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VERBAL AUTONOMY AND VERBAL SELF-RESTRAINT IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*

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ANTONIO MADDALENA, Bernard Knox, and Elizabeth Bongie have discussed how Medea's character resembles that of the Iliadic Achilles or the Sophoclean Ajax, with her intense concern for her honor and status.[1] Scholars such as Helene Foley and Rush Rehm have discussed how Medea, by pursuing such epic (and male) values, comes into conflict with that part of herself that would have been viewed as more feminine, most obviously her love for her children.[2] Richard Buxton and Deborah Boedeker have discussed the important role that deceptive language plays in this work.[3] The verbal cunning that Medea uses to realize her revenge is a characteristic that aligns well with Greek assumptions concerning the deceptive nature of women (and indeed the Chorus itself remarks upon the stereotype, 410–31). However, while Medea's use of deceptive language can be conceived of as typical of her gender,[4] the play also presents Medea as having a masculine ability with words,[5] as Laura McClure has recently discussed in relation to Medea's use of blame speech.[6]

I hope to add to this understanding of Medea's character by examining how her appropriation of the heroic code on the level of language is shown not simply in her use of heroic terms and values in her expressions of her motivation (as other scholars have discussed), but also in the way that she adopts a particular stance in relation to language, one that is typical of the extreme behavior of an Iliadic Achilles or a Sophoclean Ajax. This stance is one that is borrowed from the model of complete bodily autonomy and imperviousness that the warrior must maintain on the battlefield in order to ensure his survival and success in warfare. These qualities, when used in

The text of *Medea* I use is that of Mastronarde 2002. All translations are my own.

1. Maddalena 1963; Knox 1977; Bongie 1977. See Rehm 1989 for the view that the play in fact raises issues of traditional heroism only to critique it.

2. Foley 1989; Rehm 1989; see also Maddalena 1963, 146; Burnett 1973, 22; Knox 1977, 201–2; Barlow 1989; Segal 1996, 25–26.

3. Buxton 1982; Boedeker 1991. I am in agreement with the latter on a number of important points.

4. On Medea's feminine rhetorical power, see Rabinowitz 1993, 142–44, 153; Buxton 1982, 64; Foley 1989, 74; Segal 1996, 17. On the association between women and deceptive language generally, see Zeitlin 1996, 356–63.

5. On Medea's blurring of categories, see Foley 1989; Rabinowitz 1993, 131–41, 148; Segal 1996; Boedeker 1997.

6. McClure 1999b.

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language, are the ability to resist the persuasive power of others (verbal autonomy) and the ability to maintain control of one's own language (verbal self-restraint). The play emphasizes that these are to be understood as masculine qualities because Medea develops them only by overcoming certain stereotypes concerning women and language. First, Medea shows personal autonomy in her ability to overcome her so-called feminine susceptibility to persuasion, in particular erotic persuasion. Secondly, Medea learns to restrain and control her own words, hiding her true intentions as she effects her revenge, in particular by suppressing her "feminine" instinct to lament. The result of this combination of verbal autonomy and verbal self-restraint is her victory over Jason and the verbal mastery she evinces in the conclusion of the play.

However, the mind and the body are also different, and the model of complete autonomy and self-control required on the battlefield is not always properly applied to the sphere of language. Medea's tragedy (in the modern sense) is that she is so successful in appropriating the model of heroic behavior that she applies it in its most exaggerated, and ultimately self-destructive, form. The complete autonomy, self-control, and strength she develops in her use and response to language results in her decision to kill her children, and she thereby proves herself resistant even to her own better judgment.

A distinction between the (ideal) male body and female body can be drawn based upon the agent's ability or inability to control the boundaries of this body, both in terms of what goes into it and what comes out of it.[7] At the furthest extreme is the warrior in battle who must protect and maintain the integrity of his person in order to ensure his physical survival.[8] In other areas of life, what was important was to control just what went into and what came out of the body. Bodily indulgence in food and drink was commonly censured in Athenian thought. Hence, even beyond philosophical contexts where we expect such discussions,[9] there is a prevalent terminology that describes the overindulgent figure as a vessel or container whose openings are overly large, allowing too much, too indiscriminately, into the body.[10] Women were perceived as naturally prone to this vice, and hence males who were not able to control themselves were viewed as effeminate.[11] This conception of a woman as a naturally faulty vessel perhaps finds its clearest expression in the medical writers,[12] as in the representation of her skin as

7. See, in particular, Carson 1990, 137–45, 153–58, 160–64.

8. Hector famously links armor, inviolability, and gender when he contemplates stripping himself of his gear and approaching Achilles with a plea for peace and reconciliation, only to realize how this would feminize him (Hom. *Il*. 22.122–28).

9. E.g., Socrates in Pl. *Grg*. 494b, when he tries to show Callicles that unrestrained hedonism is not desirable, compares a life of unbridled consumption to a bird (χαραδριός) that eats and defecates at the same time.

10. On the prevalence of the image of the body as a container, faulty or leaky when appetites were overindulged, see Davidson 1997, 173–81, 210.

