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The Art of Adaptation

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The Art of Adaptation: **An Essay on the Production of *Medea* in Modern Times**

Adapting scripts from myths is as old as theatre history itself. It is only natural that as time progressed we would take myths, poems, novels, and scripts of times past to adapt them for modern audiences. After all, in the words of T.S. Elliot: “Good writers Borrow, Great writers Steal.” This paper will move to discuss why we continue to produce Euripides’ play *Medea* in its original and adapted forms, and how different adaptations in theatre, opera, dance, and film shed new light on this ancient story to help it speak to us in our culture and lives today.

Rules of Adaptation

Adaptation of old works for the modern or contemporary audiences is something that is done frequently today, not only in theatre but in movies and through music and visual art. Specifically for stage and screen there are a few different considerations one must make when writing an adaptation. Marianne McDonald, a scholar and philanthropist who is known for her work in preserving Greek and Irish texts, has three requirements for adaptation that are discussed in Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.’s book *An Athenian Sun in an African Sky*. These three requirements are similar to what any already written play fights to communicate: the work asks questions of the audience, shows conflict, and connects with issues vital to the (contemporary) audience. These three requirements help make an adaptation, like the original, speak to the intended audience. Wetmore also discusses three things to consider when adapting a script: what is kept from the original, what is removed and what is altered or reworked. As far as alterations go Michael Etherton, an Irish director and educator working in Africa, talks about five of the alterations that

can and have been made in many adaptations: changing character/place names, changing period/setting, adapting contexts, altering story, and changing theme/focus.

Considering what McDonald, Wetmore, and Etherton have said we can see that the process of adaptation could be seen to some as perhaps an easy and freeing task. However if an author wants to stick closely to the original story it can be frustrating because you wonder, especially if you have only thirty minutes for your adaptation, what points are important and what can be left out or brushed over. I know specifically for my *Medea* adaptation that was something I struggled with. I wondered what characters and or scenes could be taken out without losing grip of the message of the piece. For example, although my adaptation is focused on Jason and Medea's broken relationship and how it hurts her and pushes her to seek extreme revenge, I learned that the piece does not carry as much weight if Medea is not some kind of an outsider; a theme in the play I thought would be too tough to tackle in such a short time. Finding balance in the piece is important and some plays, myths, stories, books, poems, etc, probably lend themselves more easily to adaptations than others.

There are also several different types of adaptations that can be made at varying levels of extremes using the processes and considerations of the previously mentioned scholars and theatre artists. A theatre artist, be they writer or director needs to consider their various options. In Gershon Shaked's essay "The Play: Gateway to Cultural Dialogue" from *The Play out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, he discusses several different forms of adaptation and how each of these affects the audience of the target culture. One option is to "...adapt and remodel a subject to make it fit new artistic and social norms in a new context." (Shaked 10) This type of adaptation would probably use the considerations and alterations discussed previously, as would the process of writing a new play based on the myth that

“...intentionally modified and adapts the materials to fit the needs of his own time, accounting for the theme in a new way and giving it a new form, to bring it home to an audience whose world of experience is unable to accept the causality of the classical theatre.” (Shaked 11)

Another option is to use the traditional text and simply do the piece in modern dress and in a modern setting “...transposing the materials without changing their basic norms. The director thus takes the play as given but attempts to shed new light upon it.” (Shaked 11) This is something we have seen done very frequently with the work of Shakespeare. Sometimes adaptations can even be parodies of the work, an example of this being Christopher Durang and Wendy Wasserstein’s very short *Medea*.

Theatrical works and stories of times past I believe will always fascinate the people of modern and future societies because although our society and culture have changed, the struggles of the characters in plays past are common human struggles that we continue to be faced with today: a husband who uses and deserts his wife, the struggle with the other woman, the pain a broken home can bring to children, being the outsider, fighting to survive.

Euripides’ Original

In my research, something interesting I came to learn was that Euripides even adapted the original myth into something new, more terrifying, and more relevant for his audience in 431 BC: he added in Medea killing her children. It is thought in the original myth that because the people of Corinth were so upset over the death of Creon and Glauce, they stone Medea and Jason’s children, Pheres and Mermeros, in the street. In the version of Medea’s tale by Kreophilos “Medea killed Kreon, then left her children in the temple of Hera, where the Corinthians killed them and then spread the rumor that Medea was the murderer.” (March 35) Some argue that Euripides created Medea and his other strong women to warn men to keep

control over their women, but I don't think that's the case, I don't think he was a misogynist. I think he actually shows the struggle of Medea as a strong woman and outsider who takes extreme measures to make the man who betrayed her feel the pain she has been feeling for some time now. I also think Euripides doesn't paint her as a monster especially through showing her internal debate about whether or not she will buy "...her own freedom at the price of the murder of her own children, which is represented in the text as a form of self-mutilation...so Medea's vengeance is a kind of self-sacrifice." (Rabinowitz 150) *Medea* wasn't well received when it was first performed but is one of, if not, the most performed of the Ancient Greek tragedies today. It takes us on a journey where we are sympathetic with Medea to a certain point and then sick with ourselves and her after she takes that last step and kills her children, and I think the reaction we have to the show today is similar to that the Ancient Greek audience would have had.

