

Sexual jealousy and *erôs* in Euripides' *Medea* *

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Introduction

It has recently been argued, by David Konstan, that sexual jealousy did not exist in Classical Greece – his argument being based partly on the lack of Greek terminology for this emotion, and partly on a supposed absence of certain aspects of modern sexual jealousy (primarily, affection).¹ That sexual jealousy is not a universal emotion has been argued by some psychologists too.² For instance, Ralph Hupka believes that sexual jealousy is more properly a type of anger, distinguished by the situations in which it occurs, these situations being culturally determined; thus when societies do not value romantic or monogamous attachments, and when the group is more important than the family or known paternity, sexual jealousy is not observed.³ However, other scholars disagree, arguing that an emotion may not be commonly observed in a society simply because that society lacks a convenient label for it; it does not necessarily follow that similar psychological and behavioural traits cannot be observed.⁴

In this chapter, I use recent psychological research to demonstrate that sexual jealousy did exist in Classical Greece, and that there are, in fact, striking affinities between the ancient Greek and modern variants of this emotion. While we cannot, of course, simply transfer our own emotional concepts to Greek culture, there is a considerable extent to which sexual jealousy experience is cross-cultural, and in ancient Greece closely tied to *erôs*. To demonstrate this connection – and the efficacy of the methodological approach – most effectively, I have chosen to explore it through a close reading of a play in which Classicists usually deny the presence of the emotion: Euripides' *Medea*.

This tragedy's plot involves a woman, abandoned by her husband for another woman, who revenges herself by killing her rival, the latter's father (who arranged the match), and her own children by her ex-husband. To laypersons this would seem a straightforward tale of sexual jealousy, and a few scholars agree it is an important part of the plot.⁵ However, this is a minority view. The major current school of thought sees Medea as a Sophoclean, or even epic hero: she is driven by heroic pride.⁶ Others see her as acting from a terrible wrath, that (in Konstan's words) has nothing of 'petty jealousy' in it.⁷ I do not intend to argue against pride or wrath as motivations. Medea is clearly enraged – anger words abound in the play; and

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¹ Konstan (2006) 219-43.

² There has been a lively debate for some decades over the universality or cultural specificity of emotions in general, a debate whose principal strands are summarized by Konstan (2006) 7-27; see also D.L. Cairns (2008). Among non-Classical scholarship, P.E. Griffiths (1997) and Reddy (2001) 3-62 provide useful summaries and critiques. See also the bibliography mentioned in Sanders and Thumiger (this volume) n. 9.

³ Hupka (1991) and (1981); see also Sharpsteen (1991) 34 and Salovey (1991) 280.

⁴ Elster (1999) 412; Kristjánsson (2002) 21.

⁵ Friedrich (1993); Burnett (1998) 194; Mastronarde (2002) 16; McHardy (2008) 61-2; D.L. Cairns (2008) 53-6.

⁶ Easterling (1977a) 178; Knox (1977) 196, 207; Gabriel (1992) 353; Mastronarde (2002) 8-9; Goldhill (2003) 166-7; Holland (2003) 270.

⁷ Konstan (2006) 57-9; Mastronarde (2002) 17-18; Goldhill (2003) 166-7; Harris (2003) 140-1. See Allen (2003) 90 on the connection between *orgê* and *erôs*, a connection denied by Harris (2003) 122.

arguments for her heroic pride can point to repeated claims that she has been dishonoured, a repeated insistence that she cannot allow her enemies to laugh at her, and her clearly articulated choice to allow her passion to overrule her reason.⁸ However, people can respond to situations with more than one emotion. Euripides depicts his Medea as an immensely complex character, and I believe that reducing her emotional state to a monolithic pride or anger is too simplistic. Using the insights of modern psychology into prototypical jealousy episodes, I wish to rehabilitate sexual jealousy as a significant element in her motivation. I shall begin by outlining the modern theoretical scholarship on which I draw, before turning to the words and actions of Medea herself and others in the play. Finally, I shall look at the Greek vocabulary of jealousy, assisted by Aristotle.

Psychological approaches to sexual jealousy

Psychologists have noted that it often makes more sense to speak of an emotional episode or scenario, than an emotion *per se*.⁹ Emotional episodes begin with cognitions – perceptions of, or thoughts about, a situation – and our interpretations of them, frequently called the ‘antecedent conditions’.¹⁰ These arouse psychological and physiological feelings, the ‘emotion’ itself. Attempts at self-regulation may follow; then verbal expressions and/or physical actions resulting from the emotion; and eventually resolution.¹¹

Sexual jealousy, according to psychologists such as Gerrod Parrott or Jerome Neu, has three antecedent perceptions: (1) I have an exclusive relationship with someone; (2) I am in danger of losing that exclusivity or the entire relationship; (3) because I have a rival for his/her affection.¹² Jealousy is an unusual emotion in that it necessarily involves three people.¹³ It is predicated on personal rivalry and fear of loss. It involves a unique, exclusive and affectionate bond with a unique individual, and a rupture of that exclusivity through imagined or actual alienation of the partner’s affection.¹⁴ Parrott argues that the partner becomes formative to our own self-conception, and this is what makes jealousy possible: what we fear to lose is not so much the beloved partner, as a part of ourselves.¹⁵

The psychological feeling of jealousy is complex, and is generally considered a blend of simpler affects. These usually include anger, covetousness or envy, fear of (or grief at) loss, a blow to one’s self-esteem or pride, and hatred of the rival.¹⁶ Love is rarely included; possibly

⁸ Eur. *Med.* 1078-80: καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά, θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων, ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

⁹ E.g. Parrott (1991) 4: ‘an emotional episode is the story of an emotional event, and it seems a natural unit of analysis for understanding human emotions’.

¹⁰ E.g. Sharpsteen (1991) 37 defines antecedent conditions as ‘the elements physically or objectively present in a situation, along with the perceptions, interpretations, and appraisals of them’.

¹¹ See also Elster (1999) 244-83 and Ben-Ze’ev (2000) 49-78, whose analyses differ in some details.

