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# The Socially Deviant (M)other in Euripides' "Medea" and Two Modern Adaptations

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THE SOCIALLY DEVIANT (M)OTHER IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA* AND TWO  
MODERN ADAPTATIONS

By

Christina Faye Kramer, Associate of Arts; Bachelor of Music; Bachelor of Arts

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

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STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

For centuries male-dominated societies have developed their own culturally constructed images of the socially acceptable and socially deviant mothers. The thesis explores how the Grecian, Caribbean, and Irish cultures of Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC), Steve Carter's *Pecong* (1990), and Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) respectively, all based on the Medea myth, commonly define the social deviant (m)other and condemn her for her "otherness." It also discusses the limitations of each society's decision to label the Medea-figure as socially deviant. Euripides creates an impossible dichotomy between the culturally constructed concepts of heroism and motherhood, which he locates in separate male and female personas. Medea must cast off the female persona in order to enact her revenge, whereas the adaptations of the play prove the embodiment of two gendered personas is unnecessary to react to the mistreatment they experience; such is the progress women have made since the fifth century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Critical interest in Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC) has understandably revolved around his portrayal of a revenge-seeking, filicidal mother. G.M.A Grube explains that Euripides' critics in the fifth century took issue with his mode of writing, especially his realism. In truth, "[Euripides'] realism shocked his contemporaries [. . .] [and] it shocked nineteenth-century critics even more" because he would not hide the societal blemishes that others would have; instead he embraced them for what they were (Grube 7). One societal blemish that *Medea* brings to its audience's attention is the discriminating expectations that the male-dominated Greek society had of women, especially mothers. At that time in ancient Greece, "the Athenian citizen woman's status was derived entirely from kinship with males, and her primary function was to produce a male heir for the *oikos* ["household"] of her husband" (Foley, "The Conception" 130). Thus, a woman's role in that society was limited to that of mother and her status was directly associated with men: "kinship with males."

Such a male-dominated system of motherhood Adrienne Rich terms as "[i]nstitutionalized motherhood," which is a system of patriarchy that "demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (42). Essentially, the

ideal of motherhood is a culture-specific, socially constructed concept in which the images of the socially acceptable and the socially deviant mother are established. The socially acceptable mother will be selfless and will act the role given to her that benefits society rather than creating a version of herself that she wants to be, a version of herself that is best for her (Rich 42). This mother is expected to be “instinct[ual]” or comes equipped with a “natural” built-in ability to play the role of the socially acceptable mother that has no power beyond the position that the patriarchal society gives her. The complete opposite of the socially acceptable mother, the socially deviant mother goes against society’s expectations for mothers; such is the case for Medea and the two mothers of the representative late-twentieth century adaptations that follow in her footsteps: Steve Carter’s *Pecong* (1990) and Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* (1998).

In addition to representing the conflict that revolves around the presence of two competing images of mothers, Euripides also creates an impossible dichotomy between the equally culturally constructed concepts of heroism and motherhood. Since the two concepts are located in differently gendered roles of society, male and female respectively, Medea is placed in the position of having to decide between taking the heroic action of revenge against one’s enemies and being the ideal mother that society expects her to be. In the end, Medea chooses to take on the male heroic persona because it is the only culturally acceptable way to gain the revenge she seeks for the immense pain and insecurity that

Jason has caused her. This action, however, is not taken without punishment, as a woman who breaks the rules of the male-dominated society by donning a male persona would be anticipated to face. The two adaptations to be discussed further work to blur the lines between the fixed dichotomy of heroism and motherhood by, for instance, presenting a mother in *By the Bog of Cats* who becomes the hero by sparing her child from feeling the pain that she knows that her absence will cause by murdering her. This filicide is also motivated by revenge like in *Medea*, and demonstrates that these two concepts, heroism and motherhood, can be inextricably linked; a mother, regardless of gender, can embody both personas at once without having to choose the most culturally accepted, such is the progress that women have made in the equality of genders since Medea's time. However, such progress is proven to be incomplete as, even while the adaptations challenge the limits of the gendered constructions of heroism and motherhood, these mothers still suffer consequences for straddling two personas at once and are still seen by their societies to defy their culture's image of the ideal mother; even though they are pushed to do so by the abandonment they experience. As each is deprived of her security, she responds through any means, up to and including the murder of her children.

Euripides strives in his fifth-century play to leave the audience in a state of emotional indecision. A state in which at one moment, we sympathize with Medea in her abandonment by Jason and at the next we are horrified by her

ability to kill her own children for the sake of revenge. This state of indecision may in fact be a symptom of Euripides' own maneuvering back and forth between two opposing poles regarding the status of women in Greek society. However, what is certain is that Euripides places his audience in the difficult position of having to make a decision about how society should view the status of women and how the women who are pushed to break society's rules should be judged.

As P. E. Easterling demonstrates, Euripides attempts to make the audience question what they know about the fairness of society's rules by allowing some points to go unnoticed or unannounced that would make Medea appear even worse in the eyes of her jury, the audience. For instance, Easterling explains:

Nor does Euripides allow any character to raise the question of the legal relationship between Jason and Medea. None of them suggests that Jason was perfectly entitled to abandon Medea without bad faith because as a foreigner she could not be his legitimate wife. (180)

By presenting us the downtrodden, abandoned Medea, the audience is pressed to see her as a tragic heroine who suffers at the hands of her husband. However, after we understand her to be on the path of filicide, Medea's image as the discarded wife is marred and the audience is led to see her as the villain in a heroine's clothes. But why the change of heart by the audience? What is it about

Medea and the action she takes that has the power to turn the audience against her and by what standards do we judge her innocence or guilt? After the audience discovers that Medea, a mother of two, is going to gain her revenge on Jason by murdering their children, she becomes the mother who defies the norms of a patriarchal society and is the one who receives all of the blame, even though her husband commits the act of adultery that is the catalyst for her actions. It is this maneuver by Euripides that places Medea in comparison with her limited role that the female plays in the society of ancient Greece. This strategic move forces the audience to judge to what degree Medea is the guilty party and to what degree are outside forces (those who uphold the values of the patriarchal society) guilty for pushing Medea to commit such heinous acts in order to react to her abandonment.

Her desire for revenge stems from the desire for the reciprocity of pain. In other words, as we see in the play's opening, Jason has left Medea to suffer, to cry and moan over his abandonment of her; such an act is not so easily forgotten by Medea and she desires Jason, her enemy, to suffer as much as she has. She says herself:

Laughter from my enemies is not to be endured [. . .] What do I have to gain by living? I have no fatherland, no house, no refuge from calamity.  
[. . .]

Let no one think of me as weak and submissive [. . .] but as a woman of a very different kind, dangerous to my enemies and good to my friends.

(lines 797-810)<sup>1</sup>

Jason becomes Medea's enemy because she has given up everything for him, including her home where she is not an "other," her family that had supported her, and she even committed horrible acts such as killing her own brother and Pelias in order to help Jason: "Medea has sacrificed literally everything for Jason, thus emphasizing his special ingratitude and her special defencelessness" (Easterling 180). She gave up more than she gained by being with Jason, as she lost the security that she once had only to become a barbarian with no protection in the land of Corinth. Additionally, it is important to notice here the inextricable connection between motherhood and "otherness" in regards to the three mothers to be examined. Each is presented as an "other" in their society in some way while being deemed at the same time as socially deviant mothers. For Medea specifically, her "otherness" in part is connected to her status as a foreigner. In truth, motherhood and "otherness" are so deeply intertwined that the word mother houses the "other" within it: (m)other. Of course, this observation about the word "mother" is most applicable to the more modern (English) adaptations of *Medea*, but the idea behind it is still present in the Grecian text. To continue, the loss of Jason, for Medea, is more of a spiritual loss than a physical loss, as Medea's spirit is broken when Jason breaks the oath he made to her and the

gods, and leaves her destitute and exiled. It is for this reason that Medea seeks to reciprocate her spiritual pain through such heinous acts of revenge, including filicide. S. P. Mills points out in "The Sorrows of Medea" that this revenge is two-pronged. Not only does Medea set her sights on Creon and his daughter, who are among the sources of her pain, but she also seeks revenge against Jason. Mills asserts that it was originally Medea's plan to kill Creon, his daughter, and Jason "either by poison or by the sword," but ultimately Jason does not die by the poisoned robe like the others do, his fate is much worse (290).

By killing his children, Medea is "destroy[ing Jason] spiritually rather than physically" and is thereby transferring her pain back to its source (Jason) (Mills 290). According to Easterling, the action of killing their children would be depriving Jason of his legacy and would cut him deeply by attacking him with the love a parent feels for their child, as Medea's speech at lines 764-811 illustrates. Easterling explains that "[Medea] sees the murder of her children as a means of *punishing her enemies*. [. . .] The penalty that is worse than death for her enemy Jason will be to have no children, neither Medea's nor any borne to him by the princess" (185; emphasis in original). It is for this reason that Medea becomes the socially deviant (m)other looked down upon by the male-dominated society of ancient Greece. The only way that Medea could culturally gain the power and revenge over her enemies that she desires is by transcending her position as a woman and throwing off the cultural duties and expectations thrust upon her. She



does this by adopting a male persona where revenge is more culturally acceptable and power is seated. To this point, William Allan asserts that even though the fifth-century Athenian society prided themselves on their democratic legal systems' deviation from the heroic doctrine of revenge, they still retained some of its elements in their society (597). He explains of revenge: "with regard to the defence of one's honour and reputation, this was accepted as no less justified a motive for pursuing revenge than the basic desire to punish the initial wrong" (Allan 598). Since the legal system is part of the *polis*, which was the domain of men, while women were assigned to the domain of the *oikos*, it seems plausible to assert that the quest for revenge was generally a male undertaking. Thus, Euripides shows his audience a woman capable of stepping out of her place in society to take on the male undertaking of revenge and thereby react to the abandonment she experiences, but in so doing he exposes her to the ridicule of a society that will see her as a socially deviant and unacceptable (m)other.

It is Medea's adoption of unethical revenge that first portrays her to be the socially deviant (m)other that she is considered by many to be, as "revenge and violence were essential aspects of 'manliness' in ancient Greece, our earliest texts make it clear that both must be restrained to protect communal life" (Allan 595). Allan asserts that while the form of revenge enacted in tragedy was undesirable in fifth century ancient Greece and the Athenians had moved on to a more democratic process of handling grievances between people (596-97), it

should not be assumed that the tragic form of revenge was not present in the new democratic form. Allan identifies at least three “*continuities* that existed between the ethics of heroic vengeance and the legal justice of classical Athens” (597; emphasis in original):

Firstly, anger was seen as a natural response to being wronged or insulted; and in cases of murder (the ultimate wrong), the judicial system recognized and defused the anger of the dead man’s kin: prosecutors could encourage juries to share the relatives’ anger as they considered how to punish a defendant, while the very system of punishment by law (rather than vendetta violence) satisfied the vengeful anger of the murdered man’s family at the same time as it channelled it in a less socially destructive way. Secondly, with regard to the defence of one’s honour and reputation, this was accepted as no less justified a motive for pursuing revenge than the basic desire to punish the initial wrong. Finally, the punishment exacted by the law was also perceived as a form of vengeance [. . .] (598)

As a woman who is angered by the abandonment of her husband, and as a result seeks to “defen[d her] honour and reputation,” Medea adopts the male heroic persona in order to punish those who have wronged her. In this way, Medea sets herself apart from the societal expectations placed upon women, not only in the tragedy in which she is a character, but also in the broader Athenian

society outside the play, which also adheres to the facets of revenge found in tragedy. It is evident, given Medea's substantial impression on the debates of audiences for centuries, that Medea is such a controversial figure because she defies the norms of her society (both within and outside the play). To this point, as drama allows for unacceptability to be played out on the stage, Medea is shown to exceed her position in the home and to take on a more masculine persona, as she "takes revenge in an explicitly male heroic style (with the exception of her weapon), makes political alliances for herself with Athens, and destroys her husband's *oikos* by killing her sons" all in order to react to her experience in a way that was acceptable in her society (Foley, "The Conception" 151-52). One of the weapons that she uses for revenge includes her children (Foley, "The Conception" 152).

