dans *Médée furieuse*. De plus, ces émotions ont la capacité de changer une personne. Cette incertitude fait une personne se questionner. Ainsi, le Romantisme devenait un voyage (pour le peintre et le visiteur) pour la découverte de soi par les émotions. La question de « what constituted the self »⁸² était un aspect unique. Grâce à ces tableaux, une personne peut éprouver des

⁸¹ Roy, 11.

⁸² Hannoosh, 457.

émotions certaines et devenir sa propre personne, pas une personne que la société crée.

Pourtant, il y a des exemples de l'influence Classique dans *Médée furieuse* aussi. Il est intéressant que les corps de Médée et ses deux fils soient nus. Sans aucun doute, les corps nus sont typiques du style Classique, où les corps sont idéalisés et puissants. La raison que cette idée est si importante est parce qu'elle présente un conflit entre un ancien style et un neuf style. Cette lutte entre les deux styles fait l'identité de Médée plus complexe encore. Bien sûr, Médée est un personnage Classique avec une histoire qui était née dans 431 av. J.-C., mais Delacroix essayait de créer une femme des nouveaux temps avec le Romantisme. Donc, Delacroix ne faisait pas d'une distinction complète entre les deux styles. Pour lui, ces deux styles, le style Classique et le style Romantique, étaient dignes d'éloges pour ses propres raisons. Rosenthal a expliqué ce phénomène parfaitement quand il a écrit « On s'aperçut que, malgré tout, l'on conservait une tendresse secrète pour des héros que l'on avait si longtemps chéris. »⁸³ Bien que cette image soit, sans aucun doute, Romantique, Delacroix respectait la beauté du style Classique. Il était né et enlevé sur le style Classique, donc Delacroix rendait hommage au Classicisme.

Potentiellement, ce conflit représente une lutte dans le caractère interne de Médée pour la société d'ignorer comment le passé la classait. Autrement dit, l'histoire de Médée est devenue le symbole de la lutte entre les idées passées et

⁸³ Rosenthal, 120.

les idées présentes. Delacroix l'a peinte comme une victime et une mère éperdue, pas la meurtrière folle qu'elle était classée. Aussi, sa lutte intérieure peut représenter le conflit entre le style Classique et le style Romantique. Médée, qui est un personnage révolutionnaire, illustre le changement révolutionnaire des styles du temps. Comparable à l'amour que Médée a pour ses enfants, Delacroix a aimé le style Classique, mais il a reconnu qu'un changement était nécessaire. Donc, pour faire ce qu'il a pensé d'être bien, il y avait besoin de peindre avec ses émotions.

La Révolution Industrielle était un autre mouvement de ce temps qui influençait le Romantisme et aussi *Médée furieuse*. La réponse aux mécanismes de la Révolution Industrielle a provoqué le Romantisme et a créé « interest in the fantastic...the irrational, the mysterious, the world of dreams, and the unconscious. This visionary spirit was an attempt to penetrate the façade of reason, science, and logic by which we attempt to control an unwieldy and confusing experience. »⁸⁴ Cette révolution était l'allumette qui allumait le mouvement du Romantisme. La Révolution Industrielle était concernée avec la science, et le monde naturel était perdu. La liberté d'expression était ignorée par une société formelle et scientifique, et les peintres ont réagi. Donc, Médée était la personne idéale pour représenter le Romantisme parce que la science ne peut pas la classer facilement. Elle vit sur ses émotions sauvages et il n'y a pas de contraintes qui peuvent la définir. Médée personnifie cette rébellion contre contrôler les expériences déroutantes.

⁸⁴ Hannoosh, 458-459.

Pourquoi est-ce que l'histoire mythologique de Médée et Jason provoquait tant de passions et de questions dans une personne et créait des conflits sociaux ? Aussi, comment est-ce que cette Mythology maintenait ce pouvoir plus que 2,000 ans ? La réponse à ces deux questions est que Médée a un pouvoir inimaginable. Le caractère passionnée et lunatique de Médée crée l'horreur et l'intrigue dans le public français. Ses actions sont impardonnables mais encore Médée peuvent créer une compassion de ses contemporains. Valéry, un philosophe française des dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles, a dit, « [Pour le Romantisme], il faut avoir perdu tout sens de la rigueur. »⁸⁵ Ce manque de rigueur caractérisait Médée parfaitement parce qu'elle était si libre de faire ce qu'elle ressentait d'être juste. Son caractère était une pure Romantique et il était impossible d'oublier son histoire. Il n'y a pas d'une société en histoire qui peut définir complètement les intentions de Médée. Pour ces raisons, l'histoire de Médée continuera demeurer.

Comment est-ce que les actions violentes de Médée se sont rapportées au contexte plus général du dix-neuvième siècle France ? Les raisons sont infinies, mais il y a une raison la plus importante pour cette analyse de Médée. Les femmes, et Médée en particulier, sont puissantes. Cette déclaration ne justifie pas que Médée a tué ses enfants. Au lieu de justifier cet acte terrible, cette déclaration dit que les femmes avaient besoin d'être traitée justement, où la vie peut devenir très effroyable. Aussi, Médée a représenté un personnage puissant qui devenait un caractère du peuple.⁸⁶ Donc, la société française du dix-neuvième siècle avait

⁸⁵ Roy, 14.

⁸⁶ Hannoosh, 456.

l'occasion la voir comme une contemporaine. Son histoire était terrifiante, mais pour la société du dix-neuvième siècle, son cauchemar semblait comme une réalité potentielle. Ainsi, le pouvoir de Médée a dépendu de la crainte qu'elle a créé dans une société.

Médée présente un différent type d'histoire. Une histoire où le monde est loin de perfection et les femmes, qui semblent si rationnelles et passives, peuvent prendre le contrôle d'une situation et exiger leur revanche. Mais ce n'était pas le seul but de *Médée furieuse*. En fait, Delacroix a utilisé le Romantisme pour démontrer comment elle a été une victime, pas un « monstre. » Il est important de se rendre compte que la Médée de Delacroix ait inspiré la peur mais aussi ait représenté un changement, ou au moins une remise en question du rôle des femmes françaises. Médée est révolutionnaire mais aussi une femme fictive que le public peut s'associer. Tandis qu'Euripide et Sénèque la classait comme un monstre, Delacroix la classait comme une femme qui n'est pas parfaite. Médée représentait l'émotion pure qui était caractéristique du Romantisme, donc elle était la personne parfaite pour un tableau Romantique et pour éveiller les passions contre les contraintes Classiques et les exigences féminines.