¹² Parrott (1991) 15-16; Neu (1980) 432-3; see Wierzbicka (1999) 99 for a slightly different formulation. These perceptions are generally phrased so as to encompass possessive as well as sexual jealousy, and Ben-Ze’ev (2000) 289-90 and Parrott (1991) 15-16 explicitly see sexual jealousy as the prototypical jealousy scenario; see Salovey and Rodin (1986) and Kristjánsson (2002) 155 ff. for contrary views.

¹³ Klein (1957/1975) 181; Ben-Ze’ev (2000) 289-90; Kristjánsson (2002) 139-40.

¹⁴ Ben-Ze’ev (2000) 289-90; Parrott (1991) 15-16.

¹⁵ Parrott (1991) 16-17; cf. Tov-Ruach (1980) 466-8.

¹⁶ For various formulations see: Freud (1922) 223; Shengold (1994) 619; Spielman (1971) 78-9; Sharpsteen (1991) 31, 36; Planalp (1999) 174; Parrott (1991) 4; Neu (1980) 433; Kristjánsson (2002) 141-4, (2006) 17-8; Ben-Ze’ev (2000) 301.

it is taken for granted, but perhaps it is simply not necessary: what matters is not that I love the person, but that (s)he is *mine*.¹⁷

Jealousy is considered socially disruptive, even taboo, and therefore tends to be ‘veiled’ or ‘masked’. Jon Elster says that the difference between a ‘veil’ and a ‘mask’ is ‘between hiding an emotion one feels and showing an emotion one does not feel’, though ‘a mask can also serve as a veil’.¹⁸ Elster calls this process either ‘misrepresentation’, which hides an emotion from others, or ‘transmutation’, which hides it from oneself as well.¹⁹ This is enormously important to a scholarly exploration of jealousy, because it requires the speech and behaviour of a jealous person to be examined well beyond the surface level. Observers do this subconsciously, through a cultural internalization of the jealousy prototype. However Parrott notes that, while an outside person would perceive jealousy, the patient themselves will most likely experience, or believe they are experiencing, anxious insecurity before the partner leaves them, or indignant anger afterwards.²⁰ This may lead to revenge against either the partner (if love turns to hatred) or the rival (especially if there is a strong admixture of envy). In the absence of such closure, a natural path would be a period of recrimination, followed by some measure of acceptance.²¹

Euripides’ *Medea*: situational antecedents and consequent actions

The Nurse informs us in the prologue that Medea lived with Jason as her husband, bearing everything with him jointly (11-13)²² – an unusually close, and equal, partnership in the Greek world.²³ But Jason has left Medea and married (18-19: γάμοις ... εὐνάζεται, γήμας) Creon’s daughter, Glauce.²⁴ By line 19 we know we have an abandoned woman, her ex-partner, and a rival.

The Nurse tells us too about the strength of their relationship: from the first moment Medea met Jason, her heart was struck with *erôs* for him (8: ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ’). The Chorus too is well aware of the strength, and violence, of Medea’s passion for Jason. From the time she fled Iolkos with him, she had mad passion in her heart (433: μαινομένα κραδίᾳ). Following her first confrontation with Jason, they talk of *erôs* that comes too excessively (627-8: ἔρωτες ὑπὲρ μὲν ἄγαν ἐλθόντες) and sing not one, but two hymns to the power of Aphrodite (627-42, 824-45).²⁵ Jason too asserts that Medea feels *erôs* for him (530: ὡς Ἔρωσ σ’ ἠνάγκασε), though Medea herself only speaks of it in the abstract (330: βροτοῖς ἔρωτες ὡς κακὸν μέγα).

¹⁷ Wurmser and Jarass (2008b) 15-19 discuss the conflict between love and jealousy: love is theoretically unconditional and about the individuality and unconditional acceptance of the other, while jealousy is about *my* sexual desires, *my* loss, *my* humiliation, *my* aggression; however, love seems almost inherently to contain the capacity to be overpowered by jealousy when sexual desire is frustrated.

¹⁸ Elster (1999) 96-7. This masking effect is more commonly recognized for envy – see n. 56 below.

¹⁹ Elster (1999) 341-402 for a detailed discussion of transmutation and misrepresentation (of all emotions).

²⁰ Parrott (1991) 5-6, who states: ‘It is easy to imagine situations in which an envious or jealous person is the *last* person to know that envy or jealousy motivates his or her actions’ (6).

²¹ Hupka (1991) 255-6; Sharpsteen (1991) 43-5.

²² All line numbers refer to Eur. *Med.* unless otherwise stated.

²³ Page (1938/2001) believes equality would require the prefix be *homo-* rather than *xum-*. Mastronarde (2002) 165 comments that this leaves some ambiguity as to whether she is equal or subordinate to Jason, but elsewhere (9, 167-8) states that their partnership is one of equals.

²⁴ Jason’s new wife is not named in the play, but for convenience I adopt the name most usually given her. Page (1938/2001) xxv n. 4 and E.E. Griffiths (2006) 8 note the alternative name Creousa.

²⁵ Mastronarde (2002) 16.

We are never explicitly told that Jason felt *erôs* for her in return.²⁶ However we do know that their relationship had a strong sexual element, and this is made clear by the extraordinary frequency of Greek words for the bed: *lechos*, *lektron*, *eunê*, or *koitê* occur twenty times as a euphemism for their old relationship, and twelve for his new one.²⁷ Indeed *Medea* has the highest number of bed words (at thirty-six) of any extant tragedy.²⁸ In Greek ‘the bed’ can be a euphemism for sex (and again *Medea* has by far the highest number with this meaning),²⁹ or marriage. The bed motif is first introduced by the Nurse and Tutor in the prologue, and the Chorus in the *parodos*, where it appears several times referring to Jason’s new marriage (18: ἐυνάζεται, 88: εὐνής, 140: λέκτρα, 156: λέχη).³⁰ *Medea* is at this point said merely to have *erôs* for the bed of death (151-2: τᾶς ἀπλάτου κοίτας ἔρος), since Jason has betrayed their marriage (207: ἐν λέχει προδόταν). The bed is here placed at the centre of their marriage,³¹ and it is the bed as concrete symbol (rather than e.g. the abstract γάμος) that Jason betrays.