11. On the female body in Athenian tragedy, see Zeitlin 1996, 349–52.

12. See King 1998, for the notion of the womb as a jar (34–35) and for the notion that women had a tube extending from mouth to vagina (27–28).

porous, which was used to justify beliefs that women tended to be uncontrolled in their appetite for sex, food, and drink.[13]

This model of the body as autonomous and self-controlled due to its ability to control influx and output works well also in relation to language and the mind.[14] The epic formula ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων; ("what sort of word escaped the boundary of your teeth?" e.g., Hom. *Il.* 4.350) shows that this notion of the body as a container was used in relation to language and speech as well. The self-controlled and autonomous individual must control words, as the primary medium by which the mind is affected, as they enter and leave the agent. This involves both being able to resist the words of others, when necessary, and being able to control one's own language.[15]

By a typical reversal of values, women can also be understood in light of this conceptual model, in which what is valued is the agent's ability to control the flow of words into and out of him. A frequent criticism of women was that they were susceptible to persuasive language[16] and unable to control their own words. In the first regard, women were seen as particularly susceptible to erotic persuasion.[17] The emphasis on an erotic context is not surprising, given that women were defined in large part by their sexual role, a characterization that is especially prevalent in Athenian tragedy. Moreover, a common dramatic pattern in Athenian tragedy is the disaster that results when a woman makes a choice without the presence or guidance of her husband, or *kurios* more generally.[18] Thus because a woman is assumed not to have the mental strength and authority to properly direct her own actions, she is thereby susceptible to the (potentially negative) influence of others.[19]

13. Dean-Jones 1994, 55–60; King 1998, 28–29.

14. In the case of excessive drinking, a direct connection can be drawn between lack of control of one's appetites and lack of verbal control; see Hes. *Theog.* 467–87 and Alc. frag. 333 W; as well as Rösler 1995.

15. See also Davidson (1997, 266–67) on how Aeschines, in his attempt to convict the politician Timarchus of prostitution, during which he repeatedly describes him as effeminate, presents Timarchus as unrestrained in his language, in particular in his endless legal proposals and prosecutions (in contrast to the "quiet" Aeschines). Masculinity and verbal control can also be seen in the Spartans' famous restraint in speaking.

16. Eur. *Med.* 945 εἴπερ γυναικῶν ἐστι τῶν ἄλλων μία ("if she [sc. Creon's daughter] is one among other women") is variously attributed to Medea or Jason, but in either case it seems to suggest the stereotype of feminine susceptibility to persuasion, and may, as Buxton (1982, 167) notes, refer to the fact that Medea herself was persuaded previously by Jason (800–802; see below).

17. E.g., Lys. 1.20, where Eratosthenes is said to have persuaded Euphiletus' wife into an affair with him. Gorgias famously argued that persuasive language could act as a compelling force, and given the assumptions concerning women and language in ancient Greece (in particular with regard to the adulterer and seductive language) it is hardly surprising that he used a woman, Helen, as his example (*Hel.* 8–14).

18. On the pattern generally, see Hall 1997, 106–10. This plot pattern is a literary reflection of the Athenian law that women could not speak for themselves but had to have a male *kurios* to make decisions for them. The reasons for such legal repression are, of course, many, but inherent in the practice is the idea that women would make poor decisions if they were allowed to act on their own behalf; see Gould 1980, 44–45; Foley 1981, 132. Aristotle, in a famous passage (*Pol.* 1260a), makes a linguistic connection between the historical reality that women were treated as legal minors and the notion that their deliberative ability was faulty, precisely due to a lack of this faculty.

19. Examples in tragedy are Hermione in Eur. *Andr.* (persuaded by "evil women," 930–38) and Deianeira in Soph. *Trach.* (persuaded by the Chorus, 582–95, and Nessus, 710). Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 608a25–28) states of females that "their nature is softer than the males, and quicker to be subdued and more receptive to handling" (μαλακώτερον γὰρ τὸ ἦθός ἐστι τῶν θηλειῶν, καὶ τιθασσεύεται θᾶττον, καὶ προσίεται τὰς χεῖρας μᾶλλον), thereby suggesting their supposed mental pliancy. For the need to train women upon entering one's house, see Xen. *Oec.* 7.4–10.13.

Women's inability to control their words is expressed both in the idea that women were terrible gossips and that they were particularly suited for lamentation, an unrestrained medium of expression.[20] As perceived gossips, they threaten to reveal what should not be revealed, presumably in the first instance the secrets of the (male-controlled) *oikos*.[21] As the principal figures in lamentation in Greek society, they are understood as being unable to refrain from the verbal expression of their internal psychological states.[22] In this regard tears are particularly important, since as physical material that reveals the psychological state of the agent by escaping the boundaries of the body,[23] they show how the physical and mental can be directly linked in the metaphor of the individual as a container.

Yet while the psychological boundaries of the mind could be conceived of as being like the physical boundaries of the body, there are crucial differences. Whereas in battle it is presumably never a good thing to have these boundaries compromised, there clearly were times when it was beneficial for the mind to be more flexible. This is true both of the epic hero and of the Athenian democratic citizen. The poet of the *Iliad* makes it clear in Book 9 that Achilles in his anger at Agamemnon is excessively resistant to Agamemnon's attempt at reconciliation.[24] So, too, was the average citizen of the Athenian democracy expected to show a willingness to be swayed by the words of others when they were either advantageous or simply right. Athena in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* praises the power of persuasion, a force that is clearly understood as a mode of peaceful interaction typical of the Athenian democracy (e.g., 885, 970–72).[25]

Concerning the general question of when one should be persuaded, much depends on how the act of persuasion is conducted and by whom. In Greek

20. On women and gossip, see Hunter 1994, 99–100 and 111–16 (as objects of gossip); McClure 1999a, 56–62, 64–65. Note that male fear of female gossip can be related to the perceived susceptibility of women to persuasive language, since the concern is that women discussing things in private from men will persuade one another to (improper) action (cf. Antiph. 1.14–16, where the accused stepmother convinces another woman to perform the poisoning). The demand that women be silent is not in conflict with their presumed natural garrulousness, but rather can be understood as the social regulation that responds to this belief. Compare Soph. *Aj.* 293: "Silence brings order/adornment to women" (γυναιξὶ κόσμον ἡ σιγὴ φέρει), spoken in response to Tecmessa's criticism of him ("I reproach him," κἀγὼ 'πιπλήσσω, 288). On women and lamentation, see Alexiou 2002, 4–23, McClure 1999a, 40–47. On the *Medea* and lamentation, see Pucci 1980, 21–58, and passim. On the relationship between the historical movement to limit women's role in lamentation and Greek tragedy, see Foley 1990.