Tandis que Delacroix influençait extrêmement par le Romantisme quand il a peigné *Médée furieuse*, Jean Anouilh avait une influence très différente avec sa pièce *Médée*. L'existentialisme avait un impact sur lui plus que toute autre influence. Anouilh a vécu de 1910 à 1987 et, il a écrit *Médée* en 1946. Cette date est notable parce que la Seconde Guerre mondiale a terminé en 1945. Ainsi, la

création de la *Médée* d'Anouilh et cette guerre avaient des liens forts. Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, beaucoup de penseurs ont étudié l'existence humaine. Comparable à Sénèque, un philosophe de la Rome antique, la question de « comment peut-on vivre la vie la plus vertueuse et la plus heureuse possible » était commune dans la philosophie d'existentialisme. Anouilh a utilisé ses œuvres pour poser cette question et aussi pour décrire la vie dans les termes existentialistes.

Tout d'abord, quel est l'existentialisme ? L'existentialisme est « a denial of any given human nature. Instead, human beings exist first, and then define themselves in terms of action. »⁸⁷ Donc, selon un existentialiste, on devient un être humain par ses actions ; on n'est pas né avec une personnalité féminine ou masculine. Oui, on naît biologiquement une fille ou un garçon, mais les exigences qu'une société a pour les sexes sont apprises et acquises avec les actions personnelles. Donc, les exigences de femmes et d'hommes ont été créées par la société. Ce qui est prévu d'une femme n'est pas toujours naturel, selon l'existentialisme. En fait, le caractère typique d'une femme est une création des exigences d'hommes. Cependant, un existentialiste peut ignorer ces exigences et créer (avec ses actions) sa propre identité.

Donc, tout le monde doit décider comment vivre la vie. Cette liberté crée un peu de contradiction. « Freedom exists as engaged in a resisting world confronted by facticity, which is to say that freedom and choice always exist in a

⁸⁷ Schrift, 33.

situation. In fact, part of the facticity of freedom is that freedom is not able to not be free.»⁸⁸ La contradiction ici est que toutes nos actions sont nos choix. Cependant, selon un existentialiste, la liberté n'est pas d'un choix, les êtres humains sont forcés à être libres. Cette contradiction complique la philosophie et aussi les rôles des êtres humains qui doivent décider le résultat de leurs vies, mais, en réalité, ils sont forcés à prendre ces décisions.

Une dernière pensée de l'existentialisme est l'idée qu'on peut choisir d'être heureuse, triste, furieux, ou n'importe quelle émotion.⁸⁹ L'idée la plus puissante de l'existentialisme est que la vie est sans limites complètement. On a la liberté complète de vivre comment on veut. Par conséquent, tout le monde a la capacité de vivre la meilleure vie possible. Si quelqu'un fait du tort à une autre, cette personne a la liberté de continuer à vivre dans le bonheur. Bien que cette idée ne semble pas comparable à l'histoire de Médée, une interprétation de la *Médée* par Anouilh prouve autrement. Anouilh a créé le caractère de Médée d'un point de vue existentialiste. La vie est si détestable pour Médée mais elle a l'occasion de laisser les actions de Jason la définir ou la faire plus forte. Bien sûr, Médée les laisse la définir et elle devient un exemple de mauvaise foi, une idée d'existentialisme qu'une personne n'a rien de pouvoir dans la vie.

En fait, Médée et Jason représente les deux idées contradictoires de l'existentialisme. Tandis que Médée choisit d'être détruite par les actions de Jason, Jason choisit de faire sa vie la meilleure possible. Par exemple, dans la

⁸⁸ Schrift, 34.

⁸⁹ Schrift, 33.

première scène de la pièce, Médée attend le retour de Jason. Elle et sa nourrice écoutent le festin dans Corinthe qu'elles n'étaient pas invitées. Après avoir entendu la musique et le chant, Médée dit « Je hais leurs fêtes. Je hais leur joie. »⁹⁰ Plutôt qu'ignorer le festin et être contente avec la vie, elle laisse leur joie la gêner. C'est la première scène et elle déteste déjà les autres. Médée a l'occasion de commencer une vie nouvelle mais elle ne peut pas oublier sa douleur.

Ce qui est très intéressant est que Médée ne peut pas continuer avec sa vie parce que Jason est sa vie. Donc, elle croit qu'elle ne peut pas avoir le bonheur sans lui. De plus, Médée ne peut pas se séparer de lui parce que son identité est attachée à Jason. Cependant, d'un point de vue existentialiste, Médée a la maîtrise complète pour trouver le bonheur mais elle choisit de ne pas être contente. Quelques lignes plus tard, la nourrice lui demande pourquoi elles sont parties de Colchide, et Médée répond, « On est parties parce que j'aimais Jason, parce que j'avais volé pour lui mon père, parce que j'avais tué mon frère pour lui ! »⁹¹ Selon Médée, tout de son existence dépend de Jason. Elle n'a pas la liberté de choisir d'être heureuse. Ses convictions représentent tout le contraire de l'existentialisme. En fait, ces convictions présentent l'idée de mauvaise foi.

La douleur de Médée continue pendant qu'elle peut écouter la fête encore. Elle dit « Quel bonheur qui pue jusqu'ici ?...Qu'est-ce qui se passe de si gai ce soir qui m'étreint, moi, qui m'étouffe ? Nourrice, nourrice, je suis grosse ce soir.⁹²

⁹⁰ Anouilh, 359.

⁹¹ Anouilh, 360.

⁹² Anouilh, 363.

Le bonheur des autres pue tout autour d'elle comme Médée souffrît d'un cœur brisé. Elle est maintenant définie complètement par sa douleur. Elle se sent même pleine, comme si toutes ses émotions la remplissent physiquement. Anouilh faisait un point essentiel ici avec Médée où elle choisit de ne pas être heureuse et de sentir des réactions physiques avec son ventre et son nez. Médée demeure sur sa tristesse, bien qu'elle puisse changer sa vie quand elle veut. Le problème est que Médée ne peut pas ignorer le mauvais traitement qu'elle a reçu, et elle refuse de prendre la responsabilité pour le restant de ses jours sans Jason.