However, the bed is not just a metonym for their marriage, but also for what is performed on it – i.e. sex.³² *Medea* first draws attention to this herself, when she talks about going into the palace to kill Jason and his new bride as they lie on their bed (380: ἴν’ ἔστρωται λέχος). The Chorus says *Medea* has lost her marriage since her bed is manless (435-6: τᾶς ἀνάνδρου κοίτας ὀλέσασα λέκτρον), and another queen now rules over her marriage-bed (443: τῶν τε λέκτρων ἄλλα βασιλεία κρείσσω δόμοισιν ἐπέστα) – both comments having strong sexual overtones.

In the *agôn* *Medea* complains Jason has made a new marriage (489: καινὰ δ’ ἐκτήσω λέχη): if she had been barren, then she could understand him feeling *erôs* for someone else’s bed (491: τοῦδ’ ἐρασθῆναι λέχους); as things are, he has betrayed the oaths they swore.³³ In response, Jason draws attention to her *erôs*, saying it would be invidious to point out that *Medea* is besotted with him (529-30: ἐπίφθονος λόγος διελθεῖν ὡς Ἔρωσ σ’ ἠνάγκασε), doing

²⁶ *Medea* says she knows Jason now feels *erôs* elsewhere (491), though to Aigeus (698, perhaps dissembling to avoid showing her true feelings) she says his *erôs* is for political advancement, not for her rival Glauce. The only other time the word is used is of Aigeus’ desire for children (714).

²⁷ *Medea* and Jason’s relationship (*lechos* 41, 207, 555, 568, 571, 591, 641, 697, 999, 1338, 1354; *lektron* 286, 436, 443, 639; *eunê* 265, 570, 640, 1338; *koitê* 436); Jason and Glauce’s (*lechos* 156, 380, 489, 491, 887, 1367; *lektron* 140, 594, 1348; *eunê* 18, 88, 1027); here and in nn. 28, 29 I exclude cognates that always mean spouse/bed-sharer – e.g. *xuneunetês*, *akoitis*). Bed words particularly abound during *Medea*’s first and final scenes with Jason (446-626, 1317-1414).

²⁸ Large numbers of bed words also occur in several other Euripides plays: 33 in *Helen*, 28 in *Andromache*, and 23 in *Hippolytus*. Aeschylus’ highest is 17 in *Agamemnon*, and Sophocles’ is 19 in *Trachiniae*. All these plays’ plots involve rivals for a legitimate spouse.

²⁹ Greek bed words (*lechos*, *lektron*, *eunê*, and *koitê*) are always potentially euphemisms for sex – though they can also mean bed, bedding, sleep, death, marriage or spouse. E.g. in Hom. *Od.* 23 (concerning Odysseus’ marriage with Penelope, centred round a physical bed) bed words are used 21 times, 15 meaning bed/bedding (ten *lech-/lektr-*, five *eun-*), three meaning sex (219, 254, 346; two *eun-*, one *lektr-*), and three implying both (257, 294, 354; two *eun-*, one *lech-*); in *Od.* 10 (concerning Odysseus’ sexual relationship with Circe) there are ten bed words, two meaning bed (both *lech-*), and eight meaning sex (all *eun-*). This suggests that *eun-*, at least in origin, has a stronger implication of sex than *lech-/lektr-*; we should also note that the latter roots only give us an object (*lechos*, *lektron*), while the former gives us both an object (*eunê*) and an activity (*eunazô*).

³⁰ *Medea*’s bed is also referred to in the Nurse’s opening speech (41: λέχος), but this line is almost certainly an interpolation, copied from 380 – see Page (1938/2001) 68.

³¹ Cf. D.L. Cairns (2008) 54-5.

³² Burnett (1998) 194-5 denies that the stress on *Medea*’s bed has anything to do with her sexual pleasure, but a focus on pleasure misses the point: for *Medea*, sex with her husband is both an end in itself, and also a sign of the continuing health of her marriage, in which is bound up everything she holds dear (see below).

³³ Presumably marriage oaths. Easterling (1977a) 180-1, Allan (2002) 50-1 for the argument that Jason and *Medea* were legitimately married, despite her being a barbarian, and the Corinthian Women agree (267, 578).

it anyway. Jason constantly alludes to the sexual use of the marriage-bed: he says he did not leave her because he hated having sex with her, nor through longing for a new bride (555-6: οὐχ ... σὸν μὲν ἐχθαίρων λέχος, καινῆς δὲ νύμφης ἰμέρω πεπληγμένος). *Himeros* means sexual desire, and its juxtaposition to *lechos* indicates we should read the latter as sex, not bed or marriage; *numphê* also draws attention to Medea and Glauce's relative ages, a reason for Glauce's greater sexual attractiveness. Jason argues that it is Medea who is chafed by matters sexual: 'Honestly', he says, 'all you women care about is sex. If sex is going well, you think you have everything; if there's a problem with your sex life, even the finest things are totally wrong.' (568-73: οὐδ' ἂν σὺ φαίης, εἴ σε μὴ κνίζοι λέχος, ἀλλ' ἐς τοσοῦτον ἤκεθ' ὥστ' ὀρθουμένης εὐνῆς γυναῖκες πάντ' ἔχειν νομίζετε, ἦν δ' αὖ γένηται χυμφορά τις ἐς λέχος, τὰ λῶστα καὶ κάλλιστα πολεμιώτατα τίθεσθε).

He exits, and the Chorus sing a hymn to Aphrodite (the goddess of sexual love – as usual in tragedy called Cypris for metrical reasons), primly wishing for a happy marriage.³⁴ In words recalling Medea's falling for Jason, they pray that Cypris may not strike them likewise with desire for other beds (639: θυμὸν ἐκπλήξασ' ἑτέροις ἐπὶ λέκτροις; cf. 8) – bed words occurring three times in as many lines (639: λέκτροις; 640: εὐνάς; 641: λέχη). When Medea is telling Aigeus about Jason leaving her, he asks whether it was because of *erôs* for another woman or because his sexual union with Medea grew hateful (697: ἐρασθεὶς ἢ σὸν ἐχθαίρων λέχος) – again the juxtaposition of sexual desire and *lechos* indicates how we should translate the latter. Medea replies that it was a great *erôs* (698: μέγαν γ' ἔρωτα). Despite Jason's avoidance of the word, Euripides makes very clear the extraordinary role of sexual passion, and the sex act itself, in their marriage.

