The Scorned Woman: Ancient and Modern

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The Scorned Woman: Ancient and Modern

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Abstract:

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” is a famous misquotation that has contributed to the prominence of the scorned woman as a culturally recognized figure. However, this idea goes further back into Classical times and can be seen in the writing of various Roman writers. The scorned woman has not disappeared over time, but rather has transformed in order to remain relevant in a modern world.

This thesis begins by looking at three Classical scorned women (Juno, Circe, and Medea) and analyzing the portrayal of these characters in order to attempt to define a scorned woman. Using Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Seneca’s *Medea*, this project starts to explore this type of characterization and what it says about both the women themselves and how they were created. Then, through original poetry, the ancient model is reimagined and the modern scorned woman is examined. The poetry tackles not only the conventions that the Roman works began to perpetrate, but also the idea that when men are angry, we fear them, but when women are angry it becomes a character flaw to be looked down on. Throughout this project, I seek to understand where this characterization began and how modern society has or has not begun to dismantle it.
CHAPTER 1: What Makes a Scorned Woman

Today many people know about the idea of the scorned woman through a famous misquotation that states “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” which is actually from a play by William Congreve, who writes “Heav'n has no rage, like love to hatred turn'd, Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn'd” (Congreve, III.VIII). However this idea goes further back into Classical times and is a common theme in Roman writing. In Roman theater, stock characters, a stereotypical portrayal of certain characters meant to be predictable, are common. The scorned woman trope has an impact on Roman writing because it reduces the women who are written to follow this trope into merely a stock character- predictable and without dimension. Both ends of the spectrum of women’s emotions and reactions create an equally flat binary in this scenario, be it aggressive or inactive. So while there is no one set definition of a scorned woman, there are many women who follow a similar and calculable arc of actions. For the purposes of this thesis I will be using some of these general actions in order to broadly define the trope in order to focus my argument, specifically of a woman feeling she has been wronged by a man and acting out in a way that may come across as disproportionate to the adverse acts of the man. While in the real world, a woman can of course be wronged without lashing out, for the purposes of this specific stereotypical trope, the extreme reaction is part of the characterization of these women. While these actions may also impact the woman herself, there are two places where a scorned woman’s revenge can be primarily aimed: either towards the perpetrator of the wrongdoing or one of the victims. Juno and Circe, for example, are on opposite ends of this spectrum, though they are both fueled by passion and sexuality. Juno is seen taking her anger out on the women her husband cheats on her with, but Circe tends to punish the men who reject her for their own actions. Each scorned woman has a singular pattern of actions which they perform in similar situations, but
because of a variety of issues, including marital status and personal agency, those patterns are very different for each of them. Power dynamics and gender all play into the choices these women make about where they direct their rage.

As a common classical theme, the character of the scorned woman adds a great deal to Ovid’s work and is at the center of Seneca’s. With traits like fury, power, and passion, it would be simple to write this type of women off as a stereotype, including in the pieces this work will focus on as a basis for these characteristics, namely the *Metamorphoses* and *Medea*. In the *Metamorphoses*, Circe and Juno have more depth than a conventional scorned woman stemming mainly from their positions of power, while in *Medea*, her rage is her main attribute as it is needed to catalyze all the action in the play, but she is shown as using her explosive emotions somewhat calculatedly. Gender plays a similar role for each of them in holding them back in certain ways, and they both react similarly in transforming someone as punishment. However they each aim their anger about their situations differently. Gender also plays a different role for each of them when Circe subverts Juno’s actions and turns men into animals as Circe did to women. This goes back to Ovid’s habit of taking a trope or stereotype and changing it just enough to keep his readers alert and interested. There is also a focus on power dynamics in gender relations that can be explored a multitude of ways- from Circe and the men she transforms to Juno and Jupiter to Juno and Callisto or Io. The way Juno interacts with other women, for instance, is different from the way she interacts with men, even if the situation she is reacting to is the same, at least partly because Callisto is also a woman whereas Jupiter is a man. Overall, while these women have both felt they were wronged by men and lash out as a result, all these factors come together to create two very different directions in which they point their rage. With the definition of *scorned woman* as a woman who has been or feels that she has been
wronged by a man and lashes out in response, often in a way that may seem disproportionate to the original actions, it would be easy for Ovid to stick to the traditional portrayal of this stereotype. On the one hand, by attributing complexities to Juno and Circe and having Medea at the center of the play, even if it might be for the wrong reasons, Ovid and Seneca create dynamic characters that help to break the mold of the expected stereotype of the scorned woman and challenge their readers to consider these characters and their works as a whole more deeply. That being said, continuing to use this stereotype, even if it is an important aspect of a work or there is a twist on what is expected, still helps those who will not look past the surface level of a trope to feel validated in boxing women into the category of a scorned woman.
CHAPTER 2: Juno

For Juno, her husband’s undermining of their marriage pushes her into the role of a scorned woman. Jupiter consistently chases after, and in some cases rapes, women whom he is interested in, often mortals. After countless iterations of this same behavior from her husband, who is also her brother, not that this extra tie exactly helps bond them in their relationship, one of two things generally happen with Juno. Either her feelings and reactions are not factored in or shown in a story, or she lashes out in some sort of retaliation. This is somewhat common in depictions of women in the ancient world, although Juno stands out in that there are certain ways in which she is able to attempt to assert some form of dominance in her marriage by turning into a scorned woman.