Quelque chose qui complique son caractère plus est que Médée est une femme intelligente. Elle reconnaît les différences entre « le bien et le mal »⁹³ mais « il faut se servir soi-même, tout de suite. »⁹⁴ Apparemment, elle peut les distinguer mais elle ressent obligée d'agir de cette manière où elle a besoin de Jason et aussi la revanche. Donc, Médée a le contrôle de sa situation, mais elle décide de vivre une existence malheureuse. Malgré le fait qu'elle vit d'un air malheureux, Médée vit d'accord avec les idées existentialistes. Elle prend la décision consciente de vivre une existence triste parce qu'elle croit que sa tristesse est la faute de Jason. Médée comprend ce qui est bien et ce qui est mal, et elle veut être heureuse, mais elle laisse ses émotions et les actions d'autres personnes définir ses propres actions. Médée ne peut pas séparer son bonheur de sa vie qu'elle a avec Jason, donc elle refuse de vivre librement. Tous ces problèmes de Médée sont caractéristique de mauvaise foi.

⁹³ Anouilh, 378.

⁹⁴ Anouilh, 378.

Anouilh a présenté Jason comme le contraire. En fait, Jason cherche une vie plus sereine et contente. Après Médée lui demande s'il veut qu'elle meure, Jason répond, « Je ne veux pas de ta mort non plus...Je veux l'oubli et la paix. »⁹⁵ Jason représente ici la voix de raison. Il le fait très clair que, avec ses actions, il cherche la vie la plus heureuse et Médée n'est plus incluse dans son plan. Jason n'attribue pas la responsabilité de sa tristesse aux influences extérieures. Au lieu de cette responsabilité, Jason reconnaît que son destin est dans ses propres mains. Bien que Médée définisse la vie avec sa tristesse, Jason fait le contraire et il devient un exemple d'un bon existentialiste.

Le meilleur exemple de ces différentes réactions est à la fin de la pièce. Médée a tué ses deux enfants et elle s'est suicidée avec l'espoir que Jason sera détruit. Cependant, Jason réagit très différemment. Les derniers mots de Médée sont « C'est l'horrible Médée ! Et essaie maintenant de l'oublier ! »⁹⁶ La réponse de Jason est « Oui, je l'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'œil indifférent des dieux. »⁹⁷ Ce n'est pas la réaction que Médée espérait. En fait, Jason ne peut pas avoir une réaction plus existentialiste et plus contradictoire aux émotions violentes de Médée. Jason n'en veut pas aux dieux, à Médée ou à quelqu'un d'autre. Jason reconnaît la tragédie de sa vie et il est déterminé de persévérer. Il prend la responsabilité du restant de ses jours.

⁹⁵ Anouilh, 383.

⁹⁶ Anouilh, 402.

⁹⁷ Anouilh, 402.

Pendant que Médée choisit de vivre une vie malheureuse, Jason préfère une vie beaucoup plus confortable. Médée est ruinée complètement après que Jason l'abandonne. Jason, de l'autre côté, voit les morts de ses enfants et son ex-femme, mais sa réponse est presque tranquille; il oublie Médée et l'incident entier. Il reconnaît que les dieux sont indifférents à sa douleur, donc il a tout le pouvoir pour créer un bon avenir. Quel but est-ce qu'Anouilh avait quand il a créé ces deux sortes de personnes contradictoires ?

Anouilh a développé ses deux personnes contradictoires pour démontrer l'existentialisme mais aussi la mauvaise foi, un concept existentialiste. Selon Jean-Paul Sartre, un penseur existentialiste célèbre, la mauvaise foi était définie comme l'aveuglement.⁹⁸ Autrement dit, la mauvaise foi était un refus de vivre librement parce qu'on vit comme si les problèmes d'une personne sont causés par quelqu'un d'autre ou quelque force irrésistible.⁹⁹ En tenant compte de ceci, les actions de Médée et sa décision de vivre une vie malheureuse ont l'air d'être plutôt à cause de son refus de liberté. Médée en veut aux autres pour sa tristesse et elle prend une décision volontaire de ne pas tenir compte de vivre la vie qu'elle veut parce qu'elle ne peut pas se séparer de Jason.

Après qu'on reconnaît qu'on domine son destin, on peut ignorer les événements extérieurs ou on peut se concentrer sur eux. Ici, Médée est un exemple de quelqu'un qui ne peut pas oublier comment elle était trompée. Au contraire, Jason continue avec sa vie pour vivre la vie la plus contente. La

⁹⁸ Price, 476.

⁹⁹ Price, 477.

mauvaise foi dépend de décliner toute de responsabilité personnelle,¹⁰⁰ et, pour Médée, elle demeure sur sa douleur qu'elle croit qu'elle ne peut pas de changer. Donc, Médée peut être vue comme un héros anti-existentialiste. Elle est une femme de mauvaise foi qui prend le contrôle de sa situation terrible. Bien qu'on ne puisse pas justifier l'acte de tuer ses enfants, on peut voir la force du caractère de Médée quand elle punit Jason et elle se tue pour démontrer que Médée n'est pas quelqu'un qui peut être exploitée par d'autres. Médée est une femme plus puissante que la société.

Un autre aspect d'importance dans la pièce *Médée* est ses traits de caractère humanisants. Anouilh a pris l'histoire de Médée, une femme héroïque et légendaire, et il l'a mise dans un monde plein de personnes normales. Donc, ses actions et sa vie sont inattendues en comparaison de vies des personnes françaises. Médée est publiquement violente, lunatique et chargée d'émotion, toutes les choses qu'une femme ne doit pas être en public. De plus, pour Anouilh il y avait une autre différence entre les personnes comme Médée et tous les autres.

To Anouilh, humanity is made up of two kinds of people: the anonymous mass of normal and rational nonentities...and the heroes. The first group is motivated chiefly by a desire for happiness...this is the race that populates the earth and performs the daily drudgery which is the price of human existence...the second group rejects this banality. Where the ordinary man realizes the imperfection of the human lot but nevertheless grasps at the petty happiness that is offered him, the hero has the courage to say « no. »¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Price, 477.

¹⁰¹ Heiney, 331.