Medea's womanhood, and her wifely duties for Jason, also loom large in her rhetoric. In her opening speech she says that everything in the world for her, as Jason himself knew, was embodied in one person: her husband (228-9: ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ἦν μοι πάντα, γινώσκει καλῶς, ... οὐμὸς πόσις). This point is crucial. She goes on to lament the female lot (230-51): a woman must pay a dowry, take a husband (233: πόσιν), and provide him with sex – he becomes a master to her inheritance, her house and her body (233). Women must leave aside their own habits and customs (238), and work hard at taking on those of their husband (240: ζυνευνέτη). She says that men have life easy: the hardest thing they must do is fight in battle, but that is more than three times preferable to the pain of childbirth (250-1).³⁵

Having established how much wives must suffer – as women, as home-makers, and as mothers – Medea tells how she has suffered even more than other women as Jason's wife. Unlike her audience (the Chorus of Greek women), she has nowhere else to turn: she has no city, no father, no friends, no mother, no brother, no relatives (252-8). This is because of all the things she did in her passion for Jason when she was first struck with *erôs* (8), before he took her from her home: she betrayed her father and her homeland, murdered her brother, and killed Jason's uncle, Pelias (32, 483, 503, 1332).³⁶ In forging their partnership she cut herself off from, and made enemies of, all those who should naturally be her *philoï*, and now she has

³⁴ De Wet (1983) 218-19 notes that by the fourth century Aphrodite had replaced Hera as the goddess of marriage, and contemporaneously it was being accepted that sexual desire had an important part to play in marriage: '[Euripides] is very much at the beginning of this new thinking, openly recognizing the emotional needs and rights of a woman as an individual in the partnership of marriage where passionate love is transcending the traditional role of the wife as mistress of the home. He recognizes that not only the man but also the woman has emotional needs and the right to seek sexual satisfaction in marriage.'

³⁵ See Goldhill (1986) 115-17 on the engagement of this speech with Athenian ideology.

³⁶ The murder of the brother, part of the Medea mythology (E.E. Griffiths (2006) 7), is elided by Euripides.

nowhere to turn. In bloodily severing herself from her roles as daughter, sister, citizen and princess, she has made being Jason's wife, mistress of his house, and mother of his children, even more formative to her self-conception than is normal in ancient Greek society.³⁷ Abandoned for another woman, and on the verge of having her children taken away from her, Medea has at a stroke lost everything in her life. Her entire self-conception is now formed by being a wife and a mother, and losing it all in this way creates exactly the antecedent situational conditions for a sexual jealousy scenario.

It is for these reasons that Jason's behaviour has been such an outrage (255-6: ὑβρίζομαι πρὸς ἄνδρός), and Medea feels fully justified in seeking revenge, or justice, against her husband (261: πόσιν δίκην τῶνδ' ἀντιτείσασθαι κακῶν).³⁸ She concludes her introductory speech: 'Whenever a woman is wronged in the marriage-bed, then no other heart is more murderous' (265-6: ὅταν δ' ἐξ εὐνήν ἠδικημένη κυρῆ, οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρήν μαιφονωτέρα). It is hard to overstate the importance of this statement. This is Medea speaking, not others attempting to understand her. To the obvious objection that Medea manipulates and deceives everyone she encounters in the play, I reply first that the context is one in which she is explicitly expressing her intention to take revenge (though the full extent of that revenge is at this stage unclear), and second that she does not conceal her motives from the Chorus anywhere else. There is therefore no reason not to take this passage seriously. Though it would be a mistake to regard it as *the* clue to her psychology, it is an important indicator of just how we should understand the rest of the play. In her opening speech, Medea tells us it is as a wife and woman that she feels wronged, and the rest of the play must be read with this in mind. 'Jason has abandoned me,' she is saying, 'and in doing so he has hit me where it hurts most, in our marriage, in our bed, in our sex-life, in the thing that makes us women more murderous than any other; and I *will* take revenge on my husband.'

This revenge, then, is an organic development from Medea's abandonment as a wife and a woman, in favour of another. From the beginning she says she will seek revenge, and from rumours that have reached Creon, this will be against him and the newly-weds (288). But later she conceives a worse punishment for Jason. She talks successively with three men (Creon, Jason and Aigeus), and each one mentions the importance of children to him. Creon orders Medea out the country, lest she do some evil to his daughter (282-3). He continually mentions how he loves his family, how his child is more dear to him than his country (327, 329), and how much he fears for her (282, 317, 356).

At this stage Medea still intends her revenge to be to kill the newly-weds and those who arranged the alliance (366-7), thus tying it firmly to Jason's re-marriage, and she reconfirms Creon, Glauce, and Jason as her targets (374-5).³⁹ However, repeatedly expressed concern with children changes her mind. In her first scene with Jason, he says his abandonment of her was because a new marriage would bring advantages to their children, through alliance with the royal family and influential brothers (549-50). Finally, Aigeus explains he is on his way home from Delphi, where he went for advice to relieve his childlessness (670-1). By this point Medea has fully grasped the importance men place on having children.⁴⁰ In begging

³⁷ Friedrich (1993) 227; see also Gabriel (1992) 351-2. Burnett (1998) 195 also notes that Medea's marriage-bed symbolizes these three roles: Jason's wife, mother of Jason's *genos*, mistress of Jason's *oikos*.

³⁸ I agree with Page (1938/2001) that line 262, in which Medea extends her planned revenge to Glauce and Creon, must for narrative reasons be an interpolation.

³⁹ Mastrorarde (2002) 233 says she continues to maintain the illusion for the audience (and Chorus) that she intends to kill Jason rather than the children. I disagree: I do not believe she has *yet* decided to kill the children.

⁴⁰ Cf. McHardy (2008) 63.

Aigeus' help, she says she will cure his childlessness. With dramatic irony for her intended revenge, she says she will help Aigeus go from being childless (*apais*) to having *paides* – a journey she will first make Jason take in reverse – before mentioning her potions (717-18) – which, in death- rather than life-giving form, she will first use on Glauce.