While Medea's filicide has been off-putting for many readers of the play, Lillian Corti casts doubt on the accuracy of this reaction by pointing out that other works of literature have taken up this theme (1) and that the action of killing one's children was not uncommon in ancient Greece (18). While it may be that "infanticide is absolutely forbidden by the moral code of a society [including ancient Greece], economic pressures on adults may result in a noticeably increased incidence of violence against children" (Corti 21) for the reason that they must "check[ ] [ . . . ] the unlimited growth of population" (Corti 5).<sup>2</sup> In fact, in ancient Greece it was not uncommon to expose a child to the elements

(unprotected) in the hopes that it would die.<sup>3</sup> While this is not filicide in the traditional sense, the ideal outcome still shows filicidal intent to be present (Patterson 103). In this way, Euripides is dramatizing a realistic problem by exposing it, blemishes and all; no pun intended (Grube 7). In order to show that “[t]he theme of infanticide in literature is a reflection of the actual human experience of violent hostility toward children,” Corti suggests that an audience is able to relate to the performance of the infanticide theme by Medea for two potential reasons (1). The first is that audiences either have a repressed fear of parental infanticide housed in their unconscious from childhood (Corti 2) or they “derive vicarious satisfaction from the spectacle of violent excess on the part of the adult aggressor” (Corti 3); no matter the reason selected, each is part of a “process” suggested by Freud “of repression and denial” (Corti 3) which has historically prevented individuals from recognizing the evidence of infanticide (Corti 3-4). The question that arises here is, if such a desire is not uncommon and certain members of the audience may actually have a repressed desire for infanticide, and they are not condemned by society for it, then why is Medea condemned so harshly by society for choosing a weapon of revenge that would allow her to reciprocate her pain?

While I do not condone the action of killing one’s children, I do think that we have to consider what informs our decision that Medea’s actions are unacceptable. Is it unacceptable because she is the children’s mother? Or is it

unacceptable based on the premise that humans should not kill other humans? If it were true that the play's audiences have been appalled because humans should not kill other humans, then the Peloponnesian War would not be acceptable and revenge would not be allowed in the Athenian legal system. Likewise, fathers would not be given the power to determine whether a child will live or die. In all actuality, the war was fought, the Athenian legal system did include revenge, and fathers did have this authority, so it appears that these things are acceptable; by extension, it must be that the audience condemns Medea because she commits such an act as a mother. Not only that, but Medea is a barbarian (foreigner) to Greece who differs from the image her sex has been told by the male-dominated society that they must embody. If it is in fact the case that Medea is disliked by her audiences because of the reasons delineated prior, then the audience is under the spell of the patriarchal society who views Medea as a socially deviant (m)other, and also pushes her to undertake her actions because of its stringent rules on how a woman and mother can react. Being that Jason does not receive any meaningful reprimand, other than through Medea's actions, for abandoning his children, it seems that a father is not held to the same standards that a mother is; the father seems to have more freedom than does a mother, which explains the extremes that Medea must go to in order to rebel against the system that suffocates her, treats her as an outsider, and disregards her needs. That is not to say that I condone Medea's filicidal actions; while I do

believe that Medea has reason to exact her revenge upon Jason and is right to fight back against the society that oppresses her, as I work to show in the chapter devoted to Euripides' *Medea*, Medea takes her revenge too far when she is overcome by the masculine heroic persona. The thesis proper will explore the qualities of the socially deviant (m)other that are inextricably linked to her status as an "other," such as selfishness, filicide, and her defiance of acceptable female behavior in Euripides' *Medea* and two modern adaptations. The Medea figure's embodiment of these qualities are motivated by the absence of the Medea-figure's mother and the abandonment of the Jason-figure. This work will also demonstrate the limitations of such socially constructed rules for the culturally unacceptable (m)other.

The two modern adaptations of *Medea* that will be examined in the thesis follow along a very similar path as that of the original play. While each may toy with the limits of the original plot, they do not deviate far from the thematic groundwork of *Medea*, as they each continue to explore the themes associated with the socially deviant (m)other that *Medea* establishes, which include filicide, selfishness, and abandonment (absence). Steve Carter's *Pecong* (1990) is set in the Caribbean and it interprets the story of Medea with a Caribbean flare. The central character of this adaptation is Mediyah, who kills her two children after discovering that Jason, who is her lover rather than her husband, has decided to abandon her (and take the children) in order to marry the island's princess. In a

twist on Euripides, Mediyah's plight is planned by her grandmother Granny Root in order to put an end to the entire line of Creon Pandit who impregnated Mediyah's mother and would not accept responsibility for it; he would not even admit that it was so when Mediyah directly confronted him about it. When Mediyah's mother was pregnant, Granny Root asked a spirit to implant her daughter with a second child, that of Mediyah, so that Mediyah could avenge the pain Creon has caused her daughter; Mediyah's brother is actually Creon's son. This preordained mission is unbeknownst to Mediyah until the end of the play. After her children are born, Mediyah's mother abandons them by throwing herself off of a cliff to commit suicide. Once Granny Root transfers her power to Mediyah upon her death in the beginning of the play, her plan is set in motion and the revenge scheme begins.

Similarly to *Pecong*, Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) transports the story of Medea to a new setting, that of a bog in Ireland. The Medea character, Hester Swane, is abandoned by her lover, Carthage, when he decides to marry the leading farmer's daughter for financial advantage. Carthage desires to take their daughter Josie away from Hester after he is married because he sees Hester as an unfit mother, as she often walks the bog at night leaving Josie at home by herself. To make matters worse, Hester not only harbors abandonment issues caused by Carthage, but she also has unresolved feelings of abandonment caused by her own mother, who left her one day from the bog

never to return. In actuality, she had left Hester to start a completely new family, only to abandon them as well. As in *Medea*, Hester is being unwillingly exiled from her home on the bog, but in this case it is because she sold it to the leading farmer during a time of emotional weakness.<sup>4</sup> She fights to the bitter end to stay on the bog so that she can wait for her mother to return. However, when she sees that her pleas to Carthage and the farmer to allow her to stay are not successful, she undertakes her revenge by burning down the house she sold and the barn with Jason's livelihood (his cattle) inside. Having completed this, she is about to commit suicide when her daughter walks up and asks what she is doing. After telling her that she will be going away and will not return, the daughter unrelentingly begs Hester to take her with her. As Hester knows all too well what it is like to wait every day for her own mother to return, she kills her daughter to spare her from this pain. Hester then commits suicide and no other person dies in the play.

Euripides' *Medea* establishes a precedent that other adaptations of the play cannot escape. Medea is portrayed as a socially deviant (m)other who is bent on undertaking revenge through whatever means are necessary so that her enemies, Jason, Creon, Creon's daughter, and the patriarchal society that stipulates how she can act, do not win; even if that means filicide. The Medea-figures of *Pecong* and *By the Bog of Cats* are bound to the same rule-defying behavior as Medea; however, their experiences and reactions add further layers



of complication that must be unraveled. Here it is necessary to define the term “socially deviant (m)other” from the perspective of the three cultures presented by the plays—ancient Greece, the Caribbean, and Ireland—since the image of the ideal mother is a social (cultural) construct. Robert Tyminski uses the term “Terrible Mother” to refer to the socially deviant (m)other in his article, “The Medea Complex- Myth and Modern Manifestation.” Medea’s behavior has made such an impact on her audiences that she has a complex named after her. The Medea complex is a general term used by many authors, especially in the field of psychology, to refer to “the murderous impulses of the mother [in an applicable case] toward the child”; as pointed out by Tyminski, authors who utilize the Medea complex attempt “in various ways to explain” “the [mother’s] murderous impulses” (28). Tyminski offers a list of five common reasons for the terrible mother’s “murderous impulses”: “maternal aggression toward the father, feeling existentially threatened by the baby, maternal omnipotence, intolerable feelings of shame in the mother, and the mother’s insatiable thirst for vengeance” (28). Additionally, he suggests that “[a]nother aspect of the Medea complex pertains to the role of a father who cannot protect his children” as well as to the “madness” of the mother (Tyminski 37). Of the five reasons listed, each of the mothers presented in the three plays are commonly motivated by revenge and each of the fathers fail to “protect [the] children.” However, *Pecong’s* Mediyah is also motivated by “maternal omnipotence” while *By the Bog of Cats’* Hester is also

motivated by “maternal aggression toward the father.” Arguably, all three mothers are mentally sound when they commit their filicidal acts; they commit the murders of their children because they are pushed by the acts of forces outside themselves to do so.

In examining three plays by Marina Carr, which includes *By the Bog of Cats*, Karin Maresh discusses the qualities of what she terms the “unnatural mother.” She defines the “unnatural mother” as:

mothers [. . .] [that] suffer because they defy the core concepts of essential motherhood that have defined motherhood in Ireland for so long. They are selfish, rather than self-less; they are often ambivalent about rather than accepting of motherhood and marriage; they are openly sexual rather than chaste; they are damaged from maternal abuse or neglect; and they harbor violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides, and filicide. (179)

Maresh’s definition is useful in describing the qualities of the socially deviant (m)other in the three plays to be discussed as each of the mothers presented are shown to be “selfish,” as they are shown not to take care of their children in the way that society expects them to. All concerned “harbor violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides, and filicide”—Medea kills her children, poisons Creon and his daughter, and emotionally tortures Jason—Mediyah kills her children, poisons Creon and his daughter, and emotionally tortures Jason—Hester kills her

child, burns down her house as well as the barn with Jason's livestock in it, emotionally tortures Carthage, and kills herself. As far as being "damaged from maternal abuse or neglect," only Mediyah and Hester are truly shown to have this quality, as Medea's mother is never mentioned in the play. It is precisely this lack of acknowledgment that makes it unclear as to how much of Medea's behavior was impacted by her mother's absence. I do venture to suggest however that the increased focus on the presence and absence of the Medea-figure's mother in the adaptations is working to remind the audience of the outside forces that influence the Medea-figure's reaction to what they experience.

For this reason, I suggest that Maresh's definition does not go far enough in presenting the varying areas from whence the mothers' trauma (and motivation for revenge) can arise. It is not only "damage from maternal abuse or neglect" that the Medea-figure experiences. For instance, in each of the plays represented, the Medea-figure experiences trauma that is associated with the abandonment of the Jason-figure and it is this major source of trauma that pushes each character to "harbor" and undertake her "violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides, and filicide." In addition, Maresh's term hints that motherhood is a "natural" or instinctive trait that women are equipped with from birth (Rich 42). It also opens up the question of what is natural and unnatural and by whose standards this is judged. Since this term causes more problems than it solves, I prefer to use the term "socially deviant (m)other" to acknowledge the

fact that the standards that a mother is judged by are constructed by the society in which she lives. With that being said, Maresh provides some good points about what the socially deviant (m)other of Ireland would be like and by extension those cultures that share a common social ideological make-up.