Ainsi, Médée choisit d'être éperdue parce qu'elle estime qu'une vie sans Jason est un bonheur artificiel. Elle reconnaît qu'elle a la capacité d'être heureuse, mais, comme Anouilh a cru, elle a du courage à dire « non. ». La raison est encore la mauvaise foi. Médée choisit la vie la plus appropriée pour elle et elle refuse la responsabilité complètement parce qu'elle ne veut pas de bonheur artificiel. Elle est un héros parce qu'elle refuse de vivre et de réagir de la manière que la société française demande d'une femme. Médée commence comme une possibilité pour révolutionner l'identité féminine en France.

Maintenant que nous avons accepté que Médée choisit une vie malheureuse à cause d'actions des autres et la mauvaise foi, qu'est-ce que nous avons appris de son caractère intérieur par rapport au existentialisme ? Plus que tout, l'existentialisme a fourni la possibilité d'être une femme sans les contraintes sociétales. Les femmes ont été soumises aux exigences d'hommes toujours, mais l'existentialisme n'a pas ces contraintes. « L'existentialisme pose l'existence féminine dans son authenticité... Si rien n'est donné d'avance, ni la sexualité, ni l'amour, ni la féminité ; si, au contraire, tout dépend de ma volonté et de mes choix, alors tout est possible. »¹⁰² Donc, d'un point de vue existentialiste, les femmes peuvent se débarrasser des stéréotypes féminins et être la personne qu'elles veulent être. Il n'y a pas d'exigences féminines ou masculines.

Cette idée est l'épitomé de Médée. Comme une bonne femme, elle est censée d'oublier les actions de Jason et de partir de Corinthe pacifiquement.

¹⁰² Albistur, 2.629.

Toutefois, comme une femme existentialiste, Médée se comporte comme une femme sans les exigences sociétales. Pour elle, la bonne chose à faire est d'assassiner tout ce que Jason tient à cœur. « Les femmes n'ont jamais existé pour elles-mêmes. Toujours elles se sont déterminées en fonction des hommes, »¹⁰³ sauf Médée. Elle s'est déterminée en fonction de son libre arbitre qu'elle refuse. Oui, les actions de Jason la définissent, mais Médée meurt dans ses propres conditions. L'identité de Médée ne peut pas être définie dans les termes créés par les hommes finalement.

Ainsi, les actions de Médée dans la pièce *Médée* par Jean Anouilh sont existentialistes, mais pas existentialistes dans le sens le plus pur. Surtout, Médée ne choisit pas d'être heureuse parce qu'elle est un exemple d'une personne qui exerce la mauvaise foi. Elle prend une décision volontaire de vivre une vie malheureuse parce que son identité et l'identité de Jason sont la même chose, et Médée ne peut pas imaginer une vie sans Jason. La Médée de Anouilh est un héros qui a le courage de vivre sa vie à sa satisfaction.

Ce thème de la femme puissante qui est traitée comme un contemporain, continue dans le ballet moderne; plus particulièrement, le ballet d'Angelin Preljocaj qui s'appelle *Le songe de Médée*. Depuis le dix-neuvième siècle, pour le ballet en général, la féminité est une motivation magistrale et la présence de la femme est évidente dans ce ballet, qui développe une autre adaptation de Médée. Cependant, les exigences féminines sont remises en question. Pour Preljocaj, le

¹⁰³ Albistur, 2.614.

ballet classique est une influence importante, toutefois ses danses sont considérées contemporaines. Un exemple de ce mélange de styles est le ballet *Le songe de Médée*, qui est le dernier sujet de cette thèse. L'histoire a commencé dans la Grèce antique, mais Preljocaj crée un ballet d'un point de vue contemporain. Comparable à Delacroix, les styles classiques et les nouveaux styles s'unissent et ils compliquent la question de « qui est Médée » encore plus.

Tout d'abord, *Le songe de Médée* est notable pour son arrière-plan et sa mise en scène. Surtout, quand le rideau se lève, il y a des seaux vides partout. Ils se trouvent par terre et pendent du ciel. Pour faire la scène plus dérangeante dans son austérité, il y a seulement un arbre mort par terre et les deux enfants de Médée dorment sur l'arbre. La scène a l'air d'être d'une autre réalité. Pendant que les deux enfants se lèvent, la question est-ce que c'est un rêve ou une réalité se produit. L'incertitude continue comme la fille met un seau sur la tête et danse avec les gestes sinueux. L'ambiance est innocente et pénible en même temps. Qu'est-ce qui se passe ?

Comparable à ce que Delacroix faisait avec les coups de pinceau et les couleurs dans son œuvre *Médée furieuse*, Preljocaj a créé une scène nette où la réalité et le monde de rêves ne peuvent pas être séparés. L'objectif ici est de préparer le public pour l'histoire de Médée qui peut être une expérience troublante. Aussi, le but est d'enlever Médée de la réalité et de voir sa version de l'histoire. Médée devient le centre de la scène. Il n'y a pas d'accessoires inutiles, tous les objets sont présents pour dire l'histoire de Médée. « Mythes de la vie et de la fécondité qui attribue un rôle passif à la femme, tandis que l'homme se

réserve le rôle actif ; la femme est féconde, certes, mais c'est le mâle qui vient l'ensemencer »:¹⁰⁴ Cette déclaration décrit une norme de la féminité, où l'homme domine la scène, mais la Médée de Preljocaj prouvera tout autre. *Le songe de Médée* dit l'histoire de Médée de sa propre façon, pas l'histoire que les hommes ont créé pour elle.

Quand Médée entre dans la scène, l'ambiance change. Plutôt qu'une ambiance d'incertitude, il y a un air joyeux et maternel. Médée prend un seau, qui est rempli de lait, et elle l'apporte à ses enfants. Les deux boivent le lait comme deux animaux qui comptent sur sa mère et après, ils rampent sur les genoux de Médée, qui les caresse. Ce moment est beau, comme c'est une représentation d'une famille heureuse avant que Jason trompe Médée. Plus que tout, Médée apparaît comme une mère tendre. Cette scène prépare Médée plus comme une femme exploitée. Aussi, les idées du post-modernisme dans le ballet commencent. « ...Post-modern dance...uses costume, lighting, and objects in purely functional ways. »¹⁰⁵ Autrement dit, il y a toujours une fonction. Par exemple, les seaux semblent bizarres et seulement symbolique de rêves, mais aussi ils font fonction d'un appareil que les enfants peuvent utiliser pour boire du lait. Ils continueront à avoir une fonction pour le reste du ballet, on doit ne pas oublier ces seaux. Les caresses de Médée sont cruciaux pour démontrer le bonheur de sa famille avant sa destruction.