When Aigeus leaves the stage she spells out her revised revenge: she will use her *paides* to kill the *pais* of the king, and then she will kill her own children, thus destroying Jason's entire (past and future) house (774-94) – something she had impotently wished for in the prologue (112-14), before attaining the means to bring it about.⁴¹ Jason will neither see his *paides* alive again, she says, nor have more from his newly-yoked bride (803-6). She will kill not just Glauce, but her own children too, as that is the best way for her husband to be hurt (817). The Chorus reminds us that Medea is seeking revenge for the sake of her bridal bed (999: *νυμφιδίων ἔνεκεν λεγέων*) and because her husband abandoned her to make an *oikos* with another bedfellow (1001: *ἄλλα ξυνοικεῖ πόσις συνεύω*), and this foreshadows the final scene.

After exacting her revenge, Medea has a showdown with Jason, and once again bed words and Medea's role as wife and woman recur repeatedly, with both the marriage and her revenge linked directly to sex. Jason says that after their marriage (1336: *νυμφευθεῖσα* – when she was a sexually-ripe *νύμφη*) Medea bore him children, but now has killed them because of sex and the marriage-bed (1338: *ἐννῆς ἕκατι καὶ λέχους σφ' ἀπώλεσας*). Medea responds that she could not allow him to dishonour her marriage-bed (1354: *σὺ δ' οὐκ ἔμελλες τᾶμ' ἀτιμάσας λέχη*); she killed them because of his *hubris* and because of his newly-built marriage (1366), and to bring him pain (1370) and grief (1398). Jason cannot believe she did all this because of his re-marriage (1367: *λέχους ... οὐνεκα*), but Medea says that such a disaster is no small thing for a woman (1368). For her that is all the answer needed, and takes us back to the end of her first speech, that 'Whenever a woman is wronged in the marriage-bed, then no other heart is more murderous' (265-6).

Medea's psychological affects

I now turn to the emotions aroused in Medea by Jason's betrayal. The first introduced is grief, and again it is the Nurse who first informs us that Medea lies in bed, not eating, surrendering her body to tears (24-5). Mastronarde notes that: 'loss of appetite and inactivity, such as staying in bed, are signs of severe psychic turmoil (from grief or love)'.⁴² Medea's grief is hammered home to us, as the Chorus, the Nurse, and Medea herself use a plethora of suffering and grieving words: cries (132, 135: *βοάν*); wretched (133, 149: *δυστάνου/ος*); griefs (136: *ἄλγεσιν*); she pines (141: *τάκει*); alas (146: *φεῦ φεῦ*); wail (149: *ἄχάν*); grieving (159: *δυρομένα*); I suffer (161: *πάσχω*); sorrow (184: *πένθος*); and finally, 'I heard the loud-groaning wail of her mourning, as she cries her wailing and wretched griefs' (205-6: *ἄχάν ἄιον πολύστονον γόων, λιγυρὰ δ' ἄχρα μογερὰ βοᾷ*).

Two other strong emotions that Medea expresses are anger and hatred. Again from the Nurse we first learn that Medea's love has turned to hatred (16: *ἐχθρά*). Her eyes glare bull-like (92), and her rage (94: *χόλου*) will last till she rushes down on someone (93-4).⁴³ She is

⁴¹ Cf. Mastronarde (2002) 184.

⁴² Mastronarde (2002) 168 – these are symptoms of betrayed *erôs*.

⁴³ The word used here, *kataskêpsai*, is generally used of storms or divine wrath (LSJ).

stirring up her heart and her wrath (99: κινεῖ κραδίαν, κινεῖ δὲ χόλον),⁴⁴ and the children should be on guard against her wild character and hating nature (102-3: φυλσσεσθ' ἄγριον ἦθος στυγεράν τε φύσιν); her *thumos* is enlarged (108: μείζονι θυμῷ), and her spleen is hard to check (109: μεγαλόσπλαγχνος δυσκατάπαυστος). The Nurse says Medea will only give over her anger with difficulty (121: χαλεπῶς ὀργὰς μεταβάλλουσιν). The Chorus tell Medea not to sharpen her anger (157: μὴ χαράσσου), despite injustice from Jason and Glauce, as it is wearing her down; she should put aside the *orgê* in the depths of her *thumos*, and the temper in her breast (176-7: βαρύθυμον ὀργάν και λῆμα φρενῶν).⁴⁵

Creon acknowledges Medea's *thumos* is roused at her husband (271: πόσει θυμουμένην). She will be feeling *lupê* (pain, distress, grief) at being robbed of her husband's bed (286: λέκτρων ἀνδρὸς).⁴⁶ He has heard she has made threats against the newly-weds and against himself. Medea dissembles: Creon has done nothing wrong, she says; it is merely her husband she hates (310-1: ἀλλ' ἐμὸν πόσιν μισῶ); she does not begrudge (312: οὐ φθονῶ) Creon's good fortune. Jason, after some general comments about people who feel *orgê*, turns specifically to Medea: she hates him (463: στυγεῖς), he says; Medea agrees (467: ἔχθιστος). The Chorus observe that *orgê* is terrible (520: δεινὴ τις ὀργή) whenever *philo*i join in strife (521: ἔριν).⁴⁷ Jason continues to refer to her anger: the great *cholos* in her heart (590), her *orgê* (615), and her inability to let it go (621: ἀθάδια, cf. 103-4).

In all, Medea's anger is referred to twenty-one times throughout the play (*orgê*: 121, 176, 447, 520, 615, 870, 909; *cholos*: 94, 99, 172, 590, 898, 1266; *thumos*: 108, 176, 271, 865, 879, 883, 1056, 1079), and her hatred is referred to twelve times (*misos*: 311; *stygos*: 36, 103, 113, 463, 1374; *echthos*: 117, 290, 467, 1374; *echthra*: 16, 45). These feelings are almost invariably aimed at Jason, though in the prologue a few times at their children (36, 103, 113, 117), whose presence or existence brings home what she has lost. In addition, Creon and Glauce are referred to on no fewer than thirteen occasions as Medea's enemies (*echthro*i: 45, 95, 278, 374, 383, 744, 750, 765, 767, 809, 897, 1050, 1060; and she theirs twice – 734, 875), though she does not use other hating words about them.