Juno is seen as powerful, but in a way that is filled with wrath and vengeance. This would not be so out of place were it a description of a male god. In Greek mythology, for example, Zeus is often shown as punishing, sometimes based on his emotions. He chained Prometheus to a rock and every day an eagle ate his liver, then his body regrew the organ so he could be further tortured the next day, all because he was disobeyed through Prometheus’s trickery. Zeus is still not as widely considered a completely wrathful or vengeful god, though. The implications of similar actions relating to a female god, on the other hand, seem to be more negative. There is a pattern of actions that is seen repeatedly with Juno, and she is not painted in a positive light. It is a common pattern, according to Betty Rose Nagle, that “a god's amor [love] leads to a goddess's ira [rage], which is then deflected onto the mortal (or lesser divinity such as a nymph) in between” and that specifically “Io and Callisto are victims of the combination of Jupiter's amor and Juno's ira; their rape by the god provokes the goddess's jealousy” (Nagle 239). Some smaller reaction to being cheated on or something less dramatic than transforming a human into an
animal might not paint Juno the same way. If she simply told her husband not to insult her again or forbade the other woman involved from seeing Jupiter, that reaction might be seen as rational. However since the same thing has happened so many times before, her rage has built up, she reacts in an extreme manner, and she can be portrayed as an irrational woman. This is especially pronounced in contrast to the male characters, who are not shown as doing any wrong, even if they were rude or doing something that would normally be frowned upon. Characters like these women could also influence or reinforce societal expectations, so in a time where women were unable to get involved in the same things men were, such as the influential world of politics, the scorned woman reinforced that way of thinking, especially when the stories are about the gods. It is true that gods may have the same frailties as humans, but they are still meant to be respected and looked up to. So that being said, if even a goddess cannot conduct herself rationally, how could a mortal woman be expected to?

There are also gender roles at play that make the woman scorned character much more common than the scorned man. Although Juno and Jupiter are both powerful deities, Juno is shown to be lesser than her husband in certain ways. Nagle argues that a god can rely on violence as a method of getting what he wants if persuasion does not originally work, whereas goddesses only have persuasion as a means to get what they want in a sexual capacity, and their divinity is an essential part of their argument. Their power comes from their femininity and sexuality, so the two become conflated. It is due to this that “goddesses interpret erotic rejection as an insult to their divinity which must be punished” (Nagle 242). For this reason, Nagle argues, a goddess might lash out when she has been scorned. They may not be seen as having as much power as their male counterparts, so when someone insults what little they do have, they have to protect it or risking a loss in respect. This generates a level of fear in Juno, which is shown
especially when she is confronting Jupiter and Io, who Jupiter had been having an affair with behind Juno’s back. *Metum, timuitque, and anxia* are all used in one short line as Juno considers her husband’s extramarital relationship with Io, describing how Juno is afraid of her husband and what he could do to harm either her or her reputation through these actions (Ovid I.623). The quick succession of fear and anxiety shows the barrage of emotions Juno feels, and gives her character more complexity than simply a blindly hateful wife. Her most obvious source of jealousy is the other woman Jupiter was attracted to and slept with. Juno also sees her husband Jupiter not having these same problems because he uses force before it gets to that point and this, on top of her jealousy towards the women he cheats with, is another source of jealousy. She could also be jealous of her husband for not having to deal with the problems that she does as a woman. But as discussed before, she cannot take this part of her jealousy out on whom she wants, so another woman is forced to take Juno’s rage in full, whether or not that is actually fair for any of the women involved. Take the situation of Io, for instance. When Juno discovers Jupiter and Io together and cleverly asks for the heifer as a gift, Jupiter is forced to make an unappealing decision. Still, he is only worried about which woman he will have to betray, his wife or his mistress, unlike Juno who has multiple factors in play which makes the situation difficult for her. Jupiter as a powerful man clearly does not have the same worries that she does as a powerful woman, which could build up into rage that would eventually bubble over, just as her anger built up and turned into her lashing out at Io or Callisto.

By the time Juno finds out about Io and Callisto she has an established method to deal with them. All of her most prevalent qualities here are of a scorned woman’s progression from passion to fury to power, and she has figured out how to use them most effectively in her situation and how to best punish her husband through the other women. In the cases of both
women, Juno appears to us as an angry and irrational figure. In the case of Io, Juno had suspicions for some time that her husband was with someone else, and was afraid of that idea and goes to investigate. Although Juno is not the one who performs the actual transformation of Io, she is the one who instigates it, as Jupiter is worried about her rage when she discovers Io, and she is the one who makes sure that Io remains nonhuman and is not helped by Jupiter in any way. For Callisto, it is stated that Juno had known for a long time what was happening between Callisto and Jupiter, but Juno simply plotted and waited for the right time to exact her revenge. This might seem rational, but in the end Juno could not contain herself any longer and lashed out, taking it upon herself to turn Callisto into a large bear. In a similar way, this takes away the main motivation for Jupiter’s relationship with her, in theory leading Jupiter back to Juno.

Further, both instances of metamorphosis also focus on certain physical attributes being taken from the women being punished, most importantly the mouth, which is also an often sexualized part of the body. Io was alarmed when she saw her “rictus” or wide mouth (Ovid, I.640), and the rest of her changed body in the reflection of a river, but mostly struggled with her inability to communicate. In Callisto’s story, Juno becomes angry because she feels Callisto is broadcasting Jupiter’s unfaithfulness and the way he wronged Juno. By taking away Io’s ability to speak while leaving her with human emotions, Juno makes sure that she will not be able to tell anyone about what Jupiter did, preventing further shame for Juno due to her husband, along with making the punishment worse for Io, who misses her family and can see them but not interact with them on a human level. Regarding Callisto and her mouth, Ovid writes “laudataque quondam ora Iovi lato fieri deformia rictu,” or “snarling jaws deformed the mouth that Jove had kissed” (Ovid, II.480-481). Once again, though more of the transformation is described, a portion of time is dedicated to showing how the mouth Jupiter used to find pleasure in was ‘deformed’ into an unattractive
animal’s mouth. Just as the general transformation was aimed at driving her husband away from these women, this specific targeting of the mouth shows how Juno is destroying a key part of the physicality which played such a large role in Jupiter’s relationships.