I agree with Marianne McDonald who said: "Aescylus shows god questioning god, Sophocles shows man questioning god, and finally Euripides shows man questioning himself. Modern reworkings of classics question the present in terms of the past..." (Wetmore 23) In modern plays we sometimes find a fusion of men questioning god(s) but this idea of man questioning himself is something that plays tackle every day; this human struggle of making the choices and hoping they are still right so you can look at yourself in the mirror at the end of the day and not hate everything about yourself. I think Euripides' innovation in using real life psychology in plays to make them more relatable to real life is why *Medea* and his other plays have survived the test of time, because his characters are real people with real internal and external struggles.

Seneca

In the Roman Empire, Greek was not spoken as much as in other parts of the ancient world, so the plays would have to be translated into Latin and adapted for Roman audiences. Seneca adapted *Medea* and four other of Euripides' tragedies. Now because of the difference in Roman culture and entertainment *Medea* was altered to suit the Roman audience. "Seneca has transformed Euripides' play into a 'blood and thunder' tragedy of revenge and a study in criminal psychology." (Reinhold 100) In this version, Medea is seen as a dangerous and savage barbarian. Also, some of the plot points are different in this version: Creon only banishes Medea not the children, there is a men's chorus who celebrates Jason's engagement, Medea asks Jason to run off with her, Jason denies her request to keep the children, and although she still sends the poison gifts and we see her poison them it is not done magically.

The death of the children is done very violently on stage. In contrast to Greek theatre where violence was done behind closed doors, in Rome where they were used to things like Gladiator fights, violence was something they expected to see as entertainment. When Medea momentarily waives before killing her children, the furies and the ghost of her dead brother appear to her, she kills the first son wildly because of her terror, and then drags the body and the living son in the house. When Jason begs her to spare their other child, she kills him right in front of Jason's eyes. Medea is not painted sympathetically in this version, but rather we are supposed to feel more for Jason who seems to be robbed of everything unjustly in this version. Even the women's chorus isn't even sympathetic to Medea in this version, so how was the audience supposed to be when: "...the chorus not only stands in for the audience, or serves as a bridge between drama and audience, but also represents the larger community." (Wetmore 43) Instead of keeping the bodies, Medea throws them out of the dragon chariot to Jason before

making her grand escape. It is interesting that Seneca chose not to even attempt to make Medea sympathetic but just showed her as evil, brooding, and formulating her revenge all along. Yet she has her moment of pouring her heart out to Jason and her questioning if killing her children is the right thing to do. But other than these brief moments, I feel she is painted more single minded than in the Greek version.

Robinson Jeffers

Many more modern adaptations of *Medea* have been made starting probably with Corneille's *Médée* written in 1634. Corneille drew from both the plots of Euripides and Seneca and made several alterations to emerge with his new French version of the tragedy. Many different American adaptations have been made as well: Franz Grillparser's 1821 *Medea* from his trilogy *The Golden Fleece*, Harriet Fanning Read's *Medea* in the mid-1800s, and Ernst Legouvé's 1856 *Medea* to name a few. These versions all stuck pretty close to the original myth or play. Robert Duncan's 1965 *Medea at Kolchis: The Maiden Head* talked about Medea's life and the search for the Golden Fleece, and stopped before the action of Euripides' play would have begun.

Robinson Jeffers' *Medea* is probably the most famous modern adaptation of Euripides' original play. This script was written in 1946 for actress Judith Anderson, who won a Tony for her interpretation. Later Judith Anderson went on to play the Nurse and Zoe Caldwell played Medea in the revival in 1982, for which she too won a Tony. If the role of Medea hadn't been coveted by women actors before this time, it certainly would and should be today. Now although the plot is that of Euripides, and Jeffers' adaptation is very poetic and set to be played in its original setting, it does not, like other performances of ancient pieces, call for the actors to perform in mask. In my research I did not read of any adaptations or modern performances of the

original *Medea* in which the actors still perform in mask. There are some differences in the text and performance due to time and space. For example, the dragon chariot has been replaced by fire spitting snakes which prevent Jason from being able to cross the threshold of the house. Another is that Medea does not try to establish a common female bond with the (smaller) chorus of women. Also, “Unlike Euripides’ rational, complex, and self-consciously divided heroine, who defends the justice of her position, Jeffers’ once-royal Medea describes herself as rash, intemperate, and fierce; she is humiliated by the pity of others; her ‘wisdom’ is ‘rapid and tricky.’” (Foley 208) I think Medea’s frantic range of emotional states, be it grieving, scheming, anger, vengeful joy, etc, are shown absolutely beautifully in this adaptation, especially when watching the filmed version of the production starring Zoe Caldwell.