A fourth emotion expressed regularly, if less frequently, is pride. This is behind Medea's claims that Jason dishonoured her (696, 1354; the Nurse agrees: 20, 33) and that he committed *hubris* against her (255, 603, 1366).⁴⁸ Her pride is further shown by her concern, expressed six times, that her enemies might laugh at her (383, 404, 797, 1049, 1355, 1362):

⁴⁴ Note the active voice of *kinei*: this is not something that is just happening to Medea, she is actively perpetuating it.

⁴⁵ Arist. *Rh.* 2.2.1378a30-32: *orgê* is a desire for revenge for an injury. Jason and Glauce committed the original injury, hence their action was unjust. Konstan (2006) 61-5 argues that in *Trojan Women* Hecuba unwillingly accepts the Greeks' slaying of her daughter, since revenge is impossible; however when Polymester slays her son she has a means of revenge, so feels *cholos*. By analogy, in *Medea* the Chorus believe she (a foreign woman) must just accept the injury; revenge is out of the question, so anger is pointless; however, Medea *knows* she can take revenge, so she spurs on (99: κινεῖ) her rage.

⁴⁶ *Lupê* is the word Aristotle uses, in conjunction with a desire for revenge, to describe the emotion *orgê* (*Rh.* 2.2.1378a30: ὀργή ὀρεξίς μετὰ λύπης τιμωρίας).

⁴⁷ The word *eris* is used repeatedly to characterize the relationship between Neoptolemos' wife Hermione and his putative concubine Andromache, and the jealousy of the former for the latter, in Euripides' *Andromache* (directly: 122, 490, 573, 960; metaphorically or indirectly: 279, 362, 467, 477, 644).

⁴⁸ Arist. *Rh.* 2.2.1378b14-15 gives *hubris* as one of the three causes of *orgê* (see below) – Medea's pride and rage are not isolated or competing motivations, but intimately bound up with each other.

she could not bear to be an object of ridicule to them.⁴⁹ The laughter of her enemies would be intolerable (797; cf. 383, 404), she says; no one must think her low, feeble or meek (807-8); rather she wants supreme *kleos* (810; heroic renown). It is for such reasons that Medea is often portrayed as acting from heroic pride, but this pride is not unconnected to her jealousy. She will be mocked by the people who have taken away what defined her in life: her husband. And it is her husband himself who first begins to mock her by belittling her feelings – he says she is merely chafed (555: κνίζη) that he left her for reasons entirely unconnected with her, merely irked (568: κνίζοι) by feelings of sexual inconsequentiality – reducing even this sexual motive to the level of a physical itch. Medea fears her enemies will not take her seriously, and will just laugh at and degrade her; and here Jason, the very person who should respect her most, is the one leading the way in belittling her.

Medea's expressed emotions – her anger, hatred, grief and wounded pride – are not just stand-alone, but at least some of them are also part of a jealousy complex,⁵⁰ since they are tied up with the destruction of Medea's marriage by Jason's abandonment of her, by his forsaking of her bed and her sexual favours for the bed and favours of a rival, and (more generally) by his scorning and belittling her as a wife and a woman. Modern psychologists tell us that those who feel jealous typically talk about anger and betrayal, and try to take some measure of revenge. In English we do not expect a jilted woman to say 'I am so jealous' to her husband; rather she might scream 'I can't believe you cheated on me', and run a nail down the side of his car. Medea essentially does the same, though this being Greek tragedy her revenge is more murderous (266: μαιφονωτέρα).

The form and extent of her revenge make us aware that a fifth emotion pervades the play, and this is *phthonos*, or begrudging envy.⁵¹ This *phthonos* lacks the frequent expression of the other four emotions, but there is a reason for this. Modern scholarship notes that envy is even more taboo than jealousy, and is directly claimed even less frequently.⁵² The taboo seems to have been equally present in ancient Greece: *phthonos* is such a damning emotion that, while appearing frequently in accusation, it is almost never claimed for oneself.⁵³ Just as modern theory tells us that the jealousy of someone abandoned can involve envy for their rival, so it does for Medea.

Envy's most salient characteristic is a malicious hostility and ill-will, which drives acts of deep destructiveness, and it is characterized by a stronger desire for the other person not to enjoy something that the patient does not have, than a desire to obtain it too.⁵⁴ According to

⁴⁹ In the end she avoids her misfortunes giving her enemies pleasure, and takes pleasure in their own misfortunes herself (1133-5); Allan (2002) 74-5, 83-4, 93 notes that she wishes to feel *Schadenfreude* so they cannot.

⁵⁰ *Contra* Konstan (2003) 23-4: 'we must allow for the possibility that where we perceive the emotion jealousy, the Greeks may have felt distinct sentiments, including anger, envy, sadness and emulousness, without assembling these several responses into a single compound'. D.L. Cairns (2008) 53-6 also disputes Konstan's rejection of sexual jealousy as a motivation for Medea. NB I am not arguing that anger and pride are not genuine motivations for Medea in their own right – I think they are; but anger, too, can also express a socially acceptable aspect of a less creditable response.

⁵¹ See Leuzinger-Bohleber (2001) 332 on Medea's envy of Glauce.

⁵² Ben-Ze'ev (2000) 321-2. For the taboo on claiming envy see also Schoeck (1966/1969) 14, Elster (1999) 164, R.H. Smith (1991) 85.

⁵³ *Phthonos* is claimed only twice in all surviving Archaic and Classical Greek texts, interestingly both times in Euripides (*Bacch.* 820; fr. 334.1 Kannicht).

⁵⁴ Elster (1999) 171; Wurmser and Jarass (2008a) xii; Rawls (1999) 466-7, 469; Ben-Ze'ev (2000) 283; G. Foster (1972) 172; Wolf (1955) 460.

Aristotle, this is equally the case for *phthonos*.⁵⁵ It is characteristic of envy that, due to the taboo nature of the emotion, it is frequently misrepresented as, or transmuted into, righteous indignation.⁵⁶ Similarly in Greek culture, Aristotle talks about how easily *phthonos* can be confused with indignation (which he calls *to nemesan*).⁵⁷ And this is what we see here: Medea talks many times about being wronged, and even more often about justice (*dikê*: 165, 219, 221, 261, 265, 309, 314, 580, 582, 692, 764, 767, 802), almost from her very first words.⁵⁸ This emotion is valid (the Nurse and Chorus agree she has been wronged – 26, 158, 208, 267, 411, 578, 1232); but Medea’s genuine and justified indignation comes inseparably bound with transmuted envy.⁵⁹ She has been deprived of her marriage, and is to be deprived likewise of her children. Begrudging envy, aroused by jealousy, ensures she will not let Jason keep them. It is this that drives her destructiveness against Jason’s new marriage, and against his children.