¹⁰⁴ Albistur, 2.615.

¹⁰⁵ Banes, xiv.

Maintenant qu'une ambiance joyeuse a été créée, Jason entre dans la scène et le couple danse à l'unisson. Peut-être douze minutes et demi dans le ballet, Jason soutient le dos de Médée avec sa main et il la met sur la terre. Cette action fait Médée sembler dépendre de tous les gestes de Jason. Après que Médée se lève, le couple danse ensemble encore. Maintenant, les gestes sont larges et ils créent l'idée que l'amour de Jason et Médée est plein de passion. À quarante minutes et vingt secondes dans le ballet, Médée et Jason sautent et jettent ses bras dans l'air à l'unisson. Ces gestes sont grands, puissants et ils forcent la salle à regarder seulement ces deux personnes qui s'unissent comme un corps. À longueur de temps Jason soutient Médée, et Médée se fie à lui. À quinze minutes et quarante secondes, Jason porte Médée sur ses épaules et il tourne lui-même et Médée puis tout le monde peut les voir ensemble. Il est nécessaire que nous, les spectateurs, remarquions ces gestes radicaux parce qu'ils représentent l'intensité de Médée et Jason. Les petits gestes qui sont gracieux ne peuvent pas démontrer la passion que ces deux personnes ont. Peut-être quatre minutes plus tard, Médée essaye de danser librement mais Jason la retient. Donc, est-Jason son soutien à réalité ?

La réponse à cette question est oui. Beaucoup de sociétés ont classé son amour comme artificiel, mais dans cette danse, l'amour semble sincère. À seize minutes et quarante-quatre seconds, Médée court de l'autre côté de la scène et à longueur de temps Jason a ses bras sur sa taille. Quand Médée ne court plus, le couple s'étreint pendant trois secondes. Ici, on peut voir la réalité de son amour. Jason la soutient et Médée cherche l'approbation de Jason. Vier a écrit que

« Médée est une révoltée qui d'avance avait sacrifié à celui qui l'enleva et son père et son frère. Que le vert paradis des amours enfantines appelle la faux, que celle-ci soit, de préférence, maniée par une mère tarée et coupable. »¹⁰⁶ Ce n'est pas le cas ici. L'amour de Médée est vrai et on peut voir ici que Jason aime Médée autant que Médée aime Jason. En particulier, lorsque Médée essaie de danser sans Jason, Jason la retient. On peut ressentir que le besoin de l'autre est manifeste pour les deux. Médée est sans aucun doute une femme peinée dans ce ballet, encore plus que le Médée de *Médée furieuse* ou le Médée dans la pièce de Jean Anouilh. Preljocaj fait une remarque sur créer Médée comme une femme qui avait un lien passionnel avec son mari, pas le « monstre » qu'elle est considérée normalement qui a un amour enfantin pour Jason.

Cependant, cet amour est détruit rapidement dès que Creusa entre dans la scène. Après que Jason endort Médée et ses deux enfants, il va à Creusa. Maintenant, Creusa et Jason dansent ensemble, mais cette fois les deux sont inséparables, contrairement à la danse que Jason a partagé avec Médée. Tous les gestes et tous les mouvements, Jason et Creusa touchent. À un moment, Creusa lèche le cou de Jason avec le désir intense. Cette scène est très sexualisée et il crée un contraste à l'amour passionné mais aussi sincère de Jason et Médée. Jason et Médée ne sont pas poussés par le sexe comme serait le rapport entre Jason et Creusa. Jason est séduit par la beauté et la jeunesse de Creusa, il n'y a pas d'un lien profond. Quand Médée se lève et elle voit Jason et Creusa, elle est triste et désespérée pour l'attention de Jason. Les trois font un pas de trois (31 :00), où

¹⁰⁶ Vier, 948.

Creusa et Médée se battent pour l'amour de Jason. Malgré les protestations de Médée, Jason continue à choisir Creusa et Médée est abandonnée par son amant. À la fin de son pas de trois (33 :45), Jason fait quelque chose qui signifie cette décision. Jason soulève Creusa et Creusa donne un coup de pied à Médée. Après que Médée tombe, elle regarde fixement Jason. Elle se fâche mais elle reconnaît maintenant que Jason ne lui appartient plus.

Quels sont les objectifs de cette scène et ce pas de trois ? Plus que tout, Preljocaj développait Médée comme une femme pitoyable. Sa réaction initiale est le désarroi et la souffrance, pas d'hostilité que le public pense que Médée a. Comment est-ce que Preljocaj font cette réaction ? Il se servait des corps de Médée, Jason et Creusa pour créer la tristesse, la jalousie et la séduction. Pour séduire Jason, Creusa le touche pendant tout de son pas de deux et elle fait les gestes lascifs. Pour démontrer sa tristesse et sa jalousie, Médée tire sur Jason, pousse Creusa et, à longueur de temps, elle fait les grands gestes, comme si elle ne peut pas rester dans son propre corps. Pour expliquer ce phénomène d'utiliser le corps pour dire une histoire, pas seulement les pas de danse, Sally Banes a écrit, « Issues of the body and its powerful social meanings were approached head-on. The body itself became the subject of the dance, rather than serving as an instrument for expressive metaphors. »¹⁰⁷ Autrement dit, Médée dit son histoire avec et dans ses gestes. Tous ses mouvements sont importants pour démontrer des certains aspects de sa vie tragique. Ils ne représentent rien sauf les émotions que Médée ressent à l'intérieur. Il n'y a pas de métaphore complexe. Son corps est le

¹⁰⁷ Banes, xviii.

véhicule que Médée utilise pour démontrer son histoire. Cet emploi du corps est le même pour Creusa et Jason. Ils sont les corps qui font les choses corporelles, pas les choses qui sont artificielles ou forcées pour dire une métaphore inutile.

Cependant, le corps raconte une histoire. Avec son corps, Médée dit son histoire et elle démontre au monde qu'elle est une victime qui adore son mari. Par la danse et les gestes naturels, Médée devient sa propre identité et elle détruit les exigences d'une femme. L'identité qu'elle développe est féroce et dévouée, mais aussi triste et blessée. Avec l'aide de Preljocaj, Médée semble comme une femme qui va faire n'importe quoi pour sauver sa famille, pas une femme qui veut détruire la vie des autres pour punir son mari. *Le songe de Médée* raconte l'histoire de Médée avec ses propres gestes et le ballet ne suit pas le style typique du ballet classique. Tout de son pouvoir existe dans son corps et elle refuse complètement les stéréotypes féminins. Son existence dépend de sa danse ; sa danse ne compte pas sur son identité sexuelle.