I read this script and watched the production several times. One moment that is especially strong in the film and really shows the inciting incident is during Jason and Medea’s first confrontation. Medea lists all she has done for Jason and he then tries, with examples that pale in comparison, to say he too has done things to benefit Medea. Jason then states that Venus, goddess of love, favored him and made Medea do all she did to benefit him, thus discrediting her of any claim to the sacrifices she has made for him. This is a slap in the face to Medea more than I think I initially understood. By Jason abandoning Medea and not giving her the credit and thanks she deserves for all she has done for him, he basically has made her in her own eyes a foolish whore. On top of that, their marriage was not a proper Greek wedding and he breaks his oath to her and has no second thoughts about it. There is also a kiss in this filmed version which I think is another slap to Medea and a push to get her closer to killing Creusa and putting her in the mindset where the plan to kill the children seems like the perfect way to completely destroy Jason. The kiss happens when, after Jason’s reference to the favor of the Gods, Medea cannot

bear for him to be there anymore and takes a lunge at him as if to slap or strangle him. He stops her and pulls her in for a kiss, which is extremely painful for her because she still loves this man who has ripped her apart and left her alone in a country she does not belong in. She slowly pushes him away telling him “You had better take yourself back to ‘Little Creusa’” (Jeffers 36). As he leaves, she runs behind him to watch him as he heads back to the palace. She stands like a stone statue watching the man she once loved, and who possibly once loved her, walk away. It is here that she wishes she could just erase all the memories from her mind and from her skin. We know that in these few minutes Medea makes her choice to destroy everything Jason loves or will use for power and success now and in the future. “Annihilation” (Jeffers 38) – that is all that awaits Jason now, but it does not come without a price.

Operas & Marie Christine

It has been argued by some scholars that Ancient Greek theatre was more like a musical or opera, with much of the lines chanted or sung and filled with choreographed movements and dances, than like a traditional play. So it should come as no surprise then that *Medea* and other ancient stories and plays have been transformed into operas and musicals. Various operatic versions of *Medea* have been done in Italian, German, and French which shows the universality of Medea’s story. The most famous *Medea* opera is probably the Italian translation of Cherubini’s *Médée* which starred Maria Callas, in 1953, 1957, 1958, 1961, 1962. (Operone) This part is gutsy and rough, and Maria Callas delivers. She was later chosen to play Medea in an Italian movie version, which will be discussed later, and I think her having such a strong knowledge of the character after playing it many times really allowed her to connect with it, not only in the opera, time and time again, but also in the movie.

Several musicals have been made about Medea, most notably the 1999 production of *Marie Christine*, a musical by Michael John LaChiusa, which some critics have argued could almost be considered an opera because it is three-quarters sung. The knowledge I have about this musical has been taken from Helen P. Foley's *Reimagining Greek Tragedy on the American Stage*, from a plot synopsis, and from reading and listening to the music (unfortunately the libretto for this musical is not an easy one to obtain). This production is an influential adaptation for two reasons: one, because it creates an entirely new piece and only follows the basic plot of the original *Medea*, and two, because it is one of the productions of *Medea* that translates her identity as an foreigner, barbarian, or outsider into a revelation on race relations in America's history. Marie Christine is "A wealthy mulatto daughter of a black West Indian Voodoo healer and white French father in 1894 Creole New Orleans. Marie Christine resisted her two brothers' desire for respectability and upward mobility by running off, already pregnant, with a womanizing white Midwestern sailor named Dante Keyes to Chicago." (Foley 213) Dante then abandons Marie in 1899 to pursue a career in politics and marry the daughter of his racist political backer. This musical touches on many different issues that are important and shape the plot of this new adaptation: "In this play, class, race, gender, inherited temperament, and in addition, the 'mysteries and miracles of love' closed in on Marie Christine." (Foley 214) Marie Christine talks to the ghost of her mother who was trained in Voodoo arts and her powers are largely imaginary. This play is also filled with flashbacks as Marie tells her story to the other prisoners who serve as the chorus. The music is powerful and drives the show because it is more like an opera than a traditional musical. One of the most powerful songs in the show is the duet between Marie and Dante called "Tell Me." The song and the little tiff before it, mirror the first fight that Medea and Jason have about all that Medea has done for Jason, and she asks how he

can just leave her without a second thought. In this version Marie isn't even married to Dante so she could be thought of as just a whore. This is an insult that really stabs her, like it does in the *Medea* of Robinson Jeffers. Marie decides to give the children to Dante so they will be better off; she sends them with a poisoned necklace for Helena, the Creusa character, who dies on her wedding night. Magdalena, the Aegeus character, brings the children back to Marie for one more goodbye and promises Marie the refuge she needs when Marie provides her with a drug that will help her bear children. Marie Christine is more maternal than some other Medeas, and the decision to kill her children does not come so much out of her need for revenge and complete destruction of Jason, but rather to save them from "...a humiliating life with their father as mulatto bastards." (Foley 213) She sings them a lullaby, "I Will Love You," and bathes them before leading them offstage. Jason comes in singing about the horrific death of Helena, eliminating the messenger and the nurse by telling her the horror himself. He then requests to have the boys and finds them murdered. The finale commences with Marie Christine's mother singing about why the children died as Marie exits into the sunlight symbolizing her being led to her death for the murders she has committed.