Medea’s emotional vocabulary

The Greek word normally translated as (sexual) jealousy is *zêlotupia*,⁶⁰ but the earliest surviving uses of the word date from the early 380s BCE (Ar. *Plut.* 1016; Pl. *Symp.* 213d2), while *Medea* was written more than forty years earlier (431 BCE). The primary word used for Medea’s passion is *erôs*. This is more than a desire to acquire a sexual object; for instance Thucydides writes that the Athenians felt *erôs* for embarking on the conquest of Sicily (Thuc. 6.24.3) – here it implies a desire to acquire, enjoy, and retain – though Thucydides is of course employing a metaphor for sexual yearning. This is certainly applicable to Medea, whose *erôs* for Jason demands exclusive possession,⁶¹ but it cannot be the whole story as, after her revenge and destruction of the rival, Medea is happy to end the play without possessing her husband.

Our best evidence for ancient Greek emotions in the Classical period comes from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*,⁶² but Aristotle ignores both *erôs* and *zêlotupia*. He does deal with *zêlos*, etymologically the parent emotion, but that is merely emulation for goods and qualities we do not possess (Arist. *Rh.* 2.11, 1388a32-5). *Phthonos* is more relevant: although it is principally felt when we lack something we want (English envy), it also applies when we wish to hold on

⁵⁵ Arist. *Rh.* 2.9.1386b20-21: τὸ δὲ μὴ ὅτι αὐτῷ τι συμβήσεται ἕτερον, ἀλλὰ δι’ αὐτὸν τὸν πλησίον, ἅπασιν ὁμοίως δεῖ ὑπάρχειν; 2.11.1388a37-38: ὁ δὲ τὸν πλησίον μὴ ἔχειν διὰ τὸν φθόνον.

⁵⁶ Elster (1999) 98, 169; Parrott (1991) 5-6; Etchegoyen, Lopez and Rabih (1987) 50; R.H. Smith (2004).

⁵⁷ Arist. *Rh.* 2.9.1386b17: ὡς σύνεγγυς ὦν καὶ ταῦτὸν τῷ νεμεσᾶν.

⁵⁸ Gentili (1972) and (2000), and Giacomoni (2000) argue that Jason’s injustice is in not sharing his wife’s bed. Medea wants him in her bed *not* because she is sexually insatiable, but because that is the proper place for a Greek husband to be: he should be fulfilling his conjugal duties.

⁵⁹ It is possible to read Greeks rationalizing jealous revenge through the language of justice, honour and anger all the way back to Menelaus in the *Iliad* – see Bonanno (1973) on the relationship between the language of injustice (*adikia*) and the broken expectations of reciprocal amorous relationships; Pizzocaro (1994) 21-5 on Menelaus’ jealousy. Goldhill (2003) 167 has argued, in the context of *Medea*, that: ‘The language of *phthonos* (which is sometimes translated as ‘jealousy’) is linked, and subordinate, to the language of ‘honour’ (*timê*) and ‘wrong’ (*adikein*)’.

⁶⁰ Konstan (2006) 222-32 argues against this translation in the Classical period, and I broadly agree with his arguments.

⁶¹ She does not require fidelity, or at least does not say so (and indeed in Greece it would have been unusual if she had – see Kovacs (1980) 15-16), but she does not accept Jason having any other wife but her.

⁶² Aristotle is not of course commenting specifically on Eur. *Med.*, and his treatise was written nearly a century later; likewise Euripides is not a philosopher, and is not bound to be consistent in his terms as would a philosopher. But (as will be seen) the remarkable degree to which Aristotle’s thinking explains Medea’s language is a testament to how well both men understood the psychology of Greek emotions.

to something we see as ours (English jealousy).⁶³ This is most clearly seen when *phthonos* is directed at someone who has something we have lost (*Rh.* 2.10, 1388a21-22: [φθονοῦσιν] τοῖς ἢ ἔχουσι ταῦτα ἢ κεκτημένοις ὅσα αὐτοῖς ... ἐκέκτηντό ποτε). Aristotle is not speaking here of sexual jealousy, rather of possessive jealousy more generally;⁶⁴ but he goes on to note that, among other cases, we feel *phthonos* most especially against our rivals in love (*Rh.* 2.10, 1388a15-16: πρὸς τοὺς ... ἀντεραστὰς ..., ἀνάγκη μάλιστα τούτοις φθονεῖν). It is clear therefore that Medea's emotions can at least partly be described as *phthonos*.

However, there are two other emotions we must consider: *orgê* (anger) and *misos* (hatred). *Orgê*, according to Aristotle, is a desire for revenge in return for a belittlement (*Rh.* 2.2, 1378a30-2). It is necessary to actually perceive that you have been belittled, and similarly for the belittler to perceive the revenge. Aristotle mentions three types of belittlement: *kataphronêsis*, *epêreasmos* and *hubris* (1378b14-15). *Kataphronêsis* is contempt, showing you believe the other person to be of no importance (1378b15-17); *epêreasmos* is a disinterested slighting, thwarting someone's wishes with no benefit to yourself (1378b18-20); *hubris* involves taking pleasure in shaming someone (1378b23-25) – it is an insult, an insolent arrogance. Medea several times says that Jason has treated her with *hubris* (255, 603, 1366); she does not include Glauce and Creon – however, they are certainly included in the list of people who might laugh at her, behaviour Aristotle considers *hubris* (1379a30-32).⁶⁵ It is also fairly clear that Jason has considered Medea of no account (i.e. he is contemptuous of her) in assuming he can pension her off at will, and in persistently belittling her emotions. It is clear then that *orgê* has an important part to play.