The image of the socially deviant mother differs from culture to culture, but there are areas of commonality between cultures. As we are examining the cultures of ancient Greece, the Caribbean, and Ireland, it is necessary to develop a clearer picture of this (m)other in those societies in order to see the reaction of each to the socially deviant (m)other. Common to each of the societies presented is that the socially deviant mother takes on the position of the “other” who is society’s outcast or the “foreigner” to society’s norms. In Euripides’ play, *Medea* is described in the beginning of the play as a barbarian in the city of Corinth, the “country she has come [to] in her exile” (line 12) from “Iolkos” (line 7). In accordance with historical events of the fifth century, *Medea*’s status as a barbarian is not held in the highest regard by the society in which she lives, as the Greeks’

successful defence of their territory against the onslaught of the mighty Persian Empire helped to produce in the Greeks a strong sense of their own identity and values, which they began to see as fundamentally opposed to those of the Persians. This perceived antithesis between

'Greek' and 'barbarian' [. . .] coloured much of Greek thought in the Classical Age [500-336 BC]. (Blundell 95)

Euripides' play, with its connections to the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece, was performed in 431 BC which places it during this time in Greece, that of the Classical Age, where the barbarian was looked down upon and seen as an "other" to Greek society.

In terms of the Caribbean style of motherhood represented by *Pecong*, the socially acceptable mother is described as being "self-sacrificing, often tyrannical but essentially loving, and fiercely protective" (Adisa 42). Opal Palmer Adisa's definition of the socially deviant (m)other of the Caribbean shows her to be "the verbal and physical abuser, the neglecter, the pathological misfit, the deranged woman who never should have had children" (42). *Pecong's* Mediyah, as well as Medea and Hester, fit this definition of the socially deviant (m)other, as she is set apart from society from the start of the play by the fear that people have of her and the uncertainty of what she will do; they are each "the pathological misfit" that Adisa identifies. It is important to note here, that while the Medea-figures of the adaptations are locked into committing similar actions as Medea, they have more power and freedom as women than Medea had. For instance, Mediyah had a magical power that was passed down only through the *female line* in her family, which is not unlike Medea, it is just that Mediyah does not have to adopt a male heroic persona in order to seek her magical revenge. Hester also demonstrates

that she has greater freedom and power than Medea in her act of saying no to leaving her home on the Bog; similarly to Mediyah, Hester too has gained greater freedom in 1998 than Medea could have ever hoped for in fifth-century Greece. As these women were free to leave their homes and were not confined to it, unlike the women of ancient Greece who were “confined as much as possible to the interior of the house [. . .] In the house women wove, cooked, and supervised the running of the household and the rearing of children with the help of female slaves,” I see that the plight of women has improved (Foley, “The Conception” 130). However, that is not to say that these mothers are free from their share of societal judgment and oppression.

Furthermore, the modern adaptations of Euripides’ play are shown to take up the tenets of the wave of feminism prevalent at the time they are performed. For instance, Carter’s *Pecong* portrays the struggle happening between the second and third waves of feminism from his position in 1990 between Mediyah (Carter’s heroine), Faustina, and Persis (the female chorus) (Foley, “Reimagining” 172). Also, the reaction of Carr’s heroine Hester to her mistreatment is in accordance with the tenets of the third wave of feminism. On a broader scale, each Medea-figure’s reception by her respective audiences are shown to have ties to the progress being made by the feminist movement, as the audience moves from outright disgust with her filicidal actions, to “fascination,”

and finally to the realization that Medea and her audience have areas of commonality (Foley, "Reimagining" 159).

At this point it is necessary to briefly outline the waves of feminism referred to previously; this will not by any means provide a complete historical discussion of the progression of this movement, as that is beyond the scope of this thesis. In the first wave of the feminist movement women fought for basic equality, especially in terms of voting rights (Rampton). The first wave was then supplanted by the second wave in the 1960s and the focus of this wave was on "sexuality and reproductive rights" (Rampton). Additionally, this wave "drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity, claiming 'Women's struggle is class struggle,'" yet this is one of the main issues that the third wave of feminists took them to task on (Rampton). In contrast to the second wave, when the third wave rose to prominence "in the mid-90s," they acknowledged that women are different from one to another and that they have different needs and experiences (Rampton). At this time, Martha Rampton suggests that "many constructs were destabilized, including the notions of 'universal motherhood,' body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity." Essentially, the third wave was showing what society must keep in mind, as they try to define what women and mother's roles are, that women cannot and should not be compared to a set of criteria that will never be all encompassing.

One of the significant problems that comes with the attempt to hold mothers to the hard and fast standards (or criteria) of the patriarchal society is that the mother is never considered in terms other than what her role is in society. Never is it taken into consideration that mothers are people who have their own problems, such as the abandonment Hester experiences on two fronts, or Mediyah's exhaustion as a new mother, or Medea's pain and insecurity that Jason's abandonment causes. In each culture presented up to now, each society is shown to have its own version of the socially acceptable mother that it desires and to react to the socially deviant (m)other in its own way. However, these desires and reactions are not separate from each other; there are overlaps within the definitions provided by each culture that will be demonstrated through textual evidence from each play in the chapters of the thesis. These overlaps to be discussed include the abandonment that each Medea-figure experiences from mother or Jason-figure or both and the associated effects that they endure after the fact, the selfishness and neglect undertaken by each mother toward their children that makes them "unfit mothers," and the filicide that each carries out. It is as Easterling states in concluding his examination of *Medea*: "When he [Euripides] makes the insensitive Jason praise Greek society and values and when he gives the barbarian witch the ideals of a traditional Greek hero he is surely suggesting that there is no safe dividing line: civilized life is always most precariously poised, continually threatened from within" (191). In other words, the



actions that Medea undertakes are proof to the audience, members of the patriarchal society at large, that the “dividing line” established between the genders, and between the social “other” and the social norm, that serve to put each in their proper place is merely a line in the sand that can be washed away with the tide. It can be changed, modified, and “threatened from within” because it is only a societal construct. In sum, Jason acted as the impetus for Medea’s actions in that she reacted by taking on the only form in which revenge (her reaction) was allowable: acting male. Both of the socially deviant (m)others in the later adaptations of *Medea* presented follow the example that Medea sets and they struggle to redefine what it means to be a mother, escape the confines of the label “other,” and push their captive audiences to do the same.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Socially Deviant (M)other in Euripides' *Medea*

We have courtesans (*hetaerae*) for pleasure, concubines to take care of our day-to-day bodily needs, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to be the loyal guardians of our households'.

Taken from Blundell (pp. 121-22)

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Five individual episodes, each of which is tied closely to a specific locale, construct the horizontal tradition [that informs the *Medea* myth, three of which are represented here]:

- a. The Colchian story: Medea helps Jason, who has arrived with the Argonauts, obtain the Golden Fleece; she then must flee with him.
- b. The Iolcan story: Medea helps Jason to avenge himself on Pelias; they then must flee from the Peliades, who seek revenge.
- c. The Corinthian story: Medea avenges herself on Jason, who has abandoned her, by killing the Corinthian king, his daughter, and the children whom Medea has borne to Jason; she then must flee.

Taken from Graf (p. 22)

In examining the ways in which Medea is constructed as the socially deviant (m)other of ancient Greece, it is useful to first examine her mythical roots and the extent to which she deviates from them. What is unique to Euripides' version of the *Medea* myth is that it provides the audience with a more domestic aftermath of the events of the Colchian and Iolcan stories (as shown in the epigraph above). I use the term "domestic" because the action of the play is centered on the home of Jason and Medea. Medea never leaves the home, or the space directly outside it, and every character she interacts with comes within the house or directly outside the house. As the main character of the play is

acknowledged to be a wife and mother, if the action of this play had been divorced from its tragic context, the Athenian citizens would have seen this setting as culturally unacceptable. This is because women of status were generally confined to the house (the *oikos*), while lower class women were necessarily allowed to be in the male-dominated *polis* to earn money for their family. To this point, Helene Foley explains the difference between these classes of women:

Respectable women were, ideally at least, confined as much as possible to the interior of the house and to the women's quarters within it. Men, by contrast, spent relatively little time indoors. In the house women wove, cooked, and supervised the running of the household and the rearing of children with the help of female slaves. Poorer women may have participated in agriculture, and certainly sold goods at markets.

Respectable women left the house only to visit neighbors, to aid in childbirth, or to attend religious rituals [ . . . ] As Pericles stressed in his Funeral Oration, respectable women should have no public reputation, whether for good or bad (Thuc. 2. 46). ("The Conception" 130)

As Foley points out, the male-dominated Athenian society locates the place of the "respectable women" in the home, but it also dictates that she must not have a reputation that precedes her, "whether for good or bad." She must essentially

fulfill the role she has been assigned and do nothing more; she is enslaved by an image that men created for her.

Medea acknowledges her confinement to the home by contrasting her situation, and the situation of the chorus, with that of Greek men: “As for a man, when he has had enough of life at home, he can stop his heart’s sickness by going out—to see one of his friends or contemporaries. But we are forced to look to one soul alone” (lines 246-49). While a woman’s role is directly tied to the home, the *oikos*, men have more freedom than women to do what is best for them and this increased dominance, as compared to women, is evinced by the simple fact that men control both the *polis* and the *oikos* while women do not even have control over the section of society that encompasses their role. Furthermore, Medea highlights the dominance of the male-dominated society when she remarks, “But we are *forced* to look to one soul alone” (emphasis mine). The word “forced” demonstrates that the representatives of the male-dominated society value female subservience and expect such subservience regardless of what women themselves need. In other words, women get little relief from the monotony of their role in the home, and if they do, society has dictated when it is acceptable, while men are free to come and go as they please and escape what their leaving acknowledges to be an unexciting life at home. As Medea shows, women are not allowed any acceptable forms with which to

express their needs or react to any mistreatment that they experience, so Medea takes the step to find a means for reaction outside her role as a woman.

Besides being a more “domestic” portrayal of the Medea myth, Euripides’ play is made more distinctive than its predecessors who utilize the myth in that it presents “premeditated” filicide, which Edith Hall asserts was “certainly invented” by Euripides (xvi).<sup>5</sup> In truth, this aspect of Medea’s story has arguably drawn the most attention from her audiences. In fact, Medea’s acts of filicide have been so significant as to potentially manifest themselves in the prior Colchian myth. In pondering the question of how the Corinthian myth began to be associated with the Colchian myth, Sarah Iles Johnston offers a convincing conjecture. She explains that the connection may stem from Medea’s filicide, as in the Colchian myth Medea kills her young brother Apsyrtus and in the Corinthian myth Medea kills her two young children:

Apsyrtus’ name, ‘unshorn,’ alluding as it does to his preadolescent status, suggests that he originally was understood to be a *child* at the time that Medea murdered him. If Apsyrtus’ murder was part of the Argonauts’ story from early times, it would certainly have encouraged the identification of Colchian and Corinthian Medea. If it was not [which would suggest that the murder of Apsyrtus was only included in the Medea myth as far back as the fifth century], however, perhaps it expresses the influence that

Corinthian Medea's *persona* had begun to have on that of Colchian

Medea. (Johnston, "Corinthian" 66-67; emphasis in original)

Johnston's suggestions are significant to this discussion because they bring up the question: What about the "Corinthian Medea's *persona*" impacted the older myth and why? It seems clear, at least from Johnston's initial suggestion about Apsyrtus' murder being a part of the Colchian myth, that a partial answer to the question of "what" is that Medea's murder of her two children was so egregious an act (as it would have been judged by the standards of Grecian society) that it was one to be preserved in the cultural memory<sup>6</sup> of that society by being passed down to another version of the myth. To the question of why, it goes back to the idea of the "Corinthian Medea's *persona*." I assert that Medea's *persona* had an impact on her audiences precisely because her *persona* embodies the category of the unacceptable "other," which is directly tied to her status as a socially deviant (m)other. Not only that, but Medea is shown in both the Colchian and Corinthian myths to have a widely known reputation, which Pericles explains that a "respectable wom[a]n" in the Greek society of the fifth century must not have. Medea herself confirms this fact when she pleads with Creon to be allowed to remain in Corinth: "Not now for the first time but often, Creon, my reputation has harmed me and done me great damage" (lines 292-93). What makes Medea so threatening to her audience is that she shows herself willing and able to step out of the role that the male-dominated society has chained her to when

representatives of the male-dominated society mistreat her, even though she is expected to take such mistreatment like a woman is expected to, in silence. Medea also proves herself willing to embrace her “otherness” at this time, rather than continuing to strive for assimilation into the standards established for women by society. These are Medea’s crimes that the male-dominated society seeks to punish her for.