Both Io and Callisto were turned into unattractive animals, and so Juno took away both the things her husband found attractive in them, as well as their ability to communicate with anybody, doing the most she can do with the power she possesses. The focus on the mouth relates to both the attraction and communication aspects of Io and Callisto, and is perhaps also connected to Juno’s jealously. The descriptions of how lips turned into something big and ugly could go back to Juno denying them the ability to kiss or be intimate any longer, and also more generally taking away their femininity, or at least the most visible and desirable parts of it. This is also the most that she can reasonably punish her husband for his actions, while also displaying her power due to the differentials in power in the relationship. Obviously the consequences are much worse for the girls Jupiter slept with than they are for Jupiter, but he is still forced to do without something he cared about. Through her actions, she is also showing both her husband and his lovers that they should at least think twice before trifling with her. Whether or not that is effective is another question, but Juno’s best defense is that she is still a goddess, which she will display through the punishment of women like Io and Callisto. She might not have full power over her husband, but she does dominance over those women, and so Juno displays her power however she is able to. In the cases of Io and Callisto, they are both attractive girls who slept with a god against their own will, then against their own will were changed into animals for it. They have little to no personal agency, meaning that they do not have the means of exerting their full capabilities or influence as they may like to, nor do readers hear the women’s true voices in these stories, even if the stories are technically about them. As far as Juno in both circumstances,
there is a sense in which her hands are tied in the situation, as she is not free to do as she may wish to in her position. Just as Jupiter is punished by Juno’s transformation of these women, but not as much as the women are, Juno does not have full agency over herself or her actions, but she does have much more than Io and Callisto. There is something to be said of violence on women by women, but I believe much of that is due to society’s willingness to shift blame away from men. In cases such as these, is it easier for male authors to pin the blame on someone who isn’t like them. It is Jupiter’s fault that Juno is angry in the first place, but admitting that would also mean actually examining the faults of a man, when it is much easier to write Juno off as simply an irrational woman and let Jupiter’s actions, as well as those of the male authors, to remain unpunished.

A large reason that Juno punishes the women whom her husband cheats with is simply that she is not actually able to effectively punish her husband. Therefore even if it is unfair, the mortal women are the only feasible targets for her rage, an emotion which in itself is understandable to the extent that some form of hurt feelings is generally accepted when someone is hurt by a partner as Juno was, so she projects it onto them. This can be seen not only in the larger picture of the stories involving Juno as a scorned woman, but also in the Latin. For example, when Juno is punishing Callisto for the actions of her husband, she is not introduced by name. She is simply “magni matron Tonantis”, or “the wife of the great Thunderer” (Ovid, II.466). Jupiter becomes “‘Tonantis,’” a title important enough to warrant capitalization as a title, whereas Juno is only a “matron.” It is obvious in this language that Juno is a subordinate here, being known as a wife in relation only to one who is great.

She also speaks of her husband’s “impune” or his unpunished nature (Ovid, II.474). This is significant because it highlights how Juno thinks about her husband, who is able to chase after
women, be unfaithful, and show little to no remorse about these things. She is not simply thinking about her actions and becoming angry about those, but she is also thinking about how her husband is exempt from punishment, and seemingly judgement, in a way that she is not. It makes much more sense for Juno to feel shame that she was cheated on or that her husband does not care about her feelings, but she would not want to make herself seem like a victim, so the use of ‘impune’ is another way of trying to turn the situation back on her husband in the smaller ways she is able to. Likely enraged more that she cannot do anything about this immunity, the impending punishment is made even worse for Callisto. Jupiter on the other hand, is seemingly unbothered by the situation, not showing much strong emotion, especially when compared to how Juno is described. Juno is a goddess, but anything she does directly to Jupiter, he would be able to brush off or he would be able to exact revenge for later on. In this way, even if she is known as the queen of the gods which implies a great deal of power, she is at a disadvantage because she still has less power than her husband, forcing her into the role of a scorned woman in order to try to gain some of that power back.
CHAPTER 3: Circe

Circe, like Juno, has some issues surrounding being a women on the other side of unreciprocated passion. While she is not a goddess, she does still possess magic, making her more powerful than an average mortal. For both women, this relates to how Circe and Juno both handle this quality they share: passion. JD Ellsworth speaks of passion as one of the qualities of a scorned woman, relating it to the emotional nature associated with women (Ellsworth 30). While it may be thought of as a positive quality, it is also what causes women such as Circe to flip from one emotion to another so quickly. And when they have that proclivity, it can easily be used by them anytime they become seemingly overemotional. In this way, the general idea Nagle puts forth of a romantic rejection of a powerful woman being an insult to her dominance also applies here. There is still a gendered aspect to her rage. Charles Segal states that Ovid gives Circe almost demonic qualities and no compassion. She is not seen as civilized. However, she is still seen almost as a sex symbol, with many of her other humanizing qualities stripped away and her sexuality and passion at the forefront of her character (Segal 442). However, Ovid does not give her a lover, rather he writes of men who flee from her or men who invoke jealousy in her, never giving her the opportunity to show off her passion in a positive light. This stems from a view that sexuality is something to be looked down upon in a woman. It is the cause of all Circe’s problems and anger that forces her to lash out and facilitate metamorphoses. She begins approaching Picus, an attractive man she comes across and is immediately interested in, in a reasonable manner, saying to him “nec durus Titanida despice Circen,” essentially asking him to not hate her and be kind back to her (Ovid XIV.376). Ovid says that Picus “ferox…repellit”, or fiercely rejects her, responding unkindly to a civil request of Circe (Ovid XIV.377). She is passionate, but those rejections, such as the one with Picus’s possibly unnecessary force, and her anger that seem to drive her, putting her into the category of scorned woman. These specific
qualities highlighted in Circe in the stories where she is featured are different from the ones seen in Juno’s, but the passion and reactions to situations of rejection and scorn by men are the same. Feeling hurt by a man, Circe lashes out in a fit of rage to try and retaliate against the one who rejected her and the negative emotions that experience made her feel—a simple explanation, but one that follows the arc of actions of a scorned woman exactly.