This production was not successful, possibly because the flashbacks made the plot fairly disjointed. However this version speaks to so many issues that a woman would have faced in the late nineteenth-century, and some may argue, could still face today. LaChiusa really came up with an interesting way of adapting the Euripides original. I think it is also interesting that, unlike modern productions like Deborah Warner's version of Euripides' *Medea* (starring Fiona Shaw, where she drags on the dead bodies smearing the glass of the house as she goes), or Jonathan Kent's production (in which the children are revealed crushed and bloodied); in an age that

expects to view all the violence, LaChiusa stuck to keeping the death of Helena something sung not shown, and the murder of the children behind closed doors.

Productions Focused on Race

Marie Christine is just one of many modern productions and adaptations of *Medea* that focuses on Medea as an outsider through the issue of difference in race. A few of these productions will be discussed in this section. In Africa, where due to the similarities in culture Greek pieces have been frequently performed and adapted, there is a version of *Medea* called *Demea*. Guy Butler wrote this version in the 1950s but it was not performed until 30 years later at the end of Apartheid. This piece was very political because “It seemed that large numbers of English speakers (Jason = Jonas) were abandoning the cause of the coloured & black people (Medea = Demea) to vote for the racist Afrikaner nationalists (Creon – Kroon).” (Wetmore 131) Also Demea was a Tembu princess, and although not originally intended, the piece carried more weight in the 1980s because Nelson Mandela was also Tembu.

Many American adaptations of *Medea* deal with the struggles of Medea as the racial outsider in times and settings that show our country’s struggle with racism. Countee Cullen, a major poet of the Harlem Renaissance, also wrote an adaptation of *Medea* in 1935. “In this *Medea*, John, the son of a white plantation owner, had married a black named Miranda in the postbellum South.” (Foley 201) There are also two productions besides *Marie Christine* that deal with voodoo Medeas: Ernest Ferlita’s 1976 *Black Medea* which deals with the voodoo culture of Haiti affecting the journey of Medea, and Steve Carter’s 1990 *Pecong*, in which he “...stresses love’s power to undermine voodoo/maternal magic.” (Foley 212) Besides the productions that deal with racism against African and Caribbean American people, there are also productions that deal with the struggles of Asian Americans which are either adaptations performed in modern

American style (such as Velina Hasu Houston's *Kokoro* and *The House of Chaos* as well as Sung Rno's *wAve*), or are adaptations which are performed in traditional Asian theatrical styles (like Carol Sorgenfrei's *Medea: A Noh Cycle Based on the Greek Myth* and *Kabuki Medea* by William Missouri Downs and Lou Anne Wright). Houston's two adaptations deal with loss of honor, mother-child relationships, and feminism in relation to a woman's place in Asian and American cultures. *wAve* is a tragicomedy that deals with the isolation the main character, M, feels in America especially due to her betrayal of her family and murder of her brother. This pushes her to seek psychiatric help. The *Noh Cycle Medea* "...deliberately merges Eastern and Western traditions and myth and deploys Japanese theatrical style and setting" (Foley 217). To make Medea even more fantastic, in the end she transforms into a goddess/demon. *Kabuki Medea* "...used a modified version of Kabuki movement and vocal style supported by traditional Kabuki music...mixed with electronic music..." There is also a transformation into "...a powerful demon who acts and speaks for all betrayed women." (Foley 219)

Native American productions have also occurred: "Native American Medeas can also represent women deprived of their legitimate inheritance by sleeping with the enemy, initially the European invaders." (Foley 215) Going with the idea of Native American Medea was something I had considered because I am part Black Foot Indian. I thought it might be interesting to have Medea seek revenge on Creusa by giving her a blanket infected with small pox just like some of the European settlers did as a false peace offering. I thought that would be an interesting way to not only seek revenge personally, but also for all of her people. Carlos Morton's *La Malinche* could also be considered a Native piece because it merges the ancient Aztec myths of Doña Maria (translator and mistress to Cortés) the myth of La Llorona, and Medea's story. Another production that drew on the myth of La Llorona was Cherríe Morgana's *Hungry*

Woman: A Mexican Medea. This piece is set in an imaginary world of the future and deals not only with cultural issues within the Chicana/o community, but also issues of gender and homophobia.