21. On the Greek emphasis (then and now) on the need for secrecy to hide information from potential enemies, see Winkler 1990, 134–37, in particular 136: "'Slackmindedness' (*khaliphrosunê*) is a trait of children who have not yet learned to control their public personalities with constant vigilance by erecting a wall of discretion."

22. On women's propensity for lamentation, see, e.g., Eur. *HF* 536; Soph. *Aj.* 580.

23. A good example of maintaining silence and repressing one's desire to lament as a sign of heroic behavior can be seen in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, when Heracles, after lamenting "like a girl" (1071, ὥστε παρθένος) is then able to muzzle his cries by the end of the play, thereby reasserting his self-control by means of a "hard heart" (1260, ψυχὴ σκληρά). On the central importance of controlling one's emotions as an aspect of *sophrosyne*, see Rademaker 2005, 257–61.

24. Ajax, himself a paradigm of self-reliance, says that any man would accept compensation for a wrong received, even in the matter of murder, let alone the theft of one slave woman (*Il.* 9.632–38). Phoenix earlier mentions that even the gods can be moved by entreaty, since prayers can sway them (*Il.* 9.502–12).

25. See Buxton 1982, 10–18, 58–63, and 110–13 generally, with references. Lysias states (2.19) that it belongs to the beasts to decide things by force, whereas it is fitting for humans to use law and persuasion.

thought, persuasion and deception often overlap.[26] A true act of persuasion will often have as its object the benefit of the one being persuaded and not (simply) the benefit of the one trying to persuade him or her. Moreover, one should clearly be truthful in his or her act of persuasion. An honest attempt at persuasion attempts to fill in deficiencies in the knowledge of the listener (whether they be deficiencies of factual information or deficiencies in interpretation or viewpoint) in order to bring the individual to another stance, whereas deception uses deficiencies in knowledge to manipulate the individual, thereby bringing them to a desired state of belief and action that are primarily or solely to the advantage of the one persuading.[27] The issue of the manner of persuasion thus relates to the issue of who is persuading. The need to be resistant to the words of others is clearly most applicable in those cases where the one attempting persuasion is an enemy, whereas one should be more receptive to the words of a friend.[28]

Thus the hyper-heroic figure, like the Achilles of the *Iliad* or the Sophoclean hero, can be understood to reflect an inability to recognize a crucial distinction between self-control on the battlefield and in civilized discourse. On the battlefield, one's opponent is by definition an enemy, and physical harm to the body is always to be avoided. But the individual who is most successful in maintaining this ability on the battlefield then mistakenly persists in this relation in the more peaceful interaction of language, where the model breaks down precisely because language can function differently from physical conflict by producing change without violence.

Turning to the play, it was, as Medea says, by allowing herself to be persuaded by Jason that all her troubles began (800–802):

ἡμάρτανον τόθ' ἡνίκ' ἐξελίμπανον
δόμους πατρώιους, ἀνδρὸς Ἕλληνος λόγοις
πεισθεῖσ'.

I made a mistake at that time
when I left behind the home of my father,
persuaded by the words of a Greek man.

Since, as Jason emphasizes (526–31), she was convinced by him due to the influence of Eros, Medea's previous susceptibility corresponds to the pattern that views women as being particularly liable to erotic persuasion.[29] Now, however, she is clearly resistant to her lover's words and, indeed, to all others,

26. See Buxton 1982, 63–66.

27. For this understanding of how persuasion works though the listener's lack of knowledge, see Gorg. *Hel*. 11.

28. The contrast between the two forms of persuasion is illustrated in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus, himself persuaded by the unscrupulous Odysseus, uses Philoctetes' lack of knowledge about recent events at Troy to deceive/persuade Philoctetes that he is his friend and that he is, therefore, worthy to be entrusted with the bow of Heracles when Philoctetes suffers a bout of his sickness. Later, when Neoptolemus has abandoned the use of deception and proven himself a true friend of Philoctetes (cf. 1335) by returning the bow and by resisting Odysseus' machinations, his attempt to get Philoctetes to go to Troy now represents a true attempt at persuasion, intended to benefit his friend Philoctetes (cf. 1350–51) by using his superior information (knowledge of the real benefit that Philoctetes will receive by going to Troy, 1329–35) to fill in Philoctetes' lack of knowledge; see Buxton 1982, 122–28, and cf. also Theseus' successful persuasion of Heracles to give up his desire to commit suicide at the end of Euripides' *Hercules Furens*.

29. Cf. also Pind. *Pyth*. 4.216–19, cited in Buxton 1982, 40.

as well.[30] The Nurse's comment at lines 26–33 indicates the particular connection between Jason's use of treacherous words and Medea's current resistance: Jason's oath to Medea "persuaded" her to help him, but since he has been found to have broken this oath, she now shows herself to be resistant to the words of others. Similar comments on her resistance to persuasion are made at lines 140–42 and 184–89.