At this point, it is necessary to discuss the ways in which Euripides establishes Medea as an “other” in her society, as it has a direct correlation with how her audience and society receive her. Euripides’ version of the Medea myth differs from other mythic females in how he portrays the murderous mother’s mental capacity. As Hall asserts, “His [Euripides’] Medea is also the first known child-killing mother in Greek myth to perform the deed in cold blood; the others (Ino, Agave, Procne) seem always to have been given the ‘excuse’ of temporary madness” (xvi). The words “temporary madness” used by Hall carry with it the implication that a person who is “temporarily mad[ ]” is mentally incapacitated, if only briefly, and is therefore not responsible for their egregious actions; generally, those persons proven to be mad at the time that a crime was committed are not judged as harshly by society for their actions that defied society’s accepted norms. In the trial of Medea, which has been judged for centuries in the court of public opinion, Medea has time and again been proven mentally cognizant of her murderous actions, as the later adaptations of the

heroine prove to be. In discussing Medea's mental awareness, Foley refutes those scholars who argue that the war that wages within Medea is one between reason and passion, in which passion wins ("Medea's Divided Self" 73). She rather argues, "it is [. . .] [Medea's] inseparable combination of rationality and irrationality, passion and intelligence, in Medea's determination for revenge that makes it so very terrifying" (Foley, "Medea's Divided Self" 73). Thus, Euripides' Medea commits a filicidal act that other mother's such as "Ino, Agave, [and] Procne" had also undertaken, yet Medea is made to differ in mentality. Interestingly enough, it is only a change in mentality or "rationality" that is required to turn society against Medea. Why? Because women were not meant to think for themselves, the men in their lives did this for them as is shown by all of the restrictions placed on the woman's role in society. Additionally, Medea is rationally committing an act that her society has deemed unacceptable. To a society that views "unwarranted" child murder as a defiance of social norms, Medea would naturally appear "terrifying"; I use the term "unwarranted" because, as the introduction worked to show, there was a double standard when it came to the acceptability of infanticide. Infanticide (by exposure) was only acceptable when it was determined that a child was not desired, but if the child was determined to be an heir that was desired, like Medea's children are, then killing one's children becomes an issue.



Thus, Medea is thereby knowingly and willingly challenging the patriarchal system that rules over her society. As a result, society no longer allows her the option of the insanity plea. However, even if it were an option, it seems likely that Medea would not accept it because she was angry with the system that sided with the husband who had deserted her and had also degraded her for being different and too “clever” (line 286). Furthermore, Medea’s character is the play’s agent of change, so she cannot fulfill this role if she acts under the guise of temporary insanity. She is the one who verbally and physically brings to her audience’s attention the problems inherent in the patriarchal society of ancient Greece.

In writing his *Medea*, Euripides sets up his mythic heroine to be different from the versions of herself that came before. She becomes an established image of the socially deviant (m)other and thereby the socially unacceptable “other.” Rather than facing mythical monsters akin to Scylla and Charybdis like the male hero would face, the monsters Medea must overcome are creatures arguably more powerful than the mythical monsters that she subdued in prior myths while helping Jason, as attempting to single handedly eradicate a society’s engrained social norms proves to be by the end of the play; which is apparent in her escape in a dragon-drawn chariot to the protection of Aegeus in Athens. The category of the “other” is closely linked with that of the socially deviant mother and it includes a set of standards or beliefs that a society agrees to view as

undesirable and these same standards may be present across cultures and across time, as our discussion in later chapters of two adaptations of *Medea* will show. Some items that Euripides uses to establish Medea as the socially deviant (m)other, which also make up the reputation that Pericles asserts that a “respectable wom[a]n” must not have in ancient Greece, include things such as Medea’s: 1) status as a barbarian, 2) cleverness, 3) selfishness and neglect of her children (her duty in society), and 4) her filicidal actions.

While the “unenthusiastic original reception of this play” by its contemporary audience would appear to demonstrate that Medea’s many deviations from the socially acceptable were an issue for Euripides’ audience, this is still an area of disagreement for some scholars (Hall xvii). As such, it is important to address here because it casts doubt on whether or not Euripides’ play provides a truthful indication of the treatment of women at this time outside the theatre, as well as a truthful indication of the male-dominated Grecian society’s reaction to socially deviant (m)others. Both of which are important to establish in order to get an accurate view of how male-dominated societies, across time and cultures, view and degrade the socially deviant (m)other in similar ways. A representative of the counterargument previously outlined, Donald J. Mastronarde asserts more recently that Euripides’ depiction of Medea as an “other” would not have led his audience to judge her as harshly as one may expect. Mastronarde suggests that Euripides does not play up the facets of

Medea's "otherness" from Greek society like later versions of the myth do, such as her barbarian status and the fact that she is a sorceress.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the audience would not have predominately condemned Medea as harshly, as often thought, because it would have been understood by the audience that "the heroic world of tragedy is not a direct reflection of contemporary culture" (Mastronarde 27).<sup>8</sup> If that is the case, then we would also have to believe that Medea's coming out of her house to speak to the chorus lacks significance just because the tragic play requires it. As scholars such as Foley and Grube suggest, there is no reason to believe that tragedy lacks an element of truth just because it is dramatic:

In Athenian drama we are dealing with interpretations of these mythical stories made by poets who are composing in new genres — comedy and tragedy — and who are adapting their material to create a complex public dialogue between the interpretation of myth in earlier poetic genres and the contemporary Athenian democracy. (Foley, "The Conception" 134)

Thus, while Medea's coming out of the house is necessary for the play to be seen by the audience, it is also utilized by Euripides in his attempt to "create a complex public dialogue between [. . .] myth [. . .] and Athenian democracy."<sup>9</sup> While it seems logical to believe that Euripides' audience would have taken into account the fact that they were watching a play unfold before their eyes, which is likely why no scholar I have encountered has taken issue with the fact that

Medea or the female chorus are outside of their homes—the epicenter for their duties and position in society—it also seems logical that Euripides could have used his play as a vehicle to bring some attributes (whether positive or negative) of his society to his audience’s attention.

Furthermore, it seems likely that Euripides, being himself Greek, would have been knowledgeable about the ideological make-up of his audience and would therefore know that little hints of “otherness” to an already xenophobic society would go a long way and would likely achieve a reaction from his audience. In other words, he did not play up Medea’s “otherness” because he would not have to. Medea’s actions that present her as an “other” are loud enough to make the addition of the explicit textual details Mastronarde misses unnecessary; Hall has even suggested that Medea’s status as a barbarian is acknowledged in the costume the actor would have worn. So just in case the audience did miss those subtle textual details that Mastronarde believes are not as obvious as in later versions of the myth, the audience is reminded by the difference of clothing. Moreover, on numerous occasions Medea identifies herself as “[a] foreigner [that] must fall in with the city’s ways” (line 222). In addition, since the Colchian and Corinthian versions of the Medea myth became associated with each other, then it would make sense that the audience would also be able to place Medea as a cultural “other” based on what they already know from the Colchian myth, which is where Medea is explicitly identified as a

sorceress and, from the Greek perspective, an “other” (Mastronarde 24). I bring up the issue of the play’s reception simply because it reveals how deeply entrenched Athenian society was in their determination to condemn the “other,” a category directly tied to the socially deviant mother, even in dramatic form. Not only that, but Euripides’ choice of subject for his play, and the potential that his play has as a commentary on the norms of his society regarding women, shows that “otherness” in any form was an issue in Athenian society. At the very least, it was enough of an issue to be taken up from the less threatening tragic stage.

To return to our discussion of Medea’s “otherness,” in terms of Medea’s barbarian status, Hall explains, “Euripides was almost certainly the first poet to turn her [Medea] from a Corinthian into a barbarian” (xvii). Thus, not only must Medea maneuver around the social constructions built around the roles of men and women at this time, but she must also grapple with the social stigma surrounding her status as a barbarian in Corinth. What is interesting about the play is that Euripides at once establishes Medea as a beloved member of the community, or to be more explicit the female community, only to have representatives of the male community degrade this image. For instance, in lines 136-38 a member of the chorus remarks to the nurse of Medea’s suffering: “And I do not rejoice, woman, at the griefs of the house, since *it has come to be dear to me*” (emphasis added). Since the topic of conversation is not the house but rather Medea and her suffering, we should take the chorus to mean that Medea

“has come to be dear to [the chorus of women].” Furthermore, the nurse’s reply seems to account for the fact that Medea was well liked in Corinth: “her [Medea’s] heart finds no comfort, none, in the words of *any of her friends*” (lines 142-43; emphasis added). After some time, when the chorus tells the nurse to ask Medea to come out and speak to them, they refer to themselves as “her friends” (line 181). These bits of dialogue are significant because Euripides uses them to humanize Medea and to demonstrate that, at least with the women of the community, Medea held a high status and was well liked.

Even after the chorus finds out that Medea is plotting to kill her children and their king and princess, they take no action to warn them. The lack of action by the female chorus implies that they are standing in solidarity with Medea, even as they disagree with her decision to kill her children, as they do not deviate from their promise to Medea from the beginning of the play: “So I shall ask you [the chorus] to grant me [Medea] this favour and no more. If I can find some means, some scheme to take a just revenge for these evils on my husband and the man who gave his daughter to him and that daughter whom he married, I ask you to keep silence” (lines 259-64). It is important to note that Medea prefaces this request by showing herself to be different from the chorus:

I would rather stand three times in the battle line than bear one child.

However, *the same reasoning does not apply to you and to me*. You have this city, your father’s house, a fulfilled life and the company of your

friends, while I, a desolate woman without a city, shamefully injured by my husband who carried me as *plunder from a foreign land*, have no haven from this disaster, no mother, no brother, no relative at all. (lines 251-59; emphasis added)

Therefore, not only does Medea portray herself as the socially deviant (m)other who would rather go to war than have a child,<sup>10</sup> she also discloses her barbarian status to the chorus, as she calls herself “plunder from a foreign land.”

Not only that, but Medea also reveals here the disregarded dangers of pregnancy at this time. As Sarah Pomeroy suggests: “Motherhood at an early age, combined with a life spent indoors, was disadvantageous to the health of the Athenian woman” (85). Since inheritance followed the patrilineal line in ancient Greece, women’s bodies, despite the adverse affects on their health of seclusion and childbirth, were exploited in order to fulfill the need for an heir. Medea shows this exploitative system to be ineffective when she enacts her revenge upon Jason by killing his two male heirs and stops his potential to perpetuate the same system with the princess. Interestingly, the chorus is not deterred by these disclosures, nor are they deterred by Medea’s identification of their king and princess as being among the beneficiaries of her revenge. Knowing all this information, the chorus still promises to say nothing and in the end they essentially stand with her by keeping to their promise. This proves that Medea is not at odds with the women of Corinth represented by the chorus, who

had no say in the development of its laws, but with the men who dominated the *polis*. Additionally, the chorus' lack of action reveals that, while the chorus is afraid to take action or to bring issues to the attention of the males who are in charge of the *polis*, Medea is willing to deviate from the norm—to speak and take action.<sup>11</sup> For instance, she: 1) vocalizes her disgust with Jason's actions directly to his face (lines 446-628), 2) establishes a magical business transaction with Aegeus where she will help him to produce children in exchange for protection in Athens—the hint of magic here reinforces her image as an “other” (lines 709-31)<sup>12</sup>, 3) voices her grievances with the patriarchal system in public (lines 230-52), and 4) commits acts of murder which include Creon's daughter, Creon, and Medea and Jason's two children.