All of these aforementioned adaptations not only bring new light to the *Medea* story but also bring to light the issues of interracial relationships and/or different cultural struggles that each Medea may face. By placing Medea in these new cultures and/or as an outsider in American culture, the writers and directors are able to make a new socio-political commentary on race and acceptance of other cultures in the melting pot that is America.

Medea Redux

A final play adaptation I want to discuss is Neil LaBute's short, one woman *Medea Redux* from his trilogy *Bash*. In the play, a young woman discusses her situation to a person with a tape recorder. We learn that this Medea figure had a sexual relationship with a teacher and became pregnant. Although the teacher seemed excited about the child initially, he ends up running away to Phoenix, Arizona. Although this hurts the young woman, she still loves him and never reveals to her family or community who the father is. She also keeps communication with him so he can see how his son is growing. Eventually she brings her son, Billie, to meet his father. The young woman says, "...i saw something there, there in his eyes...he loved this boy, all that shit he'd said to me years ago, it was true about kids. he loved 'em. but also...he was satisfied, i could see that, satisfaction on his face...because he'd gotten away with it all...he had beaten fate...and gotten away with it." (LaBute 91-92) With this realization, along with the realization that the man would never come back to her, and her becoming more upset by Billie listening to Billie Holiday, the father's favorite artist, the young woman throws the tape player into the tub and electrocutes her 14 year old son.

I think this adaptation is interesting and original, not only as a one woman show that doesn't follow the traditional Euripidean plot, but also because it uses the outcome of the Medea story to shed light on the possible outcome of an inappropriate and/or pedophilic relationship between a teacher and much younger student who trusts, loves, and respects him.

Dance

The world of dance has also been touched by the story of Medea. Dance for me is sometimes difficult to interpret if I don't know the story or have the little pamphlet telling me what is going on, but I really found the two dance productions I viewed fairly easy to follow.

Ballet Nacional de España did a touring version of *Medea* with dance that is inspired by the flamenco music and dance of Spain. The video is in several parts on YouTube and there is a short interview with José Antonio, the director/Jason, in which he states (this is a roughly translated paraphrase) that Medea killing her children is an attempt at purifying herself and somehow turning back the clock to become the woman she was before she met Jason. There are some very interesting elements of this dance adaptation which I had not seen or read about in my other research. There are two men with golden head cages that come in to start the show, and over the course of the show I interpreted their presence as both the inner turmoil Medea feels and her ancient powers of the sun god. They act as helpers in her seek for vengeance. The only spoken word in the entire show is the "No" that Medea yells after watching the celebratory engagement dance between Jason, Creusa, and the Corinthian people. This blood curdling scream lets the audience know right away the extreme anguish Medea is suffering and continues to suffer throughout the course of the production. The children are on stage the whole time and they witness the pain their mother goes through. The passionate and romantic pas des deux between Jason and Medea gives you the feeling that Medea hopes that by making love to Jason

again he will decide he loves her and will stay. When he leaves and Creon comes to kick her out, she feels used, like a whore, and I feel that that really pushed her to seek revenge. With the use of percussive flamenco dancing the dancers were able to use their sounds as words. The faster and more forcefully they tapped, the more you felt the characters' rage and desperation in communicating their wants, needs, joys, and fears. The final image of the play is of Jason standing in a spot as Medea shuts the doors. The passionate, dramatic, and fantastic elements of dance brought this adaptation, which is probably a combination of the Seneca and Euripides versions, to a new artistic level.

Cave of the Heart is a dance choreographed by Martha Graham. This dance is about the monster of envy and the toll that it takes on Medea, Jason, and the "victim" (the Creusa character). There is also a chorus figure that comforts Medea at points. The dance features more abstract modern dance and more interpretive costumes. The thing that stuck out to me most in this performance was the fire dance that the "victim" danced. It wasn't very long but I think it was good to see that in this production (and the Spanish one) decided to show Creusa's death, which is something I plan on doing through dance in my production well.

Movie Adaptations

In an age where TV and movies typically trump theatre as "easy access" entertainment, there have been two movies made of *Medea*; both in different languages. I think it is interesting that for some reason *Medea* has never been made into a purely American movie. Each of the movies sticks pretty closely to the original plot line, while at the same time showing us new things about the piece and dealing with certain plot points in different ways. This is due in part to the artistic abilities of cinematography as well as the expectations of modern audiences today.