Misos differs from *orgê*. In Greek terms, it is the emotion one feels for one's *echthroi* (personal enemies), people who harm you without provocation. Creon is in this position: he is peripheral to the jealousy triangle, but has abetted Medea's abandonment; but although he has harmed her, he has not belittled her – on the contrary, he wants her out the country precisely because he fears how formidable an *echthros* she might be. Medea's feelings towards Creon are thus well labelled *misos*.

Her feelings towards Glauce are best described as hostile envy, a blend of *misos* and *phthonos*, both of which can lead to destruction of their target. In the Greek value system, Medea cannot admit to *phthonos*, so she can but talk of her hatred. Self-presentationally, she avoids the charge of *phthonos* by lumping Glauce in with Creon as jointly 'my *echthroi*', and she does so frequently. Although she could potentially feel *orgê* for them if they were to mock her, this has not yet happened. The appropriate action towards one's *echthroi* is to cause them harm – Aristotle describes *misos* (which he also refers to as *to misein* and *echthra*) as a desire to harm (*Rh.* 2.4, 1382a8) – and killing someone is the most harm you can do them.

Medea's feelings for Jason, however, are best described as a mixture of *phthonos*, not so much with *misos* (which, though present, is less important), but rather with *orgê*. Since once

⁶³ On the distinctions between envy and jealousy, see Sanders (forthcoming) ch. 2, Parrott (1991) 23-7, Ben-Ze'ev (2000) 281-2, Klein (1957/1975) 181-2, Neu (1980) 432-5.

⁶⁴ Another instance Aristotle gives where *phthonos* involves possessive jealousy is people who do great deeds and have good fortune (including those honoured for a distinction, especially wisdom or happiness), as they think others will try to take something away from them (*Rh.* 2.10, 1387b28-31). Other examples from the Classical period where *phthonos* implies possessive jealousy include: Ar. *Eq.* 880; Xen. *Mem.* 4.2.33.11; Pl. *Leg.* 730e5, *Spur.* 376d5, *Spur.* 376d8; Isoc. 4.29.4.

⁶⁵ She also believes Glauce and Creon would treat her children with *hubris* if she left them behind (782), and the Corinthians would too after the children were made complicit in the royal deaths (1061, 1380).

again Greek cultural taboos ensure that *phthonos* cannot be admitted, all that is left for Medea to talk about is her response to her belittlement and her injury by Jason: her *orgê*. David Konstan argues that:

The object of anger ... is to cause pain to the other. A slight makes one feel small, and the only way to get even is to induce a similar feeling in the other. It follows that, for an angry person to get revenge, the original offender must be aware of it (*aisthesthai*), since there is no such thing as unperceived pain (hence the stipulation in the definition of anger that the revenge, like the slight itself, must be perceived), whereas to one who hates it is a matter of indifference whether an enemy is aware or not of the damage done to him. That is why we may wish that people whom we hate should die, but when we are angry, what we desire is that the other person feel in return (*antipathein*) the kind of diminishment that provoked our anger in the first place (2.4, 1382a14-15). The death of the other would render that impossible.⁶⁶

Creon and Glauce wantonly inflicted harm on Medea; it is for this reason she wants them dead. At first, she believes this is what she wants for Jason too (hence *misos* is present); however, as she reflects, she realizes that is not sufficient punishment: his was not the injuring of an *echthros*, but a deeply painful belittling; her anger is stronger than her hatred, and accordingly Jason must remain alive to perceive her revenge. This is why Medea, having determined that her revenge will be to kill Jason alongside Creon and Glauce (373-5), eventually changes her mind: Creon and Glauce will still die, but Jason must be left alive to know that his children are dead because of his treatment of Medea (774-96).

Conclusion

Sexual jealousy has suffered in the interpretation of this play partly because, like *phthonos*, its expression was taboo to the Greeks, but partly also because it does not have a convenient prototypical label in Greek, such as our word jealousy. The scenario was familiar to the Greeks – in this play, the Nurse, the Tutor, the Chorus of Corinthian Women, and Jason all recognize it, even if Medea does not,⁶⁷ and the inference must be that the audience recognize it too.⁶⁸ However, labelling the emotion is more difficult. Semantically, it appears that sexual jealousy falls somewhere between *erôs*, *phthonos*, *misos*, and *orgê*.⁶⁹ We can also note that Medea emphasizes certain elements of the jealousy prototype more than we might expect from modern psychological research, especially the blow to her pride (the *hubris* and the potential mocking laughter), her rage and her hatred. It is possible that the status-conscious

⁶⁶ Konstan (2006) 47.

⁶⁷ Cf. D.L. Cairns (2008) 55. Parrott (1991) 6 notes: ‘it is easy to imagine situations in which an envious or jealous person is the *last* person to know that envy or jealousy motivates his or her actions’.

⁶⁸ The scenario of rival for legitimate wife also occurs in Soph. *Trach.* and Eur. *Andr.*, and many aspects of Medea’s sexual jealousy scenario recur in all three plays: legitimate wives (actually or potentially) abandoned for a rival; roles as Greek wife (home-keeper, bedmate, bearer of legitimate children) threatened; *erôs* felt for partner; concern about exclusivity of position; concern with status, that the rival can give the husband something they cannot (Medea, power and status; Iole, youth and sexual allure; Andromache, male offspring); rival living under wife’s roof, or husband abandoning his *oikos* for the rival’s; anger felt for husband; hostility (albeit mild for Deianira) and *phthonos* felt for rival; distinctly expressed desire to beat rival – see Sanders (forthcoming) ch.8 for a detailed discussion of these other tragedies, as well as a survey of, and comparison with, male jealousy in oratory and comedy.

⁶⁹ D.L. Cairns (2008) 56 argues, with somewhat different emphasis, that Medea’s sexual jealousy is part of her *orgê*: ‘the fact that anger at insult and injustice does not *invariably* encompass jealousy does not mean that it may not’ – cf. his similar earlier comment regarding jealousy in English: ‘Anger at a partner who prefers someone else is a perfectly good way of referring to the prototypical scenario of ‘jealousy’’ (54).

Greeks were more sensitive to these aspects of the jealousy complex than we,⁷⁰ and therefore their vocabulary was better adapted to express these, rather than the complex as a whole.

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⁷⁰ Konstan (2006) 259-61 highlights the status-consciousness and competitiveness of the entire Greek emotional lexicon.

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