In regards to the laws created by men in the *polis*, Hall points out that “[i]n 451/450 BCE the statesman Pericles<sup>13</sup> had initiated a law excluding from [Athenian] citizen privileges all but those who could prove that both their parents were members of Athenian citizen families” (xvii).<sup>14</sup> It seems of little coincidence that at the same historical moment this law is initiated, Jason decides to abandon Medea, his barbarian bride, for a Corinthian woman with status. Therefore, since Medea did not meet the law's criteria, she would logically not be accepted in the same way as an Athenian (Corinthian) citizen and by extension neither would her children; that is, even if it were agreed upon that the children could stay with their



father and his new bride. In fact, Mills shows that the princess, even though she agrees to take in the children, does not like them:

The princess is at least inimical to Medea's children. At first Creon, acting in his daughter's interest, commands both Medea and her children to go in exile from Corinth. Later, though the children are allowed to stay, the princess finds the sight of them repugnant when they come before her in the embassy. Cf. 1147-49. (Mills 294)<sup>15</sup>

Given the reaction the princess has to the children before they have even given her the poison robe, that of "disgust," Medea's excuse for killing her children, because they will be killed by the Corinthian citizens anyway as retribution for her murder of their king and princess, seems to gain ground and validity.<sup>16</sup> This goes to show that Medea's filicidal actions are not without impetus from the Grecian society at large. Had they not proven themselves to hold xenophobic values, then maybe they would have been more able to see that the children were one of Medea's weapons for achieving her revenge against Creon and the princess rather than the intentional perpetrators of it. Had they realized this, then maybe Medea could have left the children alive in Corinth, like she considers when she is debating with herself about going forward with (or not) her filicidal plan. With the reassurance that the children will never be accepted by the Corinthians, and will even be killed by them, Medea determines to continue with her revenge plot. Medea's excuse, painted in this light, begins to look more like the mercy killing

undertaken by Hester in *By the Bog of Cats*. Although, we know that Medea is additionally motivated to commit this act by a desire for revenge against the husband who abandoned her and left her vulnerable; she who has been “plunder[ed] from a foreign land.”

Furthermore, due to Medea’s foreigner status, Hall speculates that the audience may have been more disposed to be against Medea and support Jason for the reason that Medea, as a barbarian, hinders Jason’s ability to prosper: “[o]ne way of looking at Jason is as a man trying to make a life in a xenophobic new city, while *burdened* with a wife who was not only not local but not even Greek” (xvii; emphasis added). Additionally, as Hall points out, Medea herself suggests the utter importance that her barbarian status plays on her audience’s view of her during the argument she has with Jason about his new marriage. Medea exclaims to Jason: “[. . .] your marriage with a barbarian was proving a source of no glory for you as you faced old age” (lines 591-93). Medea’s statement suggests that Jason ultimately abandons her because having a barbarian wife is a detriment to his image, an image that is important to preserve if one wishes to move up the social ladder.<sup>17</sup> This is especially true since Athenians have historically been proven unwilling to accept outsiders into their society (as was pointed out by Sue Blundell in the introduction).

Another source of “otherness” for Medea, which also adds to her already bad reputation, is her cleverness. Medea pinpoints society’s dislike of the clever

woman in her conversation with Creon: “Any man who is sensible *should not have his children taught to be clever beyond the norm*” (lines 294-95; emphasis added). As “[t]he education of Athenian women was probably limited, and most were probably illiterate,” Medea in her cleverness is seen to defy the norm simply by being more clever than the male-dominated society prefers (Foley, “The Conception” 131). In general, society preferred to compartmentalize women based on their use to men. As “the speaker in the case against Neaera tells his listeners, ‘[w]e have courtesans (*hetaerae*) for pleasure, concubines to take care of our day-to-day bodily needs, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to be the loyal guardians of our households” (Blundell 121-22).<sup>18</sup> The word “pleasure” as it relates to *hetaerae* should be interpreted to mean intellectual pleasure more so than sexual pleasure, as “Athenian men [. . .] turned to the company of hetairas<sup>19</sup> (‘female companions’) for the female intellectual stimulation which they had ‘sought at home in vain” (Katz 22). Two items of significance appear here that must be addressed before returning to our discussion of Medea’s cleverness. The first is that the male-dominated society of ancient Greece bases the value of a wife on her capacity to bear “legitimate children,” to produce more male heirs that will perpetuate the societal values they inherit from their fathers, and this shows that even the mother’s body is not within her realm of control. The second item that a socially acceptable mother should be is “loyal.” The male-

dominated society essentially expects a wife and mother to perpetuate the system of female subjugation by being “loyal” to those who subjugate them.

To continue with our discussion of Medea’s cleverness, Medea is shown to stay true to these tenets of patriarchy, loyalty and “legitimate” heir-production, up until the point that she is abandoned by Jason. Only once this occurs, and Medea is left to grieve in a state of confusion about her future, does she decide to throw society’s stipulations that have told her what she is not and who she is allowed to be in their faces. It is at this moment that Medea no longer embodies these norms to fit into society’s compartment reserved for her and other wives, she rather (in keeping with her cleverness) adopts these norms in order to enact her revenge. It is as Foley suggests: “The first scene hints at Medea’s outrage and capacity for violence, but those hints are obscured by her threats of suicide, her domestic confinement, her solidarity with the chorus, and her use of ‘feminine’ wiles to manipulate Creon, Jason, and even Aegeus” (“Medea’s Divided Self” 76).<sup>20</sup> It is no wonder that Creon was afraid of Medea’s cleverness; maybe his fear was actually a reflection of a deeper fear held by the male-dominated society at large. Perhaps, they were keeping women illiterate, and dictating all facets of their lives, precisely so that they could preserve the status quo and prevent the development of a Medea. Furthermore, it makes sense that Medea, a foreigner, would be the one to challenge the system, being she has not been engrained day in and day out in the rules of a society that subjugates

women. It is no wonder that the female chorus does nothing, besides essentially giving her a small tap on the wrist that tells her not to persist in her revenge, to actually stop Medea from turning the patriarchal society upside down. They may have believed that Medea could do what no other female insider in Greece was capable of, especially since they watched her break rule after rule until she finally achieved her freedom via a dragon-drawn chariot after sticking it to the patriarchy. To this point, Knox suggests: "Euripides is concerned in this play, not with progress or reform, but (just as in the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*) with the eruption in tragic violence of forces in human nature which have been repressed and scorned, which in their long-delayed breakout exact a monstrous revenge" (211). Thus, the women of ancient Greece, including Medea, were "repressed and scorned," Medea is just the one who took her pain caused by her husband's abandonment and enacted the "monstrous revenge" that results from such prolonged mistreatment.

As was mentioned previously, Euripides is working to "create a complex public dialogue between [. . .] myth [his *Medea*] [. . .] and Athenian democracy" (Foley, "The Conception" 134). But what is Euripides trying to create a dialogue about and how does Medea's initial exit from the home add to this dialogue? The question of what Euripides intended to say about social issues in fifth-century Greece has been a highly discussed question for decades, and is one inquisitive pursuit that some scholars believe to be fruitless,<sup>21</sup> but there are two potential

answers offered in particular that are beneficial for this discussion to take into consideration; the first focuses on a loss of femininity and the other on the acquirement of the masculine heroic persona. While this is a point of contention for many scholars, I believe that the simplest answer of Euripides' intent is presented though the words of Hall. Hall suggests that Medea's coming out of the house marks the start of her "betrayal of 'femininity'": "From her [Medea's] very first monologue (which also marks her first exit from the 'feminine' sphere of the house), and its extraordinary focus on the 'masculine' notions of 'cleverness' and citizenship, we know this is no ordinary woman" (xvii). She also connects Medea's "betrayal" of her socially-determined gender (and associated role in society) with the fifth century Athenian audience's "unenthusiastic original reception of this play": "She [Medea] fundamentally *repudiates the gender role assigned to her as a woman* in fifth-century Greece" (Hall xvii; emphasis added). From Hall's words and Euripides' development of Medea as a character, it seems evident that Euripides creates a character that is willing and able to challenge her society over the fact that the male-dominated society believes it is acceptable to assign women a gender role, that of wife and mother, a role that men do not even value; hence the stipulation that women should have no reputation and as Medea explains to the chorus, "Men say of us that we live a life free from danger at home while they fight wars" (lines 249-50). This is as if to say that women lead a pampered and sheltered life where they face no danger. Medea, as proof that

she is willing and able to fight this and other socially constructed views of women, fires back at this view by suggesting that women are assigned this role whether they want it or not and that childbirth is no safe undertaking: “How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times in the battle line than bear one child” (lines 250-52).

Another suggestion of Euripides’ intent that offers an answer to the question of why Euripides would turn the myth on its head and go against precedent, a precedent that establishes Medea as the “helper-maiden” of the male hero Jason, and instead cast her in the mold of the male hero, is that Euripides is attempting to make a statement about the pointlessness of this persona (Johnston, Introduction 5). In agreement with Christian Wolff,<sup>22</sup> Foley points out that Euripides may be “using *Medea* to bring home a point about masculine ethics” (“Medea’s Divided Self” 81). She goes on to say:

Greek poets repeatedly demonstrated the tragic consequences of the brand of heroic individualism imitated by Medea and of the ‘do good to friends, bad to enemies’ ethic. [. . .] unlike Achilles, who regains his humanity in *Iliad* 24, Medea finally leaves female and even human limits behind. [. . .] By choosing Medea, a barbarian woman, to display the contradictions inherent in this heroic ethic and behavior, Euripides has achieved a particularly devastating and grotesque demonstration of the problematic nature of this archaic heroism—and one he might have

hesitated to make through a Greek or male protagonist. (Foley, "Medea's Divided Self" 81)

I suggest that the answer may lie in the middle ground between these two suggestions. If we consider the fact that Euripides' audiences for centuries have been fixated on Medea's ability to murder her children, it seems likely that the compromise between both suggestions will revolve around this moment in the play. The potential compromise is as follows. Medea's socially determined status does not allow her to carry out the revenge that she seeks, so she enacts the masculine form that will allow it.<sup>23</sup> To this end, Foley suggests that:

there is for the Greeks no model of autonomous and heroic femininity outside of self-sacrifice, Medea can only turn to a male model if she wishes to act authoritatively [ . . . ] If she acts in a way that guarantees self-preservation and child-preservation, she will in male-public terms lose face and fail to make a dramatic display of her wrongs [i.e. the wrongs done to her by Jason]. ("Medea's Divided Self" 79)<sup>24</sup>

In doing this, Medea is demonstrating the limitations of women's socially determined status and is showing the male-dominated society of ancient Greece that their definition and view of gender roles is no longer viable.