She does still experience rejection from men, but they are simply romantic interests, often someone Circe lusts after. This means that they are not bound to her by marriage as Jupiter is to Juno, and so there are only two parties involved rather for Circe (herself and the man) rather than the three for Juno (herself, her husband, and his mistress). In addition, since the men who scorn Circe are not more powerful than she is, the power dynamic is actually in her favor. For this reason, she is able to take out her rage on the men who wronged her. She knows her own power in these situations, telling one man who rejects her “'laesaque quid faciat, quid amans, quid femina, discēs rebus’ ait, used amans et laesa et femina Circe,'” or as Segal translates it, “'You will learn by events what an injured woman, a woman in love, a woman can do,' she says, 'and Circe is in love and injured and a woman’” (Ovid 14.384-385 trans. Segal). Circe’s rage is more calculated than Juno’s. It is still, of course, driven by emotion, but she knows what she is capable of and is portrayed as more rational than other examples of scorned women. This is portrayed in the different approaches of Circe and Juno in how both of them turn people into animals due to their scorn. The significant difference is simply that Circe turns men into creatures rather than women. The story of Picus in Book 14, where the quotation above is found, is an example that shows this clearly. Circe saw him and was attracted to him, but he refuted her advances, saying he already loved another. She immediately became angered and turned him into a bird. Unlike a cow or bear, birds are more commonly seen as beautiful, but there was still an emphasis placed
on the mouth—his “rostro” or beak is spoken of, and it is stated that all that is left of the man
Picus is his name (Ovid 14.391-396). Picus may be a king, but he is also just a mortal while
Circe is a sorceress who may not be entirely mortal—this makes it even easier for her to lash out
as she has the upper hand in the situation and has no problem showing him that in her anger. This
bears a striking similarity to the scenes of Io and Callisto being transformed, with the scorned
woman taking away essentially everything important to someone such as family, friends, and
their personhood. Except this is a man and rather than Juno punishing the woman and her
husband, Circe is almost punishing herself as well as the man. She takes a stance that if she
cannot be with Picus then nobody can, but this would also seem to hurt her. If she loved him and
now she cannot see him anymore or hear him speak, it would seem that would be bad for her,
although of course worse for him. This could circle back to Ovid’s portrayal of Circe as
uncivilized due to her sexuality as a woman—an average person would not punish themselves in
that way, but a “proper” woman would also not make such brazen advances on a man. Due to
that improper behavior, Circe is rejected and filled with rage, so the punishment could be for her
sensuality or stepping outside of what actions are generally acceptable for a woman. Once again,
this shows how Ovid uses a traditional trope, but shifts it slightly to add depth to these scorned
woman characters. Even with this shift however, Circe shows all the qualities of a scorned
woman.
CHAPTER 4: Medea

When researching scorned women in Classical texts, Medea is the character whose name most frequently recurs. Her story has been told by a number of authors, including Euripides and Ovid, but this chapter will focus on Seneca’s depiction. Seneca is credited with being the first Roman author to have Medea kill her children. This iteration of Medea is one that is still well known, since nearly all versions of the story after Seneca adopted his violent twist makes Medea even more clearly a scorned woman. The king exiles Medea and she is not allowed to bring her children with her, which makes her even more upset. She feels that Jason doesn’t deserve their children more than she does, and so she gives a poisoned robe to Jason’s new bride. This kills both the princess, whom Jason was about to marry, and the father of the princess, even as he tried to save her. Medea then kills both of her sons and so leaves Jason to live out his life without the people he had previously loved or spent a great deal of time with. While Medea’s emotions are explosive, by not killing Jason or harming him directly it is made clear that there was some degree of planning in her revenge. Her deliberate and extremely violent actions originate in her animosity towards a man and follow exactly the behavior of a scorned woman, even if the manner in which she expressed her emotions differs from the other women explored here.

Medea stands out from Circe and Juno in that they were scorned multiple times or by multiple men, whereas Medea’s revenge is directed solely at Jason. Before she transformed into a scorned woman, Medea met Jason, fell in love with him, and traveled with him and his crew, using magic to help Jason with tasks that were nearly impossible to complete. While Medea is given very little credit for the success of the Argonauts, she seems to not have an issue with this, since she loves Jason. Eventually they have children and live together until Jason leaves Medea to marry the princess of the city they live in. This is where Seneca’s Medea begins– with the new
wedding celebrations having just begun, and Medea contriving her path of vengeance. The single act of Jason leaving her is enough to move her fully into the act of a scorned woman. In this aspect Medea's reaction can be contrasted with that Juno, for whom it took a pattern in Jupiter’s actions for her to lash out; or with Circe, who was badly treated and scorned by a number of men in different situations.

It should be noted that in other sources, a portion of Medea’s story shows her in a more positive light. She is useful to Jason and the Argonauts because of her magic and is compliant with their needs in so far as she mostly functions as an agent who aids them in completing otherwise impossible tasks. Once she feels jilted, however, the portrayal of her completely shifts and this is precisely where Seneca’s work begins. Medea begins with a monologue, saying “adeste, sceleris ultrices deae,” or “be present, ye goddesses who avenge crime” (Seneca, 13 trans. Miller). Right away, the stage is set for her character to be based around her anger and need for revenge. These qualities also seemingly exist in a vacuum, as we have no explanation or context yet for the emotions. She goes on to say, “accingere ira teque in exitium para furore toto. Paria narrentur tua repudia thalamis,” which means “Gird thyself with wrath, and prepare thee for deadly deeds with the full force of madness. Let the story of thy rejection match the story of thy marriage” (Seneca, 51-53 trans. Miller). At this point she is speaking somewhat vaguely and the only hint towards her individual story is the reference to a rejection of marriage. So even before we learn the details of Medea and Jason’s relationship, we are introduced to Medea in this hysterical context, in which her only reference to Jason is to say that she is furious with him, though there is little explanation as to why. This organization of the play presents Medea right away as a scorned woman, presenting her as hysterical and unable to control her emotions.
Seneca's *Medea* is a particularly interesting work to consider in this context, since in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Juno and Circe are different characters present in the context of a few stories that are part of a much larger work. In Seneca’s play, Medea is the main character, so we are presented with more of her actual thoughts along with her actions. The reader is presented with the opinions of others in the situation with Medea. For example, Medea's nurse, who scolds and advises her to “iras comprime ac retine impetum,” (“curb thy passion, check thy impetuous hate”), makes Medea a scorned woman who is rebuked not by a man but by another woman (Seneca, 381 trans. Miller). Overall, however, the focus is placed on how Medea herself feels about the situation. In many long speeches she says things like, “Had Jason the heart to do this; having robbed me of my father, native land, and kingdom, could he leave me alone in a foreign land, cruel? Has he scorned my deservings, who saw flames and sea conquered by my crime? Does he think that all my powers of evil are so exhausted?” (Seneca, 118-122 trans. Miller). To some extent, having a woman able to speak for herself is a positive attribute. Hearing a story about a woman from a female perspective, even if the author is male, should give female characters the same chance to speak for themselves that male characters regularly had. On the other hand, it is still a man in a society with stringent gender roles and stereotypes composing the words of that female voice, and he does so in a way that perpetuates stereotypes and does not give the character of Medea any depth even as she is portrayed as clever. Medea is depicted as “a more violent and ruthless character than necessary” according to WV Harris (Harris 141). Although he was referring to the version of Medea written by Euripides, Seneca’s iteration of Medea shares the bias of its Greek predecessor. In some ways, such portrayals of Medea could have shown ancient audiences that women truly do act in this way and implicitly led them to continue to think it was right to think of women in this negative way.
In the same way as Circe, Medea acknowledges her position as a scorned woman. She says of herself: “no violence of fire…could imitate the onrush of my wrath” (Seneca, 412-414 trans. Miller). This is then echoed by the chorus, who state even more plainly “No violence of fire or of swelling gale, no fearful force of hurtling spear, is as great as when a wife, robbed of her love, burns hot with hate” (Seneca, 579-582 trans. Miller). Medea is aware that she is willing and able to go to extremes in order to exact the revenge due to her husband for leaving her for another woman. As she embraces her anger she embraces her role as a scorned woman. Seneca's Medea clearly does not care that these actions will ruin her reputation. Due to her loss of Jason and her exile she feels that there is already nothing worth living for. This then reinforces beliefs about women being dependent on men and how they are unable to control themselves or their emotions, especially when put in situations of extreme stress.
CHAPTER 5: How These Arcs Relate