The play also explicitly dramatizes the result of being too weak to resist the persuasive words of an enemy.[31] Here, the model of verbal autonomy is in line with the model of the impervious body of the warrior, since the words being used are those of an enemy intended to do the individual harm. Medea's first successful act of persuasion is against Creon, when he comes on stage to personally announce his edict that Medea and her children are to be exiled immediately. His reason is simple and direct: he fears what Medea may do to him and his family (287–91). Moreover, Creon also recognizes the danger of giving in to Medea's persuasive words (316–20):

λέγεις ἀκοῦσαι μαλθάκ', ἀλλ' ἔσω φρενῶν
ὀρρωδία μοι μή τι βουλεύηις κακόν.
τοσῶιδε δ' ἧσσον ἢ πάρος πέποιθά σοι·
γυνὴ γὰρ ὀξύθυμος, ὡς δ' αὔτως ἀνήρ,
ῥάιων φυλάσσειν ἢ σιωπηλὸς σοφός.

You speak things soft to hear, but in my heart
I am afraid that you are plotting something evil for me,
And as a result I am by so much the less persuaded by you than before.
For just as with a man, it is easier to guard against
A woman quick to anger than a silent, intelligent person.

Creon expresses a typical Greek male anxiety concerning women and language, that is, that Medea is hiding her intentions by her use of "soft" words, which is exactly what she is doing. Yet in the end Creon *does* give Medea what she needs—a single extra day in which she will effect her revenge (374–75). Thus despite the fact that he recognizes that he is making a mistake (350), Creon is too weak-willed to resist Medea's language.[32] Hence the "soft words" of Medea have their effect. I suggest that we should understand the term μαλθακός to have an active sense here. Persuasive language is "soft" not simply in the sense that the words are themselves (figuratively) soft, but in the sense that they make their listener soft, weakening them to the point that they can be led to do what the persuader wants.[33] Creon in the play represents that lack of resistance to the persuasive language of others that Medea

30. See Buxton 1982, 155.

31. Buxton 1982, 158–60; Boedeker 1991, 101.

32. On Creon's weakness in this scene, see Gredley 1987, 30–31; contrast McDermott 1989, 100, who sees him as a "a picture of upright piety and humanity."

33. It must be admitted that this is not the typical sense of the term. However, Plato uses μαλακός (the prose equivalent) to criticize certain rhythms because they in turn make their listeners soft (*Resp.* 398e, 411a), and Aristotle talks of the female being soft in respect of both her physical and psychological characteristics (*Hist. an.* 608a). The idea of mental weakness is emphasized in this scene when Creon speaks of his fear of "being softened" (μαλθακισθέν θ', 291; cf. Soph. *Aj.* 594, where Tecmessa uses a verbal form [μαλάσσου] to entreat Ajax to yield to her entreaties). The notion that being soft renders one vulnerable is a persistent theme of the play, as the children are repeatedly described as having soft skin (1075, 1403; see below).

herself has mastered.[34] The situation will be played out again in the second confrontation between Medea and Jason, when she again will use soft words to deceive him (μαλθακοὺς λέξω λόγους, 776).

If at the beginning of the play Medea has already revealed herself as resistant to the persuasive language of others, a resistance that she exhibits throughout, her ability to restrain her own words only develops in the course of the play's action.[35] Medea is initially presented as uncontrolled in her use of language. A good example of this sort of lack of verbal restraint is seen in her first confrontation with Jason. McClure has recently argued that in this agon Medea appropriates the male-dominated genre of blame speech and so produces "a transgression of normative gender roles that prefigures her elevation to semi-divine status at the end of the play."[36] While I would not disagree that there are masculine elements to Medea's speech,[37] I would argue both that invective is not intrinsically masculine and that Medea's language simultaneously shows a feminine lack of verbal self-control.[38]

When Jason comes on stage, he explicitly reproaches Medea for her uncontrolled language (446–51), and his accusation is an accurate one, since Creon specifically mentions Medea's threats as motivating his decision to exile her. Hence, lack of verbal control, by Jason's account, has harmed Medea.[39] After Medea's side of the debate, which alternates controlled rhetoric and emotional outburst,[40] Jason again presents her as unrestrained in her language (522–25):

δεῖ μ', ὡς ἔοικε, μὴ κακὸν φῦναι λέγειν,
ἀλλ' ὥστε ναὸς κεδνὸν οἰακοστρόφον

34. Contrast Aethra's persuasion of her son Theseus in Eur. *Suppl*. 297–345, in which she convinces Theseus to act in a noble fashion, thereby maintaining his reputation.

35. See Boedeker 1997, for a discussion of how Medea "learns" in the course of the play, in particular by assimilating the characteristics of others; see Rehm 1989, 106, for the idea that Medea learns even her desire for glory from Jason.

36. McClure 1999b, 373.

37. For instance, her use of terms more often employed by men (on this, see McClure 1999b, 384), although such language is typical of Medea throughout the play.