At the same time that she is demonstrating the limitations of the female role, Medea is engulfed completely by the power and freedom of the masculine persona and experiences a more "feminized" version of the "tragic consequences



of the brand of heroic individualism [she] imitate[s]" (Foley, "Medea's Divided Self" 81). In her internal debate about whether she will murder the children or not, she explains: "I can no longer look upon you [the children] but I am overwhelmed by the evils which surround me. And I know what evil deeds I am about to do, but my fury against Jason is stronger than my counsels of softness, and it is fury that leads to the greatest evils for mankind" (lines 1076-81). Essentially, Medea acknowledges here that the male heroic persona, which she associates with her "fury against Jason," has won out over her feminine persona that she associates with "softness."<sup>25</sup> As a result, Medea faces the consequences for her actions and loses her children at her own hands, an act which she herself acknowledges will hurt her more than Jason, who is the object of her anger: "Why should I, as I seek to pain their father through their sufferings, win *twice as much agony for myself?*" (lines 1045-1047; emphasis added) Not only does Medea achieve for herself an increase in pain, but she also gains her audience and society's disapproval.

In the end, Medea is labeled as a socially deviant (m)other because she embodies "selfish[ness], rather than self-less[ness]" when she decides to take on the male heroic persona in order to achieve her revenge (Maresh 179). Once she takes on this persona, she allows it to consume her and her children become a weapon rather than those that she gave birth to. In other words, in taking on the male heroic persona, Medea blurs the lines between "just revenge" and what

may be called excessive revenge, as well as the line between revenge-exacting hero and mother (line 261). While even the chorus believes that Medea “will be right to exact vengeance from [her] husband” (lines 267-68), which would be called “just revenge,” when it comes to her decision to murder the children they suggest that she is crossing into the realm of excessive revenge; in other words, she seeks total revenge at all costs. Her desire to attain total revenge forces her children to become the recipients of maternal neglect, which is yet another facet of the socially deviant (m)other. Additionally, Medea is looked down upon by Grecian society because she refuses to play by its rules that determine what a female and mother must be and also because she is a foreigner in Corinth. From 431 BC onward, Medea has frequently been made out to be a monster, arguably even worse than Grendel’s mother in the eyes of her contemporary audience and subsequent audiences thereafter.

However, it seems that Medea’s audiences, in their fixation on her filicidal actions, have forgotten the reason why Medea reacted in the first place. Not only did Jason treat Medea, in her words, as “plunder,” but she was cast aside so that he could ascend the social ladder. He left her in a “foreign land,” with a fast approaching exile date, and no one to turn to. If her cries and moans that could be heard outside the house were not enough to convince the audience that Medea was under an extreme amount of emotional stress, then her methods of extreme retaliation should be. Out of necessity to affirm the social order, in

labeling Medea as a socially deviant (m)other, Grecian society only compared Medea to a pre-determined “acceptable” category without giving consideration to what had pushed her to go to such lengths – be those lengths filicide or the murders of royal officials. While those actions were seen by the male-dominated society as egregious, Medea was showing them that her feelings matter as much as a man’s and that she should have the same right that they do to seek retribution from those that have wronged her. It is as Foley explains: “*Medea* exposes male suppression of women in marriage and the tragic results of a male refusal to recognize in women the same capacities, feelings, and needs they accept for themselves; and it shows the corrupting effects of this mistreatment of a woman of tremendous feeling and intelligence” (“Medea’s Divided Self” 82-83). In sum, the biggest problem facing the patriarchal society of ancient Greece in Euripides’ play is that Medea, as a woman, was underestimated and the results of this were disastrous (Foley, “Medea’s Divided Self” 77). The ramifications of Medea’s actions can be seen in the two adaptations of the 1990s that follow, as they will continue the fight against the patriarchal society’s control while at the same time enjoying an increase in freedom that all began with Medea’s fifth-century escape from sexual oppression. From the safety of a dragon-drawn chariot, Medea flies to Athens, but the story is just beginning.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Socially Deviant (M)other in Steve Carter's *Pecong*

The Mediyah of Steve Carter's *Pecong* is the socially deviant (m)other of her society in that she is: 1) the "other" or the "pathological misfit" of her society (Adisa 42), 2) "openly sexual" (Maresh 179), 3) neglectful of her children (Adisa 42), 4) "[s]elfish, rather than self-less," 5) "damaged from maternal abuse or neglect," and 6) "[she] harbor[s] violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides, and filicide" (Maresh 179). When Mediyah simply walks by she strikes fear into those of her community, and such is the power of the "pathological misfit." In a conversation between Persis and Faustina, where they contemplate whether Mediyah has been given Granny Root's power or not after she died, Mediyah is established as an "other" in their society and is someone to be feared: "But Mediyah all the time know more than anybody. / It come natural to she. And she still the only one can go to / Miedo Wood Island for special herb and bush and root and / t'ing and come back. Ain't no animal, haunt, or t'ing does / ever bother she. She charm!" (Carter 15) Briefly after this statement is made, Mediyah arrives near the place where Persis and Faustina were speaking and suggests that she has heard what they have been saying about her using her power from afar. Mediyah retaliates by freezing Faustina in place, without the ability to talk,

because, as she says: “if I able to hear silent fart [which she says that she can hear], you know I / can hear when people say vicious thing ‘bout me and me / family” (Carter 16). This moment goes to show that Mediyah is a “pathological misfit” that is causing the community of Trankey Island to fear her because of her magical abilities. Here I suggest that the term “pathological” should be understood not in terms of mental instability, but in the way that Mediyah uses her magical powers to play her jokes and get her revenge, which earns her the title of “misfit.”

In fact, the audience is never shown a mentally unstable Mediyah; in her every expression of physical and emotional pain we understand that her experience is no figment of her imagination and that she has been motivated by these experiences to act in the way she does. Additionally, we discover at the end of the play that Granny Root planned Mediyah’s plight. In order for Granny Root to pay back Creon for what he did to her daughter, she asks a spirit to inseminate her daughter with Mediyah while she was pregnant with Creon’s child Cedric. This was undertaken with the intent that Mediyah would kill off the entire line of Creon; this includes Creon, Cedric, and Sweet Bella (Carter 86).<sup>26</sup> This is significant because Mediyah is, as Granny Root explains to Mediyah, “all Granny Root perception. / You . . . all spiritual conception. / You . . . all Granny Root revenge. / You . . . all Granny Root say you was / and . . . that all you was (Carter 86). Thus, Mediyah was not in control of her own destiny and her identity is

based on what “Granny Root say [she] was / and . . . that all [she] was” (Carter 86). The importance of this is that the audience is left to wonder to what extent were Mediyah’s actions her own and to what extent were they planned by Granny Root for her. It seems likely that much of it was Granny Root’s design, as Mediyah explains, after hearing the above from Granny Root, that she now not only “ain’t feel [Jason] a-tall!,” which implies that her revenge eased her pain, but she also “ain’t feel nothin’ a-tall!” (Carter 87) The fact that Mediyah has no emotion makes her appear to be an empty shell without feeling that could be manipulated like wood can be crafted into furniture, especially since Granny Root acknowledges that Mediyah was produced from “herb and bush and root and air and fire and smoke / and earth and wild forest” (Carter 86). With that being said, even though Mediyah was manipulated by Granny Root to avenge her own daughter’s death, it should not be forgotten that Mediyah nonetheless experienced all of the physical and emotional pain that she believed was pushing her to act; Mediyah never knows Granny Root’s designs until the play’s final moments.

For this reason, Mediyah, the (m)other of Trankey Island, earns greater sympathy from the audience. This is evidenced by the fact that *Pecong* “has been performed in Newark (1992), San Francisco (1993), London, and New York (2009) to fairly favorable reviews” (Foley, “Reimagining” 172; emphasis added). In addition, given that Carter is an American playwright, who as he acknowledges

“[does not] know Caribbean culture, but [he] know[s] Caribbean people and their experiences here [in America],” we can see that *Pecong* has roots not only in the Caribbean, but also in America (Nesmith 147). The play’s dualistic origins add more to the play, especially in terms of Mediyah’s reaction, as we will see in her dealings with Faustina and Persis. To this point, I suggest that the conflict between Mediyah, Persis, and Faustina mimics the conflict that occurred between the second and third waves of feminism in America. As will be shown later in the chapter, Faustina and Persis are seen to be in the position of Caribbean feminists who have established standards and values themselves for motherhood and mothering. They are unable to accept Mediyah because she defies their standards, which just so happen to align themselves closely with the standards of the broader patriarchal society. Moreover, *Pecong* was written at a time in feminist history when second wave feminism was losing ground and fading into third wave feminism because it was heavily criticized for not taking into account that all women are not the same or have the same experiences; not all standards apply to all women.

In her discussion of the development of the feminist movement in England, and more specific to our purposes, the second wave, Margaret Walters offers the remarks of bell hooks about the state of feminism in America, which is applicable to our discussion of Mediyah’s interaction with Persis and Faustina. She explains in her discussion of bell hooks’ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to*

*Centre*, written six years before *Pecong* was performed: “[bell hooks] argu[es] that the women ‘who are most victimized by sexist oppression . . . who are powerless to change their condition in life’ have never been allowed to speak out for themselves. Current feminism, she insists, is racist, and has left many women bitterly disillusioned” (Walters 105). She goes on to say that “[hooks] found that white women adopted a condescending attitude towards me [hooks] and other non white participants” (Walters 105). The only difference here between the controversy amongst races in the American feminist movement and the Caribbean female characters of *Pecong*, is that rather than seeing “white women adopt[ ] a condescending attitude towards [. . .] non white participants,” we have women criticizing another person of their race for not meeting their standards. To this point, Carter explains in an interview with Nathaniel G. Nesmith “that this was not a play about black and white but about dark-skinned and light-skinned black people” (148). Helene Foley is shown to agree with this point and asserts that Mediyah is darker than others around her: “*Pecong* focuses more on conflicts within a black community than on race per se, although Mediyah is additionally disadvantaged by being identified as blacker than some other characters” (“Reimagining” 172). For these reasons, I assert that *Pecong*’s American roots, with its clashes in the feminist movement, run deep and impact the way that Mediyah is treated by the female chorus. Foley highlights this conflict by saying that “Persis and Faustina, who substitute for the Greek chorus, underline



Mediyah's isolation by developing the tensions between the heroine and her (especially female) community" ("Reimagining" 172). More explicitly, Mediyah is criticized and treated as an "other" not only by the men of the patriarchal society of Trankey Island, but by the women of her society as well.

A glance at the play's reception reveals that the modern Mediyah has been received better than her Grecian counterpart. Foley suggests that "these later productions [which includes *Pecong*] confirm that America's fascination with Medea derives from her role as an outsider who is at once victimized and surprisingly empowered in a nation often speciously categorized as a melting pot" ("Reimagining" 159). In the fifth-century version of *Medea*, the audience watching the play was aghast at a mother's ability to kill her own children, but they did not take the time to consider the undue societal pressure that was being placed on mothers at this time and the potential ramifications of such pressure. However, since the fifth century, the reaction of the audience to Medea and her actions has changed with the make-up of people to become less reactionary and more of "fascination." However, this "fascination" does not extend so far as to relieve the audience of all anxiety over Mediyah's infanticidal actions. As Rachel Saltz points out in her 2010 review of the play:

Unlike Euripides' Medea, this Mediyah doesn't love her children (twin baby boys) or spend much time worrying about whether she should kill them. Her revenge is cruel and on the money but not a true sacrifice or an

object lesson in mother love run amok. Still, if the play's ending doesn't stay with you (sorry, no catharsis), what comes before probably will.

It is evident just in Saltz's review that progress has been made, as "[Mediyah's] revenge is cruel and *on the money*" at the same time (emphasis added). Here we see a clear shift in the audience's reaction to Mediyah's actions that shows that they are more cognizant of the motivations that push her to commit her filicidal actions, rather than dismissing her simply because society says that mothers should not do what she does.