Something more specific that Juno, Circe, and Medea have in common is that even though their anger is shown in a negative light, it is something that is truly for themselves. They do not care, for example, the status of those who become victims of their anger. It did not matter to Circe that Picus was a king when she turned him into a bird and it did not matter to Juno that Callisto had been raped by Jupiter, Juno still turned her into a bear. While this might not be considered a good thing, it is unique in that almost everything these women do is related to men. The lashing out is still, of course, tied to their anger at whatever man wronged them, but they do seem to be thinking more of themselves and how to make themselves feel better than the status of their victims or the consequences of their actions. This is significant because the victim of a scorned woman’s anger is a piece of the scorned woman identity that the women can, in theory, control and choose for themselves.

That being said, the anger seems to also try to serve the purpose of getting revenge for what was done to them, and while it may be effective to some extent, it always comes back around to the women who sought revenge. Juno punishes the women her husband sleeps with outside of marriage to attempt to get revenge for his unfaithfulness. In doing this however, she does not punish Jupiter enough that he has any true incentive to stop being unfaithful, meaning he will inevitably hurt her again. She is also a goddess associated with fertility and women, so by lashing out at other women, she is hurting the very people whom she would want to give her offerings and such, thus possibly hurting her standing as a goddess, not to mention that her actions give her a negative reputation, though this is more relevant to readers of myth than it would be to Juno. Circe comes across these men whom she loves or lusts after, and if they turn her down, she loses her temper and transforms them into animals. This clearly punishes the men
who reject her, but through her actions also punishes herself. If she was so upset about the rejection clearly she cared about the men in some way, even if it was superficial. Due to this, by destroying someone she cares about, she would also be causing herself more distress. Medea also harms herself in a very direct fashion. She dooms Jason to a life of remembering how all those he cared about were killed as a consequence of his actions, but she also kills her own children in the process. She gets her revenge, but taking her children’s lives is as much a tragedy for her as it is for Jason. As Medea says, “trahere, cum pereas, libet,” a very simple line in Latin which translates to “Tis sweet to drag others down when thou art perishing,” encapsulating perfectly how it still always reflects back on the women and hurts them too, even if the intent was singularly to get revenge on the man (Seneca 429 trans. Miller).

Enough women had these things in common for it to become a trope, and enough people enjoyed the characters that it remains a part of culture today. The scorned woman paints women as hysterical, out of control, and over-emotional, which are still common stereotypes. This begs the question of why women cannot get past this characterization, or perhaps more specifically, why male authors are unable to get past this characterization. Part of the explanation may lie in the history- it is a well-known and widely accepted role for women, which makes it a safe role to write into stories. Deeper than that however, especially in the more traditional Roman society, I believe it is partly due to a conscious shifting of blame. If a woman getting angry is taken seriously, it means that the man who made her angry is in the wrong. If she is portrayed as overemotional and explosive, however, then the reaction is the woman’s own fault, alleviating the blame from the men. It is because of this that a scorned man cannot exist in the same way a scorned woman does- the same stereotypes and societal expectations are not in place, so the idea
of a scorned man would not be as accepted and the blame does not need to be shifted from them since it would not be placed there in the first place.

Throughout my research, I did not come across any one, standard definition of the scorned woman. Rather, there was a framework created after the fact in order to categorize a certain type of recurring character. The similarities between scorned women such as Juno, Circe, and Medea come from their circumstances and reactions more than anything else. All these women were passionate, wronged by at least one man, and reacted to being wronged in a way that was seemingly disproportionate to the original actions. By this I mean that while Medea had a right to be hurt and upset when Jason left her, so a smaller transgression may have been understandable to most people. However because she falls under the category of a scorned woman, instead of a more logical or excusable reaction, she kills Jason’s new bride and the bride’s father, as well as both of her children, and throws the bodies of Jason’s dead children at him, which would be considered extreme under any circumstances. All of these women lash out and become labeled as scorned women for slightly different reasons, as explored in the previous chapters, but the arcs of their actions are all generally the same. There is no hard and fast definition of a scorned woman, but the similarities in circumstances, qualities, and reactions detailed above group women of this type together. What matters is the woman herself and her actions- unlike many of the stories about scorned women, the definition itself is based around the woman, her emotions, and where they stem from.
CHAPTER 6: Retelling With a Female Voice and Giving Scorn a Voice

We don’t have many female voices from the ancient world, and we have even fewer female voices that are as commonly known as the majority of male voices. With the exception of the well-known Sappho from Ancient Greece, nearly every time we hear from a woman, it is through the words of a man. Even in modern times, when there are a number of well-known female Classicists, there was not a full translation of *The Odyssey*, a text dated back to the 8th century BCE, until 2017. This clearly shows the imbalance in whom we hear stories from. Not only are the texts we read almost always written by men, they are often translated by men as well. This is especially significant with the trope of the scorned woman, which enforces stereotypes. Anger becomes gendered. When men are angry, we fear them, but when women are angry it becomes a character flaw to be denigrated. Look at Jupiter and Juno, for example: when we think of the king of gods being angry, we think of storms and lightning bolts— it is regrettable to upset him. The queen of gods on the other hand is seen as lesser when she becomes angry. She is laughed at for her reaction rather than shown empathy for the unfair situation she is in. For men, anger is power. For women, anger is powerlessness. The scorned woman reinforces the idea that women are overemotional and unstable. When authors reiterate this character, they do not blame the men involved for their actions, but they blame the women for being hurt by those actions. This inspired pieces like “Medea” and “Atalanta” in which the story is familiar, but the female character gets to control the narrative more than she has historically. There is power in words, so by giving these women words, they are given power over their own stories.