38. McClure discusses the connections between women and blame speech (1999a, 47–52; 1999b, 374–76). The strongest evidence seems to be that of female abusive language in ritual contexts (which, however, as McClure is right to emphasize, is directed toward other women, not men), the personification of invective as a woman, Iambe, and certain famous individual examples in literature of verbally abusive language spoken by a woman, such as Helen's reproach of Paris in *Il*. 3.428–36. Further evidence can be mentioned. Aristotle described the female, in a discussion of the "natural" characteristics of males and females, as being "more fond of insulting" (φιλολοίδορον μᾶλλον) than the male (*Hist. an.* 608b). Plato (e.g., *Resp*. 395d, 549c–e) similarly suggests that a woman reproaching her husband was a common occurrence. Semonides' invective repeatedly presents wives as verbally abusive (7 W, lines 10–11, 33–36, and in particular 105). Compare also the sharp-tongued Melantho's rebuke of Odysseus disguised as a beggar in *Od*. 18.321–36 and Plutarch's mention (*Lyc*. 14.4–6) of Spartan girls reproaching cowardly soldiers (see McClure 1999b, 374). I do not think there is a real conflict between McClure's description of Medea's language as masculine and my own of the speech as feminine, if a distinction between normative and natural is recognized. McClure rightly emphasizes that such aggressive language is an attack upon the Greek male's presumption of superiority. In order to maintain this (im)balance of power, women in Greek society, Classical Athenian society in particular, were trained to silence. Hence, an outspoken woman goes against the normative restrictions placed upon women by their society. However, this repression is itself in large part supported by assumed notions concerning the nature of women, who were understood as lacking self-control in matters physical and psychological.

39. The inability to control one's anger (446–47) is another sign of a lack of self-restraint (see Rademaker 2005, 178 with n. 28)

40. See Lloyd 1992, 24, 41–43, especially 42.

ἄκροισι λαίφους κρασπέδοις ὑπεκδραμεῖν
τὴν σὴν στόμαργον, ὦ γύναι, γλωσσαλγίαν.

I must, it seems, prove no mean speaker,
But like a careful helmsman of a ship,
Using just the edge of the sail, outrun
Your incessant tongue, woman.

Line 525 is remarkable. Jason uses two rare words (the pleonasm perhaps meant to reflect the excessive nature of the object described), etymologically related,[41] to describe Medea's speech as the product of an uncontrolled tongue, between which he addresses Medea as "woman," that is, a member of that class of individuals who were stereotypically understood as unrestrained in their speech. This only accentuates the simile: Medea produces a torrent of words like the raging sea, while Jason in his speech is the helmsman who is able to master such a torrent.[42] In contrast to Medea's uncontrolled use of language, Jason will emphasize his own control of words. He will not go into details of how it was desire that led Medea to help him (529–32, itself an example of the rhetorical figure of *praeteritio*) and he controls the debate as a whole by deciding when it should end (609). He furthermore controls Medea's language by silencing her with a command to be quiet (550), when she seems about to object to his outrageous description of himself as her friend.

Moreover, it is important to note that Medea's use of invective is unsuccessful. Medea says that her speech is meant to cause Jason pain (471–72), but in the course of the debate it is shown that it is not at all effective in hurting Jason. Indeed, Jason preempted such an attempt even before she spoke (451–52). Moreover, not only does he initially say that he is not angry with her, but he remains unconcerned by the end of their debate. It is certainly true that the Chorus, and just about all later commentators, view Medea as having won the debate by showing Jason to be in the wrong, but this is not the relevant point when dealing with invective. Medea may win the debate in the view of others, but her use of invective is ultimately ineffective. Invective is a type of speech act that is meant to harm one's enemy, and Jason, with his final words in the debate that he is *still* willing to help Medea and the children,[43] shows that he has not been harmed in the least by Medea's reproaches. He remains as smug and unconcerned as ever, and is certainly not angry. Thus Medea's words are indeed μάταιοι, vain, for they can do nothing except produce more opposition and difficulty for herself.[44] It will only be when Medea's words are supported by deeds that they will have the power to harm Jason.[45]

41. See Mastronarde 2002, ad 525.

42. See Pucci 1980, 108.

43. Note the use of the present θέλω in 620.

44. Presumably, since Medea's words do not hurt Jason, they also ultimately do not relieve her heart. On "vain" words in the play, see Boedeker 1991, 103 and passim.

45. Compare Thersites' abuse of the commanders in Hom. *Il.* 2, of which Martin (1989, 111) says: "Thersites' style deserves no respect because he does not have the heroic martial performance record needed to back up his words."

After their debate, Medea gains the first element required for her plan of revenge when she obtains the promise from the Athenian king Aegeus to receive her in exile. She then confronts Jason once again. This time, we might say, she loses the battle in order to win the war. She brilliantly plays the role of a weak woman, fawning on Jason and belittling her gender as she praises him, thereby using the stereotype to her own advantage.[46] By doing so she effectively hides her true intentions and so paves the way for her revenge.

Medea's relation to lamentation shows a similar progression toward self-control. As noted, the idea that women were less restrained in their use of language finds clear expression in the belief that they were more suited to perform acts of lamentation.[47] Medea begins the play in a state of lamentation, as she grieves for her betrayal at the hands of Jason and for the family she lost by following him (31–32, 166–67). Her words are frequently described in terms of lamentation (31, 55, 59, 107, 135, 204), which is reflected in her use of ritual cries such as ἰώ and αἰαῖ (after 95, 110, and 143), and she sings in agitated anapaests. Moreover, since Medea repeatedly threatens her enemies during these outcries (111–14, 163–65), such unrestrained lamentation can be clearly related to her earlier discussed lack of verbal restraint, since we can understand such curses to be the source of Jason's and Creon's knowledge of her ill will toward them.[48]