In keeping with Euripides' play, Carter's Caribbean (m)other also experiences the degradation of the patriarchal society, which will in turn push her to react against such mistreatment. Like the moment at the beginning of *Medea* where the audience is told that Medea is crying and moaning because Jason (her husband and love) left her for the princess, a moment that reveals Medea's subjection to a male on a more personal level, Mediyah also experiences this subjection and rejection before she decides that she has had enough. It is as Granny Root acknowledges to Mediyah after Mediyah tells Jason that she will "do anything you tell me. / Anything you say! Anything you ask!": "Mediyah, you ain't have no power. You just / give it to this man. He hold power over you, now. You / surrender to he. You just a ordinary woman, now" (Carter 45). It should be noted here that there is a double meaning that lies behind Granny Root's statement that Mediyah is an "ordinary woman, now." Not only are we to take this

to mean that Mediyah has lost her ability to do magic (for the present), but that her present and future dejection and treatment will mimic the plight of others of her sex.<sup>27</sup> As both Medea and Mediyah claim to be different from other women, as was previously shown of Medea in the previous chapter and as Mediyah expresses to Jason, “I the most / different woman you goin’ meet. No other like me,” we can see that both women are destined to push the limits of society’s rules when they do react and decide to break the hold of the dominant male figures in their lives (Carter 44).

Before discussing how Mediyah is the socially deviant (m)other of her Caribbean society, it is necessary to define the difference between motherhood and mothering, even though I find both systems to be similar to each other in their ability to establish an “other” that defies their system’s standards. Andrea O’Reilly, following in the footsteps of Adrienne Rich, suggests that motherhood and mothering are two separate entities. While the former is a product of the patriarchy that determines for women how a mother should behave, the latter is within women’s sphere of control (O’Reilly 12). O’Reilly suggests that in order to achieve the shift from the ideology of motherhood to that of mothering, the “[p]atriarchal [system of] motherhood [must be] dismantled, or more accurately destabilized, by critiquing and correcting its oppressive systems as they are manifested in both ideology and practice” (12). To this end, one way that Mediyah, the Caribbean (m)other, pushes back against patriarchal motherhood

and the feminist standard for mothering, is in how she chooses to raise her children, or in Mediyah's case, not to raise them (O'Reilly 12). Dorsia Smith Silva and Simone A. James Alexander point out in their introduction to *Feminist and Critical Perspectives on Caribbean Mothering*, that being a mother is an important element in the status of the Caribbean woman: "Pat Ellis remarks that Caribbean mothers place a high valorization on motherhood and their mothering identity. She asserts that they gain social power and prestige through motherhood" (viii). Furthermore, they suggest that "[t]his perception of mothering also influences the self-image and agency of Caribbean women, so that 'parenthood, even more than wifhood, is the important source of feminine identity. If she does not have her own, she must at least parent the children of other women'" (Silva and James Alexander viii; qtd. from Ellis 122).<sup>28</sup> While Silva and James Alexander perceive the elevation of "parenthood" over "wifhood" to be a positive for the feminist system of mothering because it "alleviates female subordination" (viii), they also point out (in less explicit terms) that this system carries with it the potential to mimic the patriarchal system's ability to use motherhood as a way to elevate some women over others (viii-ix).

With regards to Mediyah, this system of motherhood, from both the male patriarchal and female feminist perspectives, devalue her as a mother. For instance, after Mediyah gives birth to she and Jason's two sons at Carnival, she is at home, lying on a "pallet, star[ing] into space" and dwelling on her anger that

was caused by Jason's rejection of her love, when Persis and Faustina pay her a visit (Carter 70). The first words to come out of Persis' mouth after Faustina has asked Mediyah if "[they] could come in" are: "How the two little baby keepin'?" (Carter 72) Thus, rather than being concerned for Medea's well-being, they show themselves to care more about the children; this goes back to the increased valuing of the act of mothering children (with its focus on the children) over the person doing the mothering in Caribbean society (Mediyah in this case). In other words, the act of mothering a child in Caribbean society, as discussed above, is what gives status to the mother. When Persis and Faustina follow up this question, and questions like them about the babies, with "we could help you pick up 'round / here?," we see the system of motherhood/ mothering at work from both the male patriarchal and female feminist perspectives (Carter 73). Both sides put Mediyah into the category of the socially deviant (m)other because she has neglected her household duties and has thereby neglected her children, which gives Mediyah a very low status in the Caribbean society of Trankey Island. Additionally, Mediyah is showing herself to be socially deviant in that she is being "[s]elfish, rather than self-less," when she decides not to put her children's needs above her own in terms of the cleanliness of the environment the children live in (Maresh 179).

To this point, the patriarchal society's view of Caribbean motherhood is shown to be in alignment with the female feminist perspective when Jason, as a

representative of the male-dominated society,<sup>29</sup> scolds Mediyah for keeping a dirty house after she has given birth to their children. He remarks that he will not stay at her house while it is in such a state and that his mother never kept a dirty house. This interaction between Jason and Mediyah is as follows:

JASON. This place filthy! I can't stay here! How you feel?

Me two son all right?

[. . .]

JASON. I can't find place to stretch out or sit. I goin'! After I win, I might could come back and let you peek at me trophy, but you better pick up this place . . . else I not settin' foot in here. Me mother ain't raise me in no dirty house and I ain't want me son raise in no dirty house. You goin' wish me "Bon Chance"?

MEDIYAH. Yes. I gettin' up just now.

*(MEDIYAH rises and offers her lips for JASON to kiss. He offers his cheek. She kisses it.)*

JASON. Careful! Don't dirty me suit. Why you don't go to the pond beneath Yama Fall and have a dip and cleanse youself. At least, woman, you could fill a basin and drop a rag in it and then pass it over you body. I ain't like no unclean woman. I ain't like no unclean woman for the

mother of me son. I have to go. 'Bye!

(JASON *leaves*. MEDIYAH, *abject and sobbing, sinks to the ground*.

GRANNY ROOT *appears*.)

GRANNY ROOT. Ordinary woman! (Carter 55-56)

In this interaction between Jason and Mediyah, Jason is shown to be ruthless in his attacks on the cleanliness of Mediyah's body and hut. While I do concede that bodily cleanliness is important for health reasons and the cleanliness of the hut is important for safety reasons, Jason's attacks do not take into consideration that Mediyah is carrying twins and is about to deliver them.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Jason takes his knowledge about the necessity of an immaculate house from his mother, who likely was simply following the prescription for the socially acceptable mother handed down by the male-dominated society. Not only that, but Jason not once offers to help Mediyah to make the house habitable for Mediyah, himself, and what he acknowledges are his sons. Mediyah, in her condition, is offered no help by the father of her children, is in the throws of pregnancy, is assailed by criticism after criticism, and has her kiss (her expression of love) degraded to a kiss on the cheek, all because she does not feel physically able to meet society's expectations of cleanliness; all of which leaves Mediyah "abject and sobbing." This is the situation of the "ordinary woman" that Granny Root speaks of, a woman who "[g]ive 'way she brain, / she

heart, she soul” and is “feelin’ sad,” and is a situation handed down by the male-dominated society that Mediyah will rise up and fight back against (Carter 56).

Had the members of the society of Trankey Island cared about Mediyah, then maybe she would not have been pushed by their rebukes and overall lack of concern to act in the way that she does. Thus, Mediyah has neglected her duties as a woman, shown herself to be “[s]elfish, rather than self-less,” and has thereby signaled to society that she is willing to expose her children to this neglect as well (Maresh 179). And because of this, even though Mediyah is not eager to be a mother and lacks the energy to do these duties, Jason, the female chorus, and the audience are meant to condemn her for not meeting their standards. We are to disregard her well-being and it is expected that she do the same. Mediyah says herself in response to Granny Root’s criticism of her dirty hut:

This place too much for  
me. This belly too much for me. I want to have these baby  
and done. I tired carryin’. I can’t do nothin’, I so tire. Me  
foot all swole up so, me can’t take four step without I have  
agony. The sun shine and I weepy. It rain and I worse.  
Jason only does come once in a blue moon and when him  
come, him only stay lickle piece of time. He ain’t have no  
talk for me. He ain’t touch me and is him do this thing to



me, you know. He ain't look at me. He only say him want  
to know how him two son comin' 'long. He come  
late . . . when it dark . . . and he gone 'fore mornin'. After all this  
t'ing over, I goin' rip out me tube. (Carter 54)

Here Mediyah explains that Jason only comes to see her “when it dark . . . and he gone 'fore mornin,” which suggests that Jason finds Mediyah to be a public disgrace and that being seen with her would be damaging his image; this is not unlike the Euripidean Jason's motivation for abandoning Medea and marrying up the Grecian social ladder. Not only that, but Mediyah's description of Jason's actions shows him to be more concerned about “how him two son comin' 'long” rather than about how the mother of his sons is doing. This is especially problematic being that, in Mediyah's words, “him do this thing to / me,” and she is a person who would rather physically mutilate her body (“I goin' rip out me tube”) than face the pain of another pregnancy: “I ain't goin' through this / a next time. Never!” (Carter 54)

Given that Persis and Faustina, up to this point, have not bothered to ask how Mediyah is doing personally and have merely focused on the children, I find their offer to clean her house to be a veiled statement about Mediyah's neglectfulness as a mother; this is in keeping with Opal Palmer Adisa's identification of the socially deviant (m)other as “the neglector” (42). Given the lengthy delay in their conversation with Mediyah about their concern for what

Jason has done to her, I am more willing to believe that they care less about Mediyah and more about how what has been done to her is an affront to mothers and women in general by a representative of the male-dominated society of Trankey Island; this further reveals Mediyah's status as an "other" even with the female chorus, as she may have been the one that took the blow from the patriarchal representative, but the blow overshadows Mediyah and is to be applied to the broader scope of women and mothers. In addition, Mediyah is also confused by Faustina and Persis' offer to clean her house, as she explains: "Why all you does want to do this. All we ain't / friend! I does thank you for deliverin' the baby, them, but / we ain't waste no love or like on weself" (Carter 73). Mediyah is essentially asking, "If you haven't cared about or liked me before this even happened, then why would you suddenly care or like me now?" The answer to this comes in the words of Faustina. The conversation leading up to this moment is also provided in order to avoid taking the conversation out of context. Faustina and Persis explain:

FAUSTINA. Mediyah, is time we does put all this ruction  
aside. The man do you a horrendous dirtiness. I never see  
such in all me life.

PERSIS. Never! You deliverin' the man baby. Two of  
them . . . as if one ain't hard enough. You twitchin' in the  
dirt and he rejectin' you right on the self-same spot.

FAUSTINA. *It like he grab hold of all we woman and slap all*

*we. It like he rainin' blow on all we arse!* (Carter 73; emphasis added)

I do acknowledge here that Persis and Faustina do notice how Jason did Mediyah “a horrendous dirtiness,” but the fact that this concern dissolves into a comment about the “horrendous dirtiness” done to “all we woman” shows that the chorus is less concerned with Mediyah’s plight and more with their own at the hands of the male-dominated society. Carter’s chorus seems to differ from Euripides’ chorus in that they are less concerned about Mediyah’s pain than about their own plight as women at the hands of a male-dominated society. Rather, Euripides’ chorus, even before Medea exits her home, is more concerned about her pain and makes no mention of their own. That is not to say that both choruses do not share the desire to see change occur in the status and treatment of women in their respective societies, and use Medea as a vehicle with which to attain it, it is just in the valuation of the individual mother (amongst the women in their society) that they differ.