Part of this project quickly became making scorned women where they weren’t before. As I set out to give women more of a voice in ancient texts, I realized that even harder to understand than the Latin I was translating was why unlike Juno, Circe, and Medea, some of these women
weren’t angry. I would have been angry were I in their shoes. I get angry just reading about it. But in many cases, women are not given a chance to react at all. They are important parts of stories sometimes, but only as a piece of a hero’s journey, like Dido, or a catalyst for another’s actions, like Galatea. This is how poems such as “dear Orpheus” and “Pygmalion and galatea” came about. These stories were written by men in a different time, when women were expected to adhere to strict standards, significantly more so than today. For them, the fictional women behaved no differently than women in their real lives, which is to say more often than not, women were uninvolved in direct decision making and deprived of holding many important positions in society. By framing these ancient stories differently and twisting them into something more believably from the woman’s point of view, I give these characters a chance to react: if not in an explosion of anger, at least in a smaller show of defiance.
dear Orpheus
you were made of music.
music that moved everything
from the rocks beneath your feet,
all the way up to the gods in the heavens;
music that moved me.
I spent our wedding day and every day after dancing,
until I had to flee, and it became the last thing I’d ever do.
but I must have moved you too, in some way,
because you came after me,
charming your way through the underworld.
then earning Persephone’s pity and tears
you did the impossible and found me,
plucking me out of the masses,
choosing me once again.
I was so close to the life we wanted
and you promised you wouldn’t look back,
but you’d always been so good at playing the lyre.
Pygmalion and galatea
This is not a fairytale.
They named me after one killed for choosing her own love.
I was fashioned from disgust and desire,
willed to life by an ordinary man and a goddess.
As he scorned women he created one,
built to look like everything he wanted.
He kissed me and I was awakened.
I broke his vow of abstinence purely by existing.
The goddess pitied him, but where is the pity for me?
He didn’t care as long as my flesh was warm.
I am beautiful, but calculated and cold-
they must have forgotten to give me a heart.
Medea
Even with the gift of prophecy,
Your judgement was clouded-
Blood is thicker than water, after all,
And think of all the blood you shed for him.
But a woman is used to doing twice the work
For half the credit, so you settle for being
With a hero. You, divine by birth, but still not enough for him,
Who was distracted by something shiny and new,
Who was poisoned by promises broken,
And whose new wife and children were brought down with him.
He who was punished by you,
He who deserved what you gave him.
It was worth a lifetime of your son’s screams ringing in your mind
And taking on an eon of disparagement
In return for those few moments of rage,
To make sure his life was a sentence worse than death.
Ariadne
He could not have slain the monster without her,
But he was the only hero of the story-
Never mind that she was the thread holding it all together.
He was everything she wanted though:
Young and handsome and strong.
It all came unraveled when he left her.

At least until she earned a god’s pity,
And she got to sit pretty up in Olympus:
Watching him make mistake after mistake,
Finally unobligated to fix them for him.
Laughing from the stars as he loses his crown,
And turning her back as he cries for help
Falling into Hades with no one there to catch him-
She had been waiting to leave him ever since he left her.
Pandora
Woman was made out of the god’s clay-
Eloquent and cunning,
As beautiful as she was curious,
Sent down to foolish man as punishment.
With her she brought death, disease,
And all the evils in the world-
For herself she kept hope.
Women were not made for your pleasure
Or for your own uses
Women were made to keep themselves afloat
As they wreak havoc on all that you know.
Juno Curitis
I have said that when you are queen,
You can do whatever you want.

So I scream until it echoes through all of Olympus
And it drowns out the whispers of my husband with other women.
I cannot throw lightning bolts, but I make do-
I will turn the winds and their wives against them.
I will make them remember that I gave life to the god of war.

And I am the only one saying it, but I am the queen of gods,
So I can say whatever I want.
Atalanta
Left behind at birth, I became quick on my feet;
Fierce. Pugnacious. Fast to defend myself and my honor.
Still, more was demanded from me that my happiness and chastity.
You claimed me again after I outhunted every other man, so
You didn’t get the son you prayed for,
Or the obedience you would have settled for,
But am I not everything else you could have wanted, father?

Those men couldn’t believe someone like me could outrun them.
They were too stubborn to believe they couldn’t until too late.
They died trying to prove they were better than me.
Aphrodite, who started the Trojan War with a golden apple,
Ended my freedom and oaths the same way;
She offered that man weapons of distraction instead of speed.
My husband may have won the race and my hand,
But do you not see that there is no honor in trickery, father?

So I married him, because I didn’t have a choice, did I;
Nobody ever asks the princess if they want to be saved.
Then just as I lost the life of freedom I could have had,
You lost the daughter you never wanted.
You couldn’t help when a goddess turned her ire on me.
She didn’t even let me explain that I knew what it felt like,
To be dishonored in your own home.
But if you had just let me keep my oath, let me be,
Could you not have prevented all of this, father?
CHAPTER 7: Modern Scorn

The scorned woman has not disappeared over time and the trope is still extremely relevant and commonly used in both fine arts and mass media. Works like Seneca’s *Medea* are still being reproduced on stages, with actresses highlighting Medea’s angst and struggles. Carrie Underwood’s song “Before He Cheats” follows a woman whose boyfriend or husband is unfaithful to her and she becomes so overcome with anger that she slashed his tires, smashed his windshield, and ruined his leather seats. Society may look at these scorned women slightly differently than it used to, but to some extent, the characterization of women is largely the same in many scenarios.