In Lars Von Trier's 1988 Danish *Medea* starring Kirsten Olesen as Medea and Udo Kier as Jason, there are several important changes to the plot that have been done for artistic purposes to make this adaptation new, and in some ways more shocking than the original. In this adaptation Medea is alone in the barren wilderness, thus making it more relatable to the culture for which it was originally produced. There is no mention in the written introduction or the movie itself of her betrayal of her family; rather she longs for her mother, sisters, and native land. The movie does a beautiful job contrasting Medea and Glauce, who is present and speaks in this adaptation. Medea's dress and demeanor are different than that of Glauce's. Medea is dressed in black, is constrained, her hair is wrapped up and away; she seems emotionally drained and thus empty. She is all logic, and although there is fire and passion for causing pain to her enemies, she does not outwardly show it. But in contrast to other Medeas she seems to calmly state her wants and executes her plans. The first shot of Medea in contrast with the first shot of Glauce shows you just how different these two women are. Glauce is young, naked, with smooth skin, and she laughs and does things her way. She knows she has power over her father and Jason, and she even denies Jason sex after they are married, saying "No Jason. Not until my father exiles Medea tomorrow." Although Glauce says she does not fear Medea, until she is gone, she refuses Jason sexually so she can hold more power over him. The more he lusts for her, the more he will do as she asks. Medea tries to use her sexual ways on Jason too. They have an encounter on the beach, which ends with him slapping her and calling her a whore. Although she already has the poisoned gift for the princess at this point, one wonders if this is the moment she decides to kill her children. She has wanted nothing but love and acceptance from the man she has done nothing but help and give children to. The treatment of the poisoned gift in this movie adaptation is also different. What I find most interesting about this is not only does Medea

rub poison on the points of her bridal crown, but she even picks the berries that she uses as part of the poison right in front of Creon's face as he is banishing her. When I noticed this I thought it was interesting to see that she had already started formulating some sort of poisoning plan, and basically showed Creon his fate without him even realizing it. While she was calmly asking him to stay, she was his and his daughter's murders. Just like in the original, we don't see Glauce's poisoning, but we see her with the crown and we see earlier that crown nick a horse. We see the horse run and collapse and die, so we can assume that is what happens to Glauce. We do, however, see part of Creon's death in a vision Medea has as she is taking her children farther into the wilderness to kill them; he screams and cries, stumbling through an underground tunnel before he too collapses.

The way the children's death happens in this movie version is perhaps the most blood-curdling change of all. We as the audience know that Medea is going to hang her children because of the logo for the movie has the top of the d sprout into a tree with two small figures hanging from the branches. The execution of this murder is what makes it so intensely disturbing. Medea lets her children sleep and tows them into the wilderness on a little sleigh. She gets to one tree standing on a hill in the wilderness. She kisses the children lovingly as they get up and the eldest one, who cannot be older than ten, looks at her and says "I know what is to happen." Medea carries the younger and holds the hand of the elder as she walks up the hill. She ties twine on the tree and the youngest asks "What are you hanging on the tree?" to which she responds, "Something I love." She really does love the children and almost loses her nerve. As the little one laughs and scampers down the hill trying to play, the elder brings him back up the hill. Medea quickly scoops him up and puts him in the noose. She pulls him down looking in his eyes and the elder son pulls down the legs to help his mother. Watching the life fade from her

youngest child's eyes and then seeing the scrape on his knee she had just kissed the day before to make better sends Medea into a state of shock. She sits on the side of the hill and as the sun rises higher in the sky, the eldest son approaches her. He leans his head on her back, holds out the rope which is to be his and says "Help me, mother." This moment sent chills up and down my spine. The son knows that his death is the only way his mother can be free from the terrible pain his father has caused, and he is willing to help kill his brother and himself for the mother he loves more than anyone in the world. She holds him so he can tie the noose to the tree himself and slip it around his neck, and then she struggles to keep him high because she still isn't sure if she can kill the son who is the only person who truly understands her. Eventually, she does pull him down, and then she walks off and we see her emotionless on Aegis' boat. Jason discovers his dead children and rides his horse until it collapses, and then he runs around until he collapses too, because even though he has gone up to the children's bodies and realized it is them, he keeps circling around hoping time will turn back and they will be alive. At the very end of the movie, we see the tide come in and as the boat takes off, Medea releases her hair and she breaks down. We don't know if she will be the same or if she will choose to kill herself because her pain is too much. But, for now, she is free.

The 1969 Italian film *Medea*, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini and starring Maria Callas, shows not only the story of Medea in Corinth but goes back even farther to show the culture of her native land Colchis, her stealing the golden fleece, the murder of her brother, and the love which once existed between her and Jason. By showing Medea's culture we can further understand why she does what she does. Medea was a priestess in her old country where there is a yearly ritual in which they chop up the body of a prisoner (or some willing participant, that was unclear) and feed the crops with the blood and organs of this victim. It is not done for violence, it

is merely a part of the culture. By showing this and the loss of her “powers” Medea faces by being away from her culture, we can understand more the desperation of her acts.

When we get into the part that more closely resembles Euripides’ *Medea*, there are slight differences in plot order and there are a few other differences in the movie which help to shed new light on the piece and on the relationship between Jason and Medea. One of these differences is the element of mythical mystery with the appearance of Jason’s childhood guardian, the Centaur. He is a vision in the later part of the play but he says something very interesting which makes Jason think “It’s his influence (Old Centaur), despite your schemes and your interpretations, that causes you to love Medea... Yes. And you also pity her. You understand her spiritual catastrophe, her confusion as a woman of the ancient world in a new world which ignores her values. The poor woman has experienced a reverse conversion and has never recovered.” The Centaur as a part of Jason’s soul and conscience knows that Jason loves Medea and pities her in some way. Although his love is not as strong now because his want for power has beat it out. However, there is part of him that is still linked to her, which we see further evidence of later.