La scène finale de *Le songe de Médée* est la plus terrifiante et exaltante. Médée réalise finalement que Jason a choisi d'être avec Creusa. Alors que les enfants se lèvent, Médée sait ce qu'elle a besoin de faire. Jason et Creusa sont partis de la scène et les enfants s'asseyent dans les genoux de Médée. Encore, comme le début du ballet, Médée les caresse et les console comme une mère. L'image d'une famille heureuse réapparaît mais il y a un changement cette fois. Dans le visage de Médée, on peut voir l'angoisse existentielle et de l'incertitude. Devrait-elle les tuer ? Dès que le public sent comme les enfants sont en sécurité, Médée change.

À ce moment, Médée se lève. La musique accélère et après un dernier baiser, Médée saisit les enfants. Elle coupe ses deux enfants et, avec la peinture rouge, Médée fait les saigner. La scène est turbulente avec l'intensité de la peinture rouge, mais dans le visage de Médée, il y a une histoire différente. Son visage n'appartient pas au meurtrier psychotique, mais c'est celui d'une femme qui souffre. Aussi, les coups de couteau ne sont pas violentes avec l'intention de causer la douleur, mais les coups sont rapides avec l'espoir de finir avec cette situation terrible. Il n'y a pas d'intention diabolique. Finalement, pour atténuer la douleur de la situation et pour donner quelque respect aux enfants, Médée met deux seaux sur les têtes de ses enfants. Ces actions ne semblent pas comme une revanche contre Jason, mais plus comme la pitié pour ses enfants. Aux yeux de Médée, Jason les a trompés avec Creusa autant que Jason a trompé Médée. Ces actions sont ceux qui ont condamnés Médée pendant 2,000 ans, mais dans ce ballet, ces actions remettent l'identité de Médée en question.

Plus que tout, cet acte de tuer ses enfants fait questionner le public qui est Médée dans le monde de ballet. Pendant tout le ballet, les mouvements et les gestes de Médée sont toujours grands, puissants et pas délicats. Ces adjectifs ne sont pas typiques pour les personnes qui dansent dans le ballet classique. En fait, une femme est censée d'être gracieuse quand elle danse la danse classique. Oui, la Médée de *Le songe de Médée* danse magnifiquement, mais elle ne suit pas les normes de ballet classique. Pour une femme dans ce monde, la grâce est nécessaire. Toutefois, « the concentration of 'grace' in the female body was

largely a creation of male artists. »¹⁰⁸ Donc, Médée ignore les normes d'hommes et de ballet classique, et elle danse avec la passion qu'elle ressent. C'est la beauté du ballet postmoderne, il y a moins de contraintes sociétales. En fait, Preljocaj dit l'histoire d'une femme selon une femme, pas selon les exigences des hommes. C'est un thème comparable à la Médée de Jean Anouilh, où Médée danse de sa propre façon, pas de la façon qui est typique de femmes.

« Artifice and nature turned incompatible, and grace itself survived only by allying with the 'natural law' of femininity. »¹⁰⁹ Donc dans le vieux monde de ballet, la féminité et la grâce sont les exactement mêmes choses. Pour être une danseuse féminine, une femme a besoin d'être gracieuse et puis, la grâce compte sur la féminité. Cependant, Médée ne suit pas ces niveaux classiques. Elle danse avec ses émotions et elle utilise son corps pour être elle-même, pas pour être la personne que les hommes veulent. L'identité de la femme a été décidée par les hommes, pas par les femmes jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Pour cette raison, la Médée de Preljocaj est révolutionnaire et une révolte contre les hommes. Pour la danse classique, la grâce était nécessaire pour être respectable. Toutefois, pour la danse postmoderne, la danse a une liberté d'exprimer l'identité naturelle d'une femme. Si une femme est en colère, elle peut danser avec les grands gestes pleins de passion. Le corps et ses passions ne sont pas limités par les formes prédéterminées.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, 258.

¹⁰⁹ Cohen, 262.

Le ballet se finit quand toutes les lumières s'éteignent sauf un projecteur sur Médée. Dans ce moment, Médée est toute seule dans un monde sombre. Jason est parti et ses deux enfants ont morts. Elle n'a pas de famille, de maison ou de pays qu'elle peut retourner. Cependant, Médée ne questionne plus ses actions et elle est très calme. Pour son dernier acte, Médée lève son poing et, au lieu de maudire sa situation comme on croit qu'elle va faire, elle ouvre son poing et souffle. Médée ne souffle rien de particulier, mais ce geste est notable. Cette scène est appropriée pour finir le récit de Médée à cause de son ambiguïté. Comme Médée se rend compte de ce qu'elle a fait, son songe, où Jason la trompe et Médée tue ses enfants, devient une réalité. Elle dit au revoir à son cauchemar et arrive à un accord avec la vie qu'elle vivra maintenant. Pendant un geste si simple, il y a beaucoup de pouvoir et d'importance. Pour un moment, nous voyons Médée dans sa forme la plus pure, où elle est fragile mais déterminée en même temps. Encore, comparable à *Médée furieuse* par Eugène Delacroix et à la pièce, *Médée*, par Jean Anouilh, la Médée de Preljocaj est important pour humaniser le « monstre » de Médée.

Quand on regarde *Le songe de Médée*, on voit une épouse, une collègue, une fille ou soi-même, et on peut ressentir la douleur, le désarroi et la solitude de Médée. Ses problèmes deviennent les problèmes de tout le monde. Selon Guth, le Romantisme, au mépris de croyances et personnalités, crée le plaisir au public parce qu'il est plein de vraies émotions, pas les émotions forcées de l'art

classique.¹¹⁰ C'est la même idée pour la Médée dans *Le songe de Médée*. L'objectif est de créer le plaisir pour les spectateurs, mais aussi d'amener cette grande femme héroïque dans un monde bien moins fantastique pour qu'une personne puisse se rapporter à son histoire.