One of the most significant changes I have noticed is that in certain scenarios we have more sympathy for the scorned, or simply angry, woman now, whereas before she was seen in a wholly negative light. There is also a certain level of reclamation of the scorned woman. This is most clearly seen in a reclaiming of anger by women, prevalent in movements such as the Nasty Woman Movement, which arose after Donald Trump called Hillary Clinton a “nasty woman” in the final presidential debate in 2016. The phrase was commonly used both at the Women’s March on Washington and online, with women sharing what they considered to be positive qualities about themselves, but which others, namely though not exclusively men, may think make them a similarly “nasty woman.” This was the inspiration behind poems such as “Female Dog,” while others like “People Who Called Me a Bitch and Meant it Maliciously” focus more on the difficulties faced daily without that reclamation. This poetry attempts to capture how I have felt trying to work through both of those contrasting ideas. Such historically negative stereotypes surrounding female anger creates discomfort when women do feel anger and often isolates them when they express it. Modern scorned women may manifest their emotions
differently or be thought of differently than in ancient times, but the societal attitude towards
angry women has remained enough that the scorned woman remains an accepted trope.
In a world where I am unafraid
The construction worker catcalls me,
so I hiss and growl and spit at him, hackles up.
My mother tries to tell me it’s better for girls to be hairless,
so I shave my head.
A friend tells me they prefer me with a more natural look,
so I use mud as eyeshadow and smear berries on my cheeks.
My teacher says “school doesn’t matter anyway, you’re pretty”,
so I go get a PhD in astrophysics then slap her with the degree.
My boss asks if I need one of the guys to help me use the scissors,
so I break into his house and cut holes in all his clothes.
My cousin tells me he thinks it’s unattractive when girls swear,
so I embroider every curse word under the sun onto my nicest jacket.
A boy thinks I owe him my body because he bought me a drink,
so I collect roadkill and leave it on his doorstep.
And this world keeps trying to tell me I don’t deserve better
Than the sexism, the condescension, the opinions I never asked for,
so in this universe, at least, I will allow myself to fight back.
People Who Called Me Bitch and Meant it Maliciously

The first time I was called a bitch it was over AIM when I was 12, and it was by Courtney Brown, who used to be my best friend. She was upset because I told her that her YouTube video, in which she tried to recreate a scene from *Paranormal Activity*, was not very believable because when the lights flickered, you could see her friend flipping the light switch.

A friend of a friend said I was a bitch after I called a guy out for lying. He said he couldn’t believe she didn’t go watch him play hockey, acting all hurt so that she would pity him enough to talk to him more. But I was wrong for pointing out that he wasn’t good enough to actually be on ice, because I didn’t have to embarrass him by catching him in his lie.

At 14, my friend Greyson asked me to go to a camp dance with him. I said yes and in the end he didn’t dance with me once the whole night, but all the girls that had wanted him to ask them instead still called me a bitch, even after I went home and cried about watching him dance with them over me, because it didn’t matter that he ignored me, I thought I was in love with him.

There was also that guy Sean from a party at Lehigh when I was 17, who I thought was very nice until he found out I was 17, and then he called me a bitch for tricking him, because apparently by that point I should’ve known better than to not tell every person I met that I was still underage or to be friendly to a man I had no intention of sleeping with.

My father tells me that I should be nice even though my friend was in the wrong. I say I’m always nice, but he laughs and tells me, “we both know, sweetie, that you can be kind of a bitch to people who you don’t like,” ignoring the fact that I wouldn’t have had to be a bitch at all, if my friend hadn’t been an emotionally manipulative asshole.

And I only asked for an apology the first time, with my eyes still stinging from the shame implicit in the word. I tried not to get angry, knowing it would only fuel her point. So I smiled through the heat bubbling up inside of me as I asked her, but in the end, I apologized. Every time, I apologized.
Female Dog
I’m nice until you’re not.
And then you call me names but
I have reclaimed the word bitch
and I wear it as armor.
I am a basic bitch,
a broke bitch,
a resting bitch faced bitch,
and a badass bitch.
So you hurl the word at me,
out for blood,
but I am already bleeding.
After He Left Me
He told me that he didn’t like seeing me in that dress,
So I told him that I don’t give a fuck
About what he says, or anybody else.
He said it makes him feel better,
That it’s not just him I don’t care about.
And it’d be cute honestly, if it weren’t so infuriating-
Him thinking I would do anything to make him happy.
And he always thought his music was better than mine,
So I blast the shittiest pop music I can find
And have a dance party at two in the afternoon.
He hated that I didn’t open up to him enough,
So I whisper secrets into stranger’s ears.
He never liked seeing me with other boys,
So I smile while I tell the newest one to put an arm around me.
He told me he likes my hair better straight,
So I haven’t straightened it in two years-
He hasn’t noticed, but nothing about me is straight
Or willing to be tamed for him.
Pandora II
The first woman was created with a voice to tell lies,
As men had been doing for years.
Woman was created so that we could be to men,
What men had been to the gods:
Something lesser, but just charming enough to be dangerous.
She was created as a punishment, but she evolved-
Man’s memory is long, though.
Pandora opened the box, not Epimetheus,
And we have been blamed ever since.
anger is not an inherently toxic emotion in women, we’ve just been socialized to believe that women should be pleasant and accommodating at all times.
I have been burning up inside
for years now, and questioning
whether I am adequate,
whether I am allowed.
The answers I got were never enough.
I had been waiting my whole life
for permission to yell, scream, make a mess-
Because anger is messy.
It's uncomfortable.
It means I want things to be different.
And there are times to be kind, but
my anger has meaning
and it deserves to be heard
and I deserve to be heard, so
I’ll save myself,
burning down the world instead,
and I’ll be kind some other time.
CHAPTER 8: Cultural Significance

The fact that the trope of the scorned woman still exists today has already been established. The question this chapter attempts to answer is, what does that mean for women today? While the same characterization exists, society and the world around us has changed significantly since ancient times. While a few of these poems are based on my individual experiences, they are also meant to bring up questions about women more broadly, such as how women are seen or generally considered. This chapter tries to think more broadly about what it is like to be living in a society that both enforces the scorned woman stereotype and is in some ways trying to tear it down. These poems are meant to more generally reflect what it is like living with the expectation that if a woman gets angry, she is automatically written off as over-emotional and irrational, even though anger is not inherently a negative emotion. There are some personal poems like “I Came Across An Old Picture” that explore personal anecdotes related to this, as well as some like “Your love was like dandelions,” which try to capture a more generalized experience or experiences of others related to this topic.