What is so unique about this version is that they show in a vision the death of Glauce and Creon via the flaming outfit that was true to the Euripides original, and then go back to show how the deaths really happen. After coming back from seeing Jason dancing happily, celebrating his soon-to-be marriage, Medea comes home distraught and has a vision where the Sun God tells her that she still has the powers of her old country. She picks herself up and knows what to do to invoke the most pain on Jason, the royal family, and the city of Corinth: namely the death of Creon and Glauce. This is just a dream of glory and power that maybe Medea could have had in her old country, or maybe people just think she has magical powers because she is seen as a

barbarian witch. In reality, here in Corinth, Medea is just a normal, heartbroken woman who is an outsider and is struggling to not lose sight of who she is, of what she has done for Jason, and of what his betrayal has made her become. The real sequence of events starts with Creon going to see Glauce, who is visibly upset. Seeing his daughter so distraught makes him go banish Medea. In contrast with the other adaptations, he really struggles with this: “To tell the truth, I am not banishing you out of hate or out of suspicion because you’re so different, a barbarian, come here with signs of another race on you, but rather out of love for my daughter who feels remorse toward you. She knows what you are suffering, and she too suffers. This marriage with Jason, Medea, has become the source of anything but happiness. You are blameless, but my daughter must not suffer. Therefore, harsh as it may seem, I must drive you from my kingdom.” Medea reenters the house and faints, wondering what to do next. Jason comes to her and she meets him. They fight, she asks for forgiveness, and they have sex. Then the same discussion about the children bringing the gifts to Glauce happens and again, as in the first time, Jason smiles at her and blows her a kiss goodbye. This shows Jason’s love for Medea, and though he says she helped him only because she loved his body, it is now he who is the lustful one. He gives into Medea’s request to ask Glauce to let the children stay because she “puts out”. The garments are given to Glauce but instead of her catching on fire, a different choice is made by the writer and director. Glauce looks at herself crying in the mirror, and I think seeing herself in Medea’s native outfit makes her feel Medea’s pain more and causes her to remember that Medea gave up everything for the man who she loved and who eventually threw her away. She wants control over her own life, but does not have that as a princess. She will always feel guilty for marrying Jason because Medea sent her these gifts and was kind, even though Glauce stole Jason. She cannot live with this whether or not Medea lives outside the city walls or in some

unknown exile. Glauce runs away from her father and throws herself off a cliff, dying free.

Creon is so heartbroken by the fact that his choices have led his daughter to suicide that he too throws himself off the cliff. This interpretation makes me wonder if Medea had been a real woman, this might have been how the story really happened and it might have been transformed or adapted into this larger than life story, including magic.

The death of the children in this movie is different as well. Medea cannot just drag them into the house and kill them, she loves them too much. She gets them ready for bed as she always does; she washes their bodies and rocks them to sleep. Then she decides to stab them. Medea cannot live with herself after this. She has destroyed all ties with her homeland, abandoned her culture, and now has destroyed her family. She sets her house on fire and holds the children's bodies on the roof shouting down to Jason that he cannot cross the fire. When he tells her she will suffer for what she has done regardless of who her God is she says "As long as I know I exist, I want to suffer." When Jason again asks to hold and bury the bodies of his children, she says not to ask again because "Nothing is possible anymore." The movie ends with that. This ending shows a lost Medea who, after being betrayed by the man she loves, destroys him and herself because she wants him to suffer as much as she has. Also, she cannot live knowing she has destroyed the only family and love she has ever known for this one man who wanted not love, but power.

My Adaptation & Conclusion

Through the research I did on different productions of *Medea* as well as on Medea herself and the decisions she made, I was able to learn a lot of things that helped me write my first draft, and will continue to help me as I move into my second draft of my script this coming week.

One of the first steps in my research for this paper was a discussion with David Kaye who produced an adaptation of Sophocles' version of *Electra* in 2007. David's adaptation was of special interest to me because his version was a punk-rock adaptation. He was inspired by a Marilyn Manson concert he saw on TV and thought that perhaps the energy people have at concerts today is similar to that of the Ancient Greeks during a theatrical experience. It was a full theatrical spectacle which was highly ritualistic and ceremonial, and yet would be filled with shock and amazement with every new show they would see.