The issue of lamentation arises again when Medea's feelings of sorrow and pity for her children threaten to reveal her intentions to her enemies. When Medea has deceived Jason into believing that she is no longer angry with him, he discusses how he will provide for the children in the future, only to be interrupted by Medea as she breaks out in tears (referred to at 922, 927, 928). Here her sense of sorrow for the deaths she will inflict on her children threatens to reveal her intentions to Jason.[49] So, too, after Jason has left with the children to bring the deadly gifts to his new wife, and it is reported by the Paedagogus that the children have won a reprieve from their sentence of exile, Medea again comes close to revealing herself (1005–14). Medea's ritual cries suggest that she will move into open lamentation (as after 95, 143), but instead she does indeed show herself to be strong[50] by repressing her desire to lament. She then sends the Paedagogus offstage. Now beyond the hearing of those who might betray her plans (the Chorus having been sworn to secrecy), Medea openly laments for the children she is planning to kill. Her sorrow leads her to question her resolve, claiming for a moment that she will abandon her intention. Yet in the end it is her concern for her reputation that wins out (1049–52):

46. See Buxton 1982, 166–67; Rehm 1989, 107; Foley 1989, 78; McClure 1999b, 390–91.

47. Excessive displays of emotion and lamentation also align Medea with the stereotype of the eastern barbarian, but as has been noted, Euripides does not stress Medea's ethnic difference (see Mastronarde 2002, 23–24). Medea herself (928) relates such lack of restraint to feminine, not barbarian, nature.

48. If it is correct, as Alexiou (2002, 21–22) suggests, that female lamentation played a role in rousing male kin to seek redress for the death of a family member, then we can see here a fascinating example of Medea's union of feminine and masculine roles, insofar as she performs an agitated lamentation calling for vengeance (the feminine role), which she herself will exact (the masculine role).

49. On this scene, see Maddalena 1963, 147–48.

50. Just as the Paedagogus advises (θάρσει, 1015), ironically recalling the same command given by Jason to Medea when she previously wept at the thought of the children's death (926).

καίτοι τί πάσχω; βούλομαι γέλωτ' ὀφλεῖν
ἐχθροὺς μεθεῖσα τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀζημίους;
τολμητέον τάδ'· ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐμῆς κάκης,
τὸ καὶ προσέσθαι μαλθακοὺς λόγους φρενί.

But what am I doing? Am I willing to be mocked
By letting my enemies go unpunished?
I must dare these things. But alas for my cowardice,
To even allow soft words into my mind.

Medea thus maintains her strength of resolve, using the same language of "soft words" that was used to describe Creon's failed act of verbal resistance.[51] Whereas Creon allowed himself to give in to Medea's soft words, Medea remains able to resist words that would turn her from her course.[52]

This scene emphasizes physical contact between Medea and the boys, as her sense of loss at their impending death creates in her the desire to touch them (1069–75, in particular the references to embracing, kissing, and the children's soft skin). This may reflect the *prothesis* stage of Greek burial, with its emphasis on washing and anointing the body. Such treatment, of course, served to prepare the body for burial, but it also allowed mourners (in particular the women who performed such ritual cleansing) a final contact with the body of the deceased loved one.[53] This is just what Medea denies Jason at the end of the play. The scene thus suggests that Medea's ability to control her desire to lament for her children results from the grim technique of performing this lament for them before their death, discharging such emotion in order that it not interfere with the intention to murder that generates it.

After the Messenger has reported the effects of the gifts on the king and his daughter, Medea must fortify herself one last time before killing her children (1242–50):

ἀλλ' εἶ' ὁπλίζου, καρδία· τί μέλλομεν
τὰ δεινὰ κἀναγκαῖα μὴ ⟨οὐ⟩ πράσσειν κακά;
ἄγ', ὦ τάλαινα χεὶρ ἐμή, λαβὲ ξίφος,
λάβ', ἕρπε πρὸς βαλβῖδα λυπηρὰν βίου,
καὶ μὴ κακισθῇς μηδ' ἀναμνησθῇς τέκνων,
ὡς φίλταθ', ὡς ἔτικτες, ἀλλὰ τήνδε γε
λαθοῦ βραχεῖαν ἡμέραν παίδων σέθεν
κἄπειτα θρήνει· καὶ γὰρ εἰ κτενεῖς σφ', ὅμως
φίλοι γ' ἔφυσαν· δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή.

But come, my heart, don your armor.
Why do I delay doing terrible yet necessary evils?
Come, my wretched hand, take the sword,
Take it and step to the starting line of a grievous life.

51. The verbal connection is noted by Boedeker 1991, 99–100; see also Mastronarde 2002, ad 1052.

52. Conacher 1967, 195: "Medea herself is really the only one capable of resisting Medea." Knox (1977, 201) suggests that Medea's internal debate is a recasting of the typical scenario in Sophocles whereby the hero resists the persuasive entreaties of others to abandon his or her course.

53. References to the need or desire to touch the body in death are common in tragedy, e.g., Eur. *HF* 1360–64, 1375–76; *Hipp*. 1431–32; *Tro*. 1232–35; *Supp*. 815–17; Soph. *El*. 1138–42.

> Do not be base, and do not bring to mind your children,
> How dear they are, how you gave birth to them. Rather,
> Forget about your children for just this one brief day,
> And then lament. For even if you will kill them,
> Nonetheless they are your kin, and I am a wretched woman.

Thus, Medea's verbal self-control can be understood in two senses.[54] First, her ability to suppress her feelings of sorrow and to displace her lamentation for her children reflects strength of will, something that is emphasized here through Medea's use of military and athletic terminology. Secondly, by so controlling her feelings and her expression of them, she allows herself to plot and win her revenge. Moreover, given that her plot is specifically designed to ensure that her enemies do not laugh at her in her weakness—a laughter that would typically be accompanied by verbal mockery—the heroic resonances are quite clear. Medea controls her own words in order to control the words of her enemies.