Maintenant que nous avons considéré Médée dans trois différents périodes dans l'histoire française, la question de « qui est la Médée française » revient. Tout d'abord, pourquoi utiliser une tragédie antique ? Les tragédies grecques et romaines de l'antiquité sont d'un monde incroyablement différent d'aujourd'hui. Les Grecs et les Romains croyaient que tout dans le monde était créé par un groupe de dieux qui s'appelle les Olympiens. Toutes les tragédies étaient axées sur ces dieux et ils avaient la capacité de donner des pouvoirs magiques aux mortels. Par exemple, Médée était la nièce de Circé, une déesse de magie, et elle est la raison pour laquelle Médée est sorcière. Pour les personnes d'aujourd'hui, si quelqu'un dit qu'il a une histoire magique, cette personne est considérée folle. Cependant, les personnes d'antiquité respectaient et célébraient les personnes qui avaient les pouvoirs magiques et aussi les personnes qui avaient les proches magiques. Les idées et les convictions d'antiquité sont plus fantastiques qu'elles sont aujourd'hui. Ainsi, pouvons-nous apprendre de quelque chose si différente de nos propres convictions ?

Bien sûr nous pouvons apprendre de la tragédie d'antiquité. Les œuvres antiques sont bizarres pour le public du vingt-et-unième siècle, mais ils transfèrent

¹¹⁰ Guth, 260.

le public de son propre monde et le mettent dans un autre monde, où les problèmes d'aujourd'hui semblent minuscules en comparaison aux problèmes d'antiquité. Cependant, en même temps, les problèmes sont très authentiques. On peut se voir avec un tricheur pour un mari ou on peut comprendre le besoin d'obtenir la revanche après qu'on est blessé. Pour ces raisons, la fascination avec l'antiquité continue à grandir. « De collège en collège la tragédie gagne la France. Des professeurs frais émoulus de l'université, des poètes en herbe usent leurs yeux sur des traductions de tragédies grecques. »¹¹¹ Ces tragédies passionnent, terrifient et suscitent la colère du public français. Tout le monde les lit pour oublier la réalité et être inclus dans ce monde fantastique. C'est la fonction de Médée dans la société française. Peu importe la période, Médée peut servir d'un exemple pour ses contemporains.

« Tragedy should speak to us, as it spoke to the Greeks, as a living and contemporary human drama; the action should appear to involve persons like ourselves who are seen in predicaments we can understand. »¹¹² Comme j'ai déclaré dans l'analyse de *Le songe de Médée*, Médée est célébrée encore pour ses qualités humanistes. Le pouvoir le plus puissant de Médée est qu'elle est une femme pour tout le monde. Elle peut être modelée aux yeux d'un Romantique, d'un Existentialiste ou d'un chorégraphe postmodern, et l'histoire de Médée peut créer l'horreur mais aussi la compassion pour tous les trois. Même après ses actes odieux, elle peut créer la pitié dans les cœurs de générations innombrables. C'est

¹¹¹ Guth, 134.

¹¹² Heiney, 335.

un signe d'une bonne histoire, une histoire qui peut enthousiasmer l'esprit dans plusieurs moyens d'expression ou périodes historiques.

Surtout, dans cette étude, nous avons vu qu'il y a un conflit entre les idéals classiques et les nouvelles idées par rapport à la période spécifique. Le conflit pour Delacroix était entre le style artistique de Classicisme et la liberté de Romanticisme qui laisse le peintre créer ce qu'il veut. Pour la Médée d'Anouilh, la question de « qui suis-je ? » (en particulier concernant la philosophie d'Existentialisme) influence le caractère de Médée. De plus, l'idée de mauvaise foi dans la théorie existentialiste change les motifs dans son caractère. Finalement, la Médée dans *Le songe de Médée* est agressive et elle ne danse pas dans le style féminin qui était demandé dans le ballet classique. Médée danse de sa propre façon. Tous ces conflits d'identité dans les différentes représentations de la Médée française luttent entre les normes d'art et les styles neufs. De plus, ces trois conflits créent une lutte représentée dans l'identité de Médée et compliquent son rôle dans la société française. Comparable aux sociétés qui essaient de la définir, Médée n'est pas simplement une idée de Classicisme ou une idée de changement. Médée est un mélange d'idées. Elle est une femme d'antiquité qui transmet de certains messages de mouvements révolutionnaires.

Varga discute de rôle de tragédie dans la culture française quand elle écrit, « La tragédie classique française nous apparaît dès lors comme la synthèse originale mais précaire entre un modèle tragique primitif et un modèle nouveau,

de caractère psychologique et dramatique. »¹¹³ Dans cette citation on peut voir le lien entre l'ancien et le nouveau. Il y a toujours les anciennes idées mais les idées neuves compliquent la tragédie. Comme les personnes, les tragédies changent toujours, mais elles peuvent nous enseigner de nouvelles choses. Avec une histoire d'antiquité, un artiste peut compliquer les caractères avec une identité déroutante et réviser la narration pour adapter aux besoins du public.

Médée peut nous enseigner quelque chose toujours. Elle nous enseigne à être sa propre personne et de prendre le contrôle d'une situation. Médée est une femme d'antiquité qui peut être associée avec les différents mouvements. Elle représente une femme effrayée qui vit sur ses émotions dans la peinture *Médée furieuse*, qui était peignée par Eugène Delacroix. Médée n'a nulle part pour aller et elle est contrastée avec le monde sombre dans l'arrière-plan de l'œuvre. Donc, ses émotions sont intenses et on peut voir comment la liberté du style Romantique était bénéfique. Comparable à la fin du ballet *Le songe de Médée* où il y a seulement une lumière qui braque sur elle, la Médée de Delacroix était contrastée avec l'obscurité du monde. Donc, il faut que tout le monde concentre sur elle. À cause d'elle, on ressent la terreur et l'intrigue. Plus que tout, Médée devient une femme abusée qui a tué ses enfants parce qu'elle n'avait rien. Le « monstre, » qu'elle a été étiquetée, est seulement un autre exemple du mauvais traitement qu'elle a souffert dans sa vie.

¹¹³ Varga, 930.

Dans la pièce *Médée* par Jean Anouilh, il y a des influences existentialistes qui font le caractère de Médée un modèle de mauvaise foi. Elle est un héros anti-existentialiste qui en veut au monde pour sa tristesse et refuse de reconnaître sa liberté. Oui, Médée choisit une vie malheureuse bien qu'elle ait la capacité de vivre avec bonheur, mais c'est sa décision. Elle fait les choix qui sont appropriés pour elle et, en fin de compte, ces décisions donnent un pouvoir à Médée, pas Jason, la personne qui a détruit sa vie.