For David's adaptation he used the original script, but made slight alterations to make the piece more connected to modern day. He told me that Electra would probably be a suicide bomber if she lived today. She would walk right into the palace and take out her mother and stepfather. The costume design was able to highlight the teenage angst that underlies the struggles here. Although Electra's problems go beyond teenage angst, it is true that her mother views her as just an upset and rebellious teenager, and the style of the piece helped to show this. The music was very dark and raw, which helped to express the anguish Electra was feeling in this piece. Going along with the age-old saying that "In musicals, when speech isn't enough that is when singing happens," David said "Moments that I thought were so super heightened in the course of the play were better expressed through song than simply spoken word." As stated before, it is believed that music was a big part of Ancient Greek theatrical pieces and some parts of the show were sung or chanted rather than just spoken, especially when it came to the chorus.

Like David felt with *Electra*, I feel that *Medea* strongly lends itself to rock music, the raw emotions of this music help to express Medea's feelings of deep dark anguish. The songs I have selected are: "Bachelorette" by Bjork, a Dubstep remix of "Knights of Cydonia," "2 Ghosts II" by Nine Inch Nails with lyrics I have written for the production, and "What You Are" by

Audioslave. I feel these help in telling the story of Medea. “Bachelorette” brings a sense of longing and pain in showing how the relationship has changed. Dubstep is a type of electronic music with thundering bass and drums, so I felt the remix of “Knights of Cydonia” would be perfect for the manic fire dance that Creusa suffers before dying. Then there is a lullaby Medea sings as her son slips into sleep and then death. “What You Are” is Medea telling Jason she is now free from his control, however, there is a chance in the end for Medea to show that even though she has destroyed Jason and hurt him as much as she has been hurting, she does not kill the children and leave unharmed by her own actions. This ending is still something I’m playing with and will probably decide in the rehearsal of the piece.

For my adaptation of Medea, titled *Fury*, I used Robinson Jeffers’ *Medea* as my main inspiration for plot and feeling. Due to time constraint I replaced the fight between Creon and Medea with a phone message in which he gives her an extra 24 hours. I wanted my main focus to be on the love triangle, so I was able to use the arc of the three arguments Jason has with Medea. There is also a scene with Calliope, a character I invented who is a combination of the Nurse, Aegeus, and the women’s chorus. I did this because I feel having Jason as the only man may add a new level to the adaptation.

After two conversations with my advisor John Berst, I went back to look at the Jeffers adaptation to search more for what the inciting incident is. What is the final push that makes Medea decide that yes, she will go through with her plan and destroy Jason in any way she can? Although like many Ancient Greek dramatic figures Medea can be seen as single minded, there is something that finally pushes her to action. As I discussed earlier, in the filmed production of the Jeffers’ *Medea*, it is clear that the inciting incident is in the first argument Jason and Medea have. Medea lists all the deeds she has done for him, and he discredits her, merely calling her an

“instrument” of the gods. (Jeffers 36) She has been tossed aside like a whore. What seals this feeling of betrayal and disgust Medea feels for Jason (and for herself for being fooled by this ambitious man who she is unsure even cared for her at all) is the kiss. Although not written in the script, I think it is a very powerful moment, because Medea is lost again in the dreams of the life she once had. I plan on trying to structure my inciting incident similarly to this.

Dance in my piece is being used in an abstract way to show what Medea envisions as happening. In the first number there will be a seductive dance between Creusa and Jason, and then later the fire dance will initially be Creusa’s body being forced to do what Medea’s body is doing, implying the magic control Medea has. Then Creusa’s body will begin moving out of control until she collapses, dead. The reason I want to incorporate dance is to show more of the love triangle without words, and also to show rather than tell the death of Creusa.

I think I will only use only one boy in the performance of my capstone, not only because it may be difficult to find and work with two younger boys, but also because if Jason loses the only child he has and ever will have, that may cut deeper. Having only one child may also make Medea’s decision even more difficult. As far as the death of the child is concerned, I have been thinking about it a great deal. In the first draft of my adaptation I have Medea poison her children (there were two in draft one) and then lay in bed singing them to sleep as they slip away into death, followed by a monologue of regret. I am toying with having the internal debate Medea has about whether or not to kill her son be recorded voices that represent Medea’s inner thoughts and demons. These voices are also the voices singing with Medea before the fire dance. I was thinking about how I could make this more difficult for Medea. In some ways by having the child poisoned she can pretend they are not dead, only sleeping. Whether or not she will then stab the dead, or almost dead, body of her son in the second draft of my capstone is still

something I am working out, because I really thought that aspect of the Maria Callas movie version of *Medea* was interesting.

Throughout history productions and adaptation of *Medea* have been prevalent. It is a story that has and will most likely continue to fascinate the human race. People are able to connect with Medea on many levels, be it to her role as outsider, as thankless sacrifice, abandoned wife, loving mother, vengeful lover, or something else. Medea shows us the frightening potential in all humans to avenge the wrongs done to us, to heal our wounds in any way we see possible, and to fight to live another day.

Please note: A final copy of *FURY: A Rock Musical Inspired by Medea* by Katharine Jordan as it was performed 4/26/2013 and 4/27/2013 is available to reference. It is still in development in hopes of future performance

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