However, in the end Medea's strength of will is misdirected. Like the Homeric Achilles or the Sophoclean hero, her application of the values of self-control and autonomy have extended beyond the battlefield and, in particular, beyond the context of hostile interaction between enemies. Creon should have resisted Medea's words earlier because he knew that she was his enemy and did not intend him any good. In such a context of hostile interaction, the model of complete psychic autonomy is the correct one. Yet not only does Medea resist the entreaties of her own *philoi* (the Chorus, 811–14) to renounce her plan, she also resists her own love for her children. And since she does so in order to obtain complete autonomy from her enemies, in that she will harm them without being subject to their laughter and mockery, we can see here the familiar heroic pattern in which the figure who is obsessed by concerns for personal status is led to pursue the value of "harming enemies" to the detriment of the value of "helping friends." Moreover, by killing her children she is, in turn, harming herself. Thus, not only is Medea divided against herself, as Foley and others have discussed,[55] but she in fact views herself, or an important part of herself, literally as an enemy to be resisted. In Euripides' treatment, the pattern of the stubborn hero who resists the good advice of his or her *philoi* is made even more destructive and wasteful by making the hero resistant to her own good advice.[56] For Medea understands that her decision to abide by her decision to kill the children entails detriment to herself (e.g., 1029–30). Thus, Medea's "victory" of self-control comes only at the price of viewing herself as an enemy to be resisted.

The conclusion of the play reveals Medea in a position of complete verbal mastery, while yet revealing what this strength of will has cost her. This verbal

54. On Medea's use of masculine language in this speech, see Schein 1990, 67. On Medea's use of terminology from the heroic code more generally, see Bongie 1977, passim; Foley 1989, 75; and Rehm 1989, 112–13.

55. E.g., Foley 1989, 73–83; Barlow 1989, 167–68.

56. Compare Neoptolemus' judgment of Philoctetes as similarly misguided in his resistance (Soph. *Phil.* 1321–23). A good counterexample, showing the value of being flexible in one's decisions, can be seen in Odysseus' restraint from immediate violence in the Cyclops' cave (Hom. *Od.* 9.299–302), since his second thoughts will prove more useful, allowing for revenge *and* escape.

mastery over Jason is first of all clear from her commanding tone of voice, with her use of imperatives, as is typical of a *deus ex machina*.[57] Moreover, whereas earlier it was Medea's words that had no ability to harm Jason, now it is she who is beyond the effects of language.[58] Just as Medea indulged her hatred of Jason by her ringing condemnations of him in the agon, condemnations which were nonetheless futile because they could not affect their object of hatred, so now Jason's insults are mere empty words, empty accusations and threats that cannot reach Medea, as he himself recognizes: "But I could not bite you with a million reproaches, such boldness is your nature" (ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἄν σε μυρίοις ὀνείδεσιν / δάκοιμι· τοιόνδ' ἐμπέφυκέ σοι θράσος, 1344–45). Indeed, it is rather Medea's words that now have true "bite" to them, that is, the ability to pierce their intended target. To the accusation that she is wicked for her act of killing the children, Medea answers simply: "These children are no more. [So I say,] for this will bite you" (οἵδ' οὐκέτ' εἰσί· τοῦτο γάρ σε δήξεται, 1370). These comments also recall Medea's earlier statement at line 817 to the Chorus that she would kill her offspring because "thus my husband might truly be bitten" (οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα δηχθείη πόσις), as well as the Nurse's comment that Medea's soul was "bitten by evils" (δηχθεῖσα κακοῖσιν, 109–10).[59] Thus, in contrast to before, Medea's words are now invested with full force and power, precisely because she has carefully guarded her tongue until the time when her reproaches would be supported by something more than mere words. The reversal in positions is clear from their final exchange. Jason begs piteously to be allowed to bury his children, but Medea rejects him: "Impossible. This word is hurled in vain" (οὐκ ἔστι· μάτην ἔπος ἔρριπται, 1404). Thus Jason, the figure who seemed to think that he could effect all by means of his glib tongue, viewing Medea's own words as empty, is left without verbal power of any sort, while Medea shows herself to be completely fortified against the verbal attacks of her enemies.

Moreover, in order to steel her resolve to kill her children, Medea talks of lamenting for them later (1249, quoted above). To some extent she will do so, insofar as she herself takes control of the children's bodies to be buried in a secret location. Yet now Medea does not talk so much of her sorrow, but rather of the need to keep the graves from being insulted by her enemies (1378–81). As Charles Segal notes, in many ways, rather than lamenting for the children herself, she instead displaces the role of lamentation onto Jason.[60] Indeed, it is important to recall that this has been her exact purpose in killing the children, that is, to cause Jason as much pain as humanly possible, to affect him to the extent that no self-restraint could check his sense of

57. Knox 1977, 207–8; McClure 1999b, 392. On the play's ending providing divine validation of Medea's punishment of Jason's crimes, if not her own role in this punishment, see Allan 2002, 95–99.

58. See McClure (1999b, 391–92) for a number of parallels between Jason's abusive language here and Medea's earlier.

59. Cf. also Artemis' words to Theseus at Eur. *Hipp*. 1313–14: "Does the account [sc. that your son was innocent of rape] bite you, Theseus? But keep quiet, so that by hearing the rest you may lament the more" (δάκνει σε, Θησεῦ, μῦθος; ἀλλ' ἔχ' ἥσυχος, / τοὐνθένδ' ἀκούσας ὡς ἂν οἰμώξῃς πλέον).