Finalement, dans *Le songe de Médée*, Médée est une femme désespérée qui rejette des idéals féminins et danse à ses propres niveaux, pas aux niveaux d'hommes. Les exigences classiques sont ignorées et il y a la liberté complète de danser avec ses émotions folles. Le ballet raconte une histoire de Médée à ses yeux, pas aux yeux de quelqu'un d'autre. Pour toute d'histoire, le récit de Médée a été dit par les hommes avec des certains objectifs. Cependant, le seul objectif de Preljocaj était de laisser Médée s'exprimer à travers la danse.

Pour tous ces moyens d'expression, Médée est une femme qui provoque la pitié, mais aussi l'admiration. Son histoire a survécu pendant 2,000 ans et continue à prospérer. Avec toutes les nouvelles générations, Médée démontre une autre signification que la société française peut faire un lien personnel. Du dix-neuvième siècle au vingt-et-unième siècle, Médée représente l'humanité d'une manière audacieuse, qui ne peut pas être classée aux stéréotypes féminins. Son histoire est tragique mais c'est son histoire, pas l'histoire de quelqu'un autre. Médée est loin d'une femme typique, mais elle est un héros du peuple.

La référence des images



Médée furieuse (1838) – Eugène Delacroix
Palais des Beaux Arts de Lille

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, women have struggled with finding their personal identity. Regardless of the period, societal norms, feminine stereotypes and male expectations have heavily influenced this inner battle for the female identity. Through this thesis, we have observed how the tragic history of Medea may serve as an example of a woman in conflict with the expectations of any given society.

Beginning in 431 BC with Euripides' play, Medea has proved herself as a revolutionary figure. Classical Athens was famous for its heroes. Men and women alike celebrated figures such as Theseus, Odysseus and Achilles for their fighting abilities and intelligence, yet Medea was never treated with the same amount of praise. She became a villainous woman who was hated by her contemporaries. However, further analysis of the Euripidean tragedy has demonstrated that Medea was just as much a victim as her two innocent children were. Even though child murder is inexcusable, the personal significance of these heinous crimes gave Medea a status comparable to that of any classical hero. Medea murdered her two sons not only to punish Jason for his unfaithfulness, but even more so to protect her pride. She reacted just as any other traditional hero idolized by classical Athens, but she was condemned for this behavior. Nevertheless, we can consider her character revolutionary at this time because she ignored male expectations and

removed herself from victimhood. Medea chose the outcome of her life rather than allowing men to define it for her.

In chapter two, we discovered a connection between Stoicism and Medea's inner character in Seneca's version of the tragedy. Stoics believed that a person would live the most virtuous life possible by exercising both reason and moderation. Keeping this concept in mind, we were able to observe that Medea appears to have been a character ignoring reason completely when she murders her two children. Throughout the play, Seneca made a point of building upon this irrationality, turning Medea into an example of someone completely enslaved to her passions. The life that Seneca gave to this fictional character became a horror story of a life void of virtue and thus the play would have made an impression on his Roman audience.

Nevertheless, I found Medea to be a Stoic hero despite her excessive emotions. Self-discovery and maintaining control over a given situation are two other defining qualities of Stoic philosophy and they are present in Seneca's version of *Medea*. According to Medea, in order for her to live a virtuous life, she needed to discover her selfhood. However, this was dependent on her murdering her children, as this provided the best opportunity to get back at Jason while proving herself as a powerful woman. This in no way justifies what she did, but it does demonstrate that she maintained control of her situation and was seeking a virtuous life, even if it was not a life acceptable to her contemporaries. Thus, Seneca used the character of Medea to demonstrate certain beliefs of Stoicism, while giving her a complicated Stoic identity.

To conclude my thesis, I examined Medea in 19th to 21st century France. In this chapter, I began with Eugène Delacroix's painting *Médée furieuse*. Above all, the Romantic style of painting was the most influential aspect on the creation of this work of art. In this section, there is a definitive relationship between the freedom of emotions that was typical of Romanticism and the character of Medea. I found that Delacroix treated Medea as a victimized woman, not a monster as she has been labeled by countless societies. Furthermore, Delacroix's Medea became a voice for women during 19th century France. She overstepped the male expectations for a woman and became someone that a person could relate with.

Following the impact of Romanticism on *Médée furieuse*, I turned to Jean Anouilh's play *Médée*. This play was written in 1946, following World War Two, during a time when the question of 'what is human existence' was a primary concern for many French thinkers. In particular, I found that existentialism and the idea of 'bad faith' played a major role in Anouilh's adaptation of Medea's character. According to bad faith, a person would ignore complete responsibility for his or her life, blaming all of his or her issues on the actions of others. Medea proves this theory, but with a twist. She cannot separate her personal identity from Jason and she refuses to believe that she has the capacity to live a happy life without him, but Medea does decide to die on her own terms. In other words, Medea blames the world around her for her troubles but, in the end, she rejects the world and its expectations completely in order to die the way she wants. Again, Medea exemplifies a woman ignoring societal norms.

In the final section of chapter three of this thesis, I analyzed the role of Medea in a 2004 ballet named *Le songe de Médée*, choreographed by Angelin Preljoçaj. This ballet is an example of postmodern dance style and it ignores the set standards of classical ballet. In particular, we see Medea as a refusal of feminine stereotypes in dance. There is no grace or extreme femininity, as is the case in classical ballet, but instead there is Medea telling her story through her body in the manner most natural for her. Comparable to the Medea in Delacroix's painting, Medea's character in this ballet ignores male expectations for women. This chapter teaches us that the Medea of French culture has become a figure who protests against expected female identity and societal norms. Most importantly, Medea is treated just as a woman, not a monster, and, by portraying these particular movements in French culture within her character, Medea has become a hero of the people.

These three very different cultures all share one major theme in regards to their versions of this tragedy: society and culture dictates a woman's identity, especially in Medea's case. However, Medea is a strong fictional female figure who stands out against male expectations and societal constraints. Medea has become a hero in countless movements, despite her terrible crimes. She has revolutionized the role of women through these five versions of her story and can be perceived as a hero. There is no simple response to the question of 'who is Medea,' but this thesis proves that she was not solely a heartless murderer.

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