Poems like “When you ask me” may start out by expressing some harbored anger, but by the end the driving force behind them dies out, or at least starts to. It’s easy to feel angry about an injustice or when you feel you have been wronged, but there comes a time when that anger does not help anything anymore. If a person is angry about everything all the time, existing can become an exhausting task. When I began this project, I became infuriated as I researched and began to think more about the treatment of women historically. After working on it for months, however, I became burnt out. I could not find it within me to write anymore angry poems about the injustices in the world or in ancient writings. There comes a point when frustration turns into acceptance, though not in the same way that women are accepting and reclaiming the negative
stereotypes surrounding their anger. Rather, it is an acceptance that sometimes things are the way they are, and while that may be a reason for anger, and while I am allowed to be angry, it is not always the most constructive emotion for a situation. Having this chapter alongside some of the other more clearly scorned poems in other chapters also reflects how I sometimes feel the need to balance feeling enraged by how things work or something that happens with the reality that I will be taken more seriously without that passion. This is when pieces like “O Regina” came to be, which are more of an exploration and questioning of cultural implications than investigating my own experiences or feelings.
When I say I hate men
What I mean is that I hate the men who ask what we were wearing.
The men who tell me to get back in the kitchen.
Who taunt me for a reaction, then ask if I’m on my period once they finally get it.
I hate when men tell me I’m wearing too much makeup and not enough makeup-
If they’re going to be assholes they should at least make up their minds.
I hate the “what I think she means is…” men.
I hate it when men pretend they’re feminists, act outraged on my behalf,
Ask if I’m going to let that guy talk to me that way, when they’ve said so much worse.
What I mean is I hate men who say I need to develop my palate if I don’t like their craft beers.
That I hate men who call girls who don’t sleep with them prudes, and girls who do, sluts
And I hate how they’re so personally insulted either way (like it’s any of their business).
Not to mention the men who hit on my friend,
Then try to use the same moves on me immediately after she rejects them.
What I mean is that I hate the historic systematic oppression of women that has been perpetrated
by men for so many years and affected the choices, confidence, and lives of countless people,
But it sure is a bummer that sometimes I offend a man with an offhand comment, isn’t it?
After Catullus 11
There are things which have not changed.
The way women are seen as less than:
Not aloof enough to be in power,
Not smart enough to think for ourselves,
Not capable enough to survive on our own.
Unless they are being portrayed as too much:
Too emotional to be taken seriously,
Too much makeup to be pretty,
Too complicated to ever understand.
They are a delicate flower until they are the plough.
When you ask me
“Are you going to let him talk to you like that?”
For a moment I am stunned by your audacity,
Before I remember who I am talking to.
I want to ask what you mean
And who gave you permission to comment on my choices.
I want to ask why you want to know in the first place,
Considering I used to let you get away with so much more.
I want to ask who let you become president of a fraternity
After you spent months upset with me for stepping foot into one
Because that made me “complicit in perpetuating their sexism”
You know, as long as we’re asking bullshit questions.
I want to ask about your fake deep feminist white boy bullshit,
But you always did get mad at me when I contradicted you.
O. Regina
Queen of gods who rules over nothing,
Are we to look up to you or down on you?
Protector of women who does not lead by example,
Who punishes innocents, hoping it makes her husband pay
Subtly enough that he doesn’t seek to hurt her-
At least not any more than he already has.
How are we to be empowered,
When even power is not enough?
If there is no hope for a goddess,
Where is the hope for the rest of us?
I Came Across an Old Picture
And I can hear your favorite record in the background
   (everything just *sounds* better on vinyl, you’d always say),
And I feel my eyes straining to read my book in the dim light
   (the sun’s setting, but dorm lights are so *harsh* on your eyes, you complained),
And you only get up when you have to change the record
   (I’ll love this one, you just *know* it, I’d listen to you announce),
And I still smell the pot in your room even with all that air freshener
   (but this was the last time, you want to stop, for *real* this time, you’d tell me),
And it took a month before you trusted me to even touch the record player
   (putting on whatever you asked for *slowly* as you watched me),
And I can taste the regret rising every time I walk past spaces we used to fill
   (it’s *just* short of civil, but maybe it’s better than nothing),
And you never even asked me what my favorite record was
   (it’s *Point of Know Return*, in case you ever wondered).
Your love was like dandelions
The seeds drifted into my heart
Every time you laughed.
Until my body became overrun,
I thought myself a garden.
It looked so beautiful-
But in the end they were just weeds,
And every time I tried to pluck them out,
They only spread, roots settling deeper.

They made it hard to breathe.
After months of trying to cut them back, my fingers bled.
But there are some things we have to overlook,
My mother says, in order for a relationship to work.
So I let the seeds grow, and slowly my throat closed.
I am too tired to change now,
After all the times when I yelled, demanded more.
Too weary from years of trying to fight back.
The weeds have grown, and I am silenced.
But Not All Men
My second week of college I talked to a boy who asked me if I feel afraid
When I walk into a party because of all the men there.
I told him, steely eyed, that I could defend myself and he lunged at me,
Trying to prove me wrong. I mimed an elbow to his neck and my knee jerked
Up and he didn’t talk to me again. I walked back to my room shaking.

The first time I was catcalled I was 12 and 3 men in a car honked,
Screaming for me to tell them how old I was, laughing when I spit back
That I was most certainly too young for them but
I put on my baggiest shirt as soon as I got home.

A guy in the bar last month introduced himself to me so I smiled back and chatted
Until he said he had to fuck someone tonight or he’d lose a bet.
I wished him good luck and tried to leave 4 times only he kept grabbing my arm,
Pulling me back again. He didn’t listen to a word I said
Until my friend put his arm around me and said it was time to go,
Except that was just an escape so I took a deep breath and tried not to flinch
As everyone touched me when we walked deeper into the crowd.

Some days it feels like I am waiting to become a statistic. I walk through
This world and try to take up space until someone takes notice of me,
Because then it doesn’t take long for me to remember that I am
So small and it’s probably safer that way, anyway, if I can’t ask for anything.
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