60. Segal 1996, 38, 39–40.

loss, and here at the end of the play Jason's own words show that she has been fully successful (1405–12):

Ζεῦ, τάδ' ἀκούεις ὡς ἀπελαυνόμεθ'
οἷά τε πάσχομεν ἐκ τῆς μυσαρᾶς
καὶ παιδοφόνου τῆσδε λεαίνης;
ἀλλ' ὁπόσον γοῦν πάρα καὶ δύναμαι
τάδε καὶ θρηνῶ κἀπιθεάζω,
μαρτυρόμενος δαίμονας ὥς μοι
τέκνα κτείνασ' ἀποκωλύεις
ψαῦσαί τε χεροῖν θάψαι τε νεκρούς.

Zeus, do you hear how we are driven away,
And what sorts of things we suffer from this monstrosity,
This child-murdering lioness?
Yet at least insofar as it is possible and I am able
I lament and call upon the gods,
Taking the divine ones as my witnesses
That after killing my children you prevent
Me from touching them with my hands and burying them.

Moreover, Medea suggests that Jason's sorrow has only begun (1396): since Jason has lost both his children and his wife, he will lament even more later when he comes to old age, when he will have no one to care for him, and no one to continue his family line (cf. also 1347).[61] In contrast, by the end of the play Medea has so overcome the association between women and lamentation that she can repress her sorrow at having killed her own children. Her appropriation of a type of grim fortitude more traditionally seen as the domain of men contrasts with Jason, who, in his unrestrained lamentation, is reduced to a level of weakness comparable to Medea's at the beginning of the play.[62] Moreover the role of lamentation in this display of weakness is effectively brought out in the way that Jason switches to anapaests at line 1389. To be sure, anapaests are often used in tragedy to indicate the approaching conclusion of the play, and Jason uses marching anapaests as opposed to Medea's lyric anapaests.[63] However, given that Medea began the play lamenting her sorrows in the same meter, the switch here performs the further function of recalling to the audience just how the power relationship has changed between the two characters,[64] in particular by reversing the two characters' relation to lamentation.

However, in the end, even if Medea shows herself able to master her own feelings, Jason's own suffering cannot simply displace her own. For Jason's sorrow results precisely from his role *as a parent*, and in the course of the

61. For a succinct discussion of the play's emphasis on the importance of children, and thus the suitableness of Medea's revenge, see Rickert 1987, 105–6; see also Maddalena 1963, 144.

62. On the emptiness of Jason's words at the end of the play, see Pucci 1980, 161, 162.

63. Some scholars have also argued that there is a masculine quality to Medea's use of anapaests; see McClure 1999b, 382. However, in this play Medea used anapaests in a position of weakness at the beginning of the play, and here at the end it is Jason, in his weakness, who initiates them.

64. See Mastronarde (2002, ad 1293–1419) for a number of examples of how the positions of the two characters have been reversed by the end of the play.

play we have been given a vivid presentation of Medea's own sorrow in just this regard. The text draws the audience toward this connection. For just as Medea in her monologue emphasizes her need to touch the body of the children she is resolved to kill, so too does Jason, using the same words as Medea earlier, mention his desire to kiss their "dear mouth" (φιλίου . . . στόματος, 1399; cf. 1071) and to touch their "soft skin" (μαλακοῦ χρωτός, 1403; cf. 1075). Medea herself concedes the point, thereby revealing the brutal emotional equation at work in her actions (1358–62):

Μη. πρὸς ταῦτα καὶ λέαιναν, εἰ βούλει, κάλει
καὶ Σκύλλαν ἣ Τυρσηνὸν ὤικησεν πέδον·
τῆς σῆς γὰρ ὡς χρῆν καρδίας ἀνθηψάμην.
Ια. καὐτή γε λυπῆι καὶ κακῶν κοινωνὸς εἶ.
Μη. σάφ' ἴσθι· λύει δ' ἄλγος, ἢν σὺ μὴ 'γγελᾶις.

Medea: As for your insults, go ahead, if you wish, and name me
A lioness and a Scylla, she who dwelt on the Tyrrhenian plain.
For I attacked your heart as was necessary.
Jason: You also feel pain and share in these sufferings!
Medea: Know it to be the truth. But the pain is a profit if you do not laugh.[65]

Thus does Jason's lament economically encapsulate much of the play's thematic and emotional content. His position of powerlessness, especially in relation to language, reveals Medea's own ascendancy, itself a reflection of the just punishment of Jason for his abuse of the institution of the oath and his uncaring treatment of his own *philoi*. Yet the degree to which he suffers must be the degree to which Medea herself suffers, since both suffer the same loss of children. Thus, his lament, even as it reveals his own just punishment, so too lays bare the terrible extreme to which Medea has led herself in order to punish him as fully as humanly (or inhumanly) possible. The sorrow Jason feels at the loss of his children derives from just that part of Medea herself that she treated as an enemy to be resisted and mastered. Thus, the emotional distance between Jason and Medea also reflects the degree of distance within Medea. Jason as both the suffering parent and as the mortal enemy of Medea merge in the character of Medea herself, whose desire for revenge has led her to treat her own maternal inclinations as a foe to be vanquished by her heroic obsessions.[66]

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65. λύει, as a shortened form of λυσιτελεῖ, regularly means "to profit, benefit," but the root meaning of the compound (to discharge a debt) suggests this sort of parity of suffering between the two figures.

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