Not only are Mediyah’s feelings ignored by the female chorus at this point in the play (Act two Scene three to be more exact), but in just two scenes prior, the chorus (Faustina and Persis) prove themselves to be in agreement with the stipulations of the male-dominated society of the Caribbean. In the stage directions that are provided before Act two Scene one begins, the audience is

told that Mediyah is in her hut that is “overgrown with vines and weeds. Inside, MEDIYAH sits in an old rocking chair. Very much pregnant, it’s obvious she’s not cleaned the place in a while” (Carter 51). Then we are told that Persis and Faustina walk near her hut and “wait until they are directly within hearing distance, then elbow each other in the ribs and gleefully and deliberately speak aloud” (Carter 51). In the process of “deliberately” making known to Mediyah that her pain is her society’s “glee[ ],” Faustina and Persis also identify Mediyah with what the patriarchal society views as the socially deviant (m)other. In discussing, “within hearing distance” of Mediyah’s hut, what would motivate a person not to attend the Carnival festivities, Faustina and Persis hint to Mediyah that she is, and should be, ashamed of her actions:

FAUSTINA. [. . .] some people can’t go ‘cause them too shame to show them face.

PERSIS. Oh? You could tell me why?

FAUSTINA. Plenty people have plenty reason. Some shame ‘cause them belly big, big, big and them ain’t have man to give they legality, properness, standin’, or he name [. . .]

FAUSTINA. But, wait. We so busy chattin’ and feelin’ sorry for them what come low like snake, we ain’t realize we passin’ Mediyah hut.

PERSIS. No! You wrong, Sister, dearest. This ain't Mediyah hut. At least, it ain't the hut of the Mediyah I does know, for this place have weed all grow up on she. The Mediyah I does know does keep she place. She does trim she grass and have lovely flower all red and yellow and white and t'ing. This place does look wild like somebody what ain't have man to love they. (Carter 51-52).

It is important to notice that the standards these women identify that Mediyah is going against all involve the male-dominated society in some way, this again shows how even the system of mothering upheld by Caribbean women can replicate the patriarchal system. Faustina describes Mediyah in her accusations of social deviancy as being without a “*man to / give [her] legality,*” which in both the Caribbean and ancient Greek societies the legal system is under the control of men; this is evidenced in the play by the fact that Creon, a male and the ruler of the island, is the only one the audience is ever shown that has the power to confer legality (Carter 52; emphasis added). His power is presented when Sweet Bella begs her father to allow her to marry Jason and Creon responds in part by saying, “If the / two of you [Jason and Sweet Bella] still does have no let-upsy, then as magistrate, / I, meself, will perform the [wedding] ceremony” (Carter 68). Similarly to Medea’s ancient Greece, the Caribbean also has its own stipulations about what is “proper[ ]” for women, which includes taking care of children and

maintaining the home. As Persis describes, the socially acceptable mother should “trim she grass / and have lovely flower all red and yellow and white and / t’ing.” In other words, she is to be prim and “proper,” rather than have the “wild and tempest” look of Mediyah and her hut (Carter 52). The association of women with wildness is not unprecedented, as it is common to ancient Greece as well.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Mediyah is socially deviant because she lacks “standin’ [in society] or [a man’s] name” that will put Mediyah into her “proper” place; taking on a man’s name is in keeping with Medea’s exclamation that “we [women] have to take a master for our body” (lines 232-33). In taking on a man’s name, the woman is no longer “master” of herself, she arguably loses her own identity by taking on her husband’s. Since Mediyah becomes a mother out of wedlock, without taking on Jason’s name, she allows herself the opportunity (even if unwittingly) to redeem her power as a female by the play’s end. What also arises from Faustina and Persis’ conversation is more than they bargained for in the end, as they are made to participate in Mediyah’s revenge scheme. They themselves outline here the final way in which Mediyah will punish Jason. They explain that: “We so busy chattin’ and feelin’ sorry / for them what come low like snake.” Of course, here they are referring to the socially deviant (m)other Mediyah that has “come low like snake” by getting pregnant out of wedlock, but Mediyah simply takes their criticism and utter disregard for her pain (that aligns them with the patriarchal society) and uses it against Jason, the male

representative of Trankey Island society. In Act two Scene five, when Jason tries to kill Mediyah for murdering his bride, father-in-law, and children, Mediyah uses her regained magic on him to make “JASON crawl[ ], abjectly and snakelike, after her” (Carter 85). In the end, Mediyah decrees that Jason will be this way “from now [on]. A crawlin’, / grovelin’, slitherin’ thing that people does see and set them / dog on and spit at” and all because Jason “did cause [Mediyah] some pain and hurt” by leaving her in the insecure position that Faustina and Persis express to Mediyah in Act two Scene three (as is reproduced above) (Carter 85). Of course, Mediyah’s revenge would not be complete if she did not reciprocate the pain that Faustina and Persis have also caused her during their intentional conversation held outside of Mediyah’s hut (as was also reproduced above), those women who have participated in perpetuating the standards of the patriarchy (which also aligns in this way with the feminist system of mothering) by criticizing those that deviate from the norm, by forcing the pair to participate in her revenge plot.

The choruses of each play also differ in terms of their level of participation in the Medea-figure’s revenge scheme. While on the one hand, the members of Euripides’ chorus are the *silent* observers of Medea’s murderous revenge plot that do not warn anyone in advance about her activities; on the other, the two members of Carter’s chorus are co-opted by Mediyah to play an active role in her revenge scheme against Jason. When Faustina and Persis are visiting Mediyah at her hut, they bring up the fact that Jason is on the way over to take the

children away from her to live with him at the palace. It is important to notice at this moment that Mediyah is embodying yet another facet of “otherness,” “maternal omnipotence,” which was presented by Robert Tyminski in the introduction (28). To that end, Mediyah’s “omnipotence” appears through the fact that she already seems to be aware that Jason is on his way to take the children. As Mediyah says, “He comin’ for take he two son ‘way from here” (Carter 73). This statement is met by Persis’ question: “You does know this?”; this omniscience on Mediyah’s part sets her up as an “other” that is to be feared by her society (Carter 73).

In addition, Mediyah begins to reveal another facet of the socially deviant (m)other at this point as well; as she embarks on her journey to revenge, “[she] harbor[s] violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides<sup>32</sup>, and filicide” (Maresh 179). Abuse and filicide play an important role in Mediyah’s scheme, as she abuses Faustina, Persis, and Jason, murders Creon and Sweet Bella, and kills her own children. In order to use Faustina and Persis in her scheme to get her revenge on Jason, Mediyah hypnotizes them and then sends them with Jason back to the palace to be the nurse maids for their two children, of course not before poisoning their milk by making them “drink[ ] from wooden goblets” some sort of potion concocted by Granny Root (Carter 78). Mediyah also poisons her breast milk directly before she feeds the babies herself by pleading with various gods of the elements to “make [her] milk / pure boilin’, bubblin’, bitter, and burnin’



bane” (Carter 77). Once the babies die from the poison at the palace, Sweet Bella Pandit burns to ash after wearing a charmed “night frock” given to Jason for her by Mediyah (which Mediyah had eerily intended to wear on her wedding night with Jason), and Creon also burns to death after grasping the burning Sweet Bella, Faustina and Persis return to Mediyah to explain what had happened and their abhorrence at being used like pawns in Mediyah’s game of enchanted chess (Carter 78). To this point, they explain to Mediyah: “You cause we eye to be full with tear / and we heart to be heavy with stone / and yourself to be forever . . . alone!” (Carter 85) Mediyah’s ability to include the women of the chorus unknowingly in the action of her scheme, reveals that her sole desire as the socially deviant (m)other is to achieve her revenge, not unlike Medea. However, Medea and Mediyah differ in the fact that Mediyah shows herself even more willing than Medea to do what she feels is necessary to right the wrong that has been done to her. Not only does she take on the sexual persona commonly attributed to masculinity as a woman, which will be discussed, but she also proves that anyone who oppresses her and judges her, be they male or female, will face the consequences of “a woman scorned” (Saltz). Essentially, because Mediyah was judged in the same fashion by Persis, Faustina, and Jason, it is clear that at times the patriarchal and feminist standards overlap and degrade the (m)other in the same ways, while at the same time disregarding the (m)other’s feelings.

Mediyah also shows herself to be socially deviant, in the eyes of both the men and women of her society, in her ability to be sexually free. One option O'Reilly specifically offers for taking on the system of motherhood that relates directly to our discussion, is the idea that "mother[s] would claim and celebrate a robust and vibrant sexuality" in order to counteract "the patriarchal ideology of motherhood [which] defines mothers as nonsexual subjects" (12). This idea harkens back to Karin Maresh's identification of the "openly sexual" nature of the socially deviant Irish (m)other, which is shared with the Caribbean Mediyah (179). Like Euripides' *Medea*, Carter's 1990 version of the play also picks up on this idea about sexuality purported by "the patriarchal ideology of motherhood," but his version differs in that it actually takes up O'Reilly's feminist call to action and presents the audience with a woman that is, in action, sexually free. Euripides, on the other hand, essentially presents the audience with a mother that never engages in sexual acts, other than the one we assume happened some time before the play opens between she and *her husband* that produced their two children. I emphasize the fact that Medea's sexual act occurs with her husband because Mediyah's sexual act does not, and she is scrutinized by her society for it. Therefore, even though a woman (who soon becomes a mother) is shown to fight back against the patriarchal society by being "sexually free," the criticism that Mediyah receives from both women and men in her society shows that there are limits to the acceptability of this method that O'Reilly suggests.

Evidently, it is only acceptable for a mother to be sexually free, for both the feminist representatives (Persis and Faustina) and male patriarchal representative (Jason) of the society of Trankey Island, if she is sexually free with her husband, the father of her children.

While there is a lack of explicit discussion about this subject in Euripides, there is more on the related subject of the sacred nature of the marriage bed; men at that time felt that they were allowed to be sexually free (hence the three categories of women outlined in the epigraph from Sue Blundell that begins the chapter on *Medea*), while women were not allowed that same right due to the male-dominated society's desire for "legitimate children" (Blundell 121). Here is presented yet another double standard in the Caribbean society of the play that finds its equivalent in the society of ancient Greece. In ancient Greece, it was acceptable to have sexual relations with concubines even if the men were married, while it was unacceptable for women to have relations outside of the marriage because of the desire for "legitimate children" (Blundell 121). Similarly, in the Caribbean society of Trankey Island, the "magistrate" of the town (Creon) is made aware of Jason's sexual relationship with Mediyah (even in an unmarried capacity) and is still willing to allow him to marry his daughter (Carter 68).<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, as Faustina and Persis make clear in the conversation previously discussed, Mediyah should be ashamed of herself because she is bearing Jason's children out of wedlock.

I assert that both issues, female faithfulness and the sanctity of the marriage bed, are inextricably linked because they both deal with the issue of what society views as acceptable and unacceptable sexual behavior. Rather than challenging the Grecian society's view that women must be "chaste," even as their husbands commit adultery, and that they will overreact when their husbands do this, Medea only agrees with this estimation rather than challenging it (Maresh 179). To prove this point about women's "overreaction" to their adulterous husbands, Medea explains: "In all other respects a woman is full of fear and proves a coward at the sight of iron in the fight, *but when she is wronged in her marriage bed, no creature has a mind more murderous*" (lines 264-67; emphasis added). Here, Medea goes straight from a man's act of adultery to murder, which appears to be what the patriarchy would describe as an "overreaction." Medea also points out that a woman's body is no longer her own after she marries: "we [women] have to take a master for our body" (lines 232-33). Thus, Medea is shown to agree with society's estimation of the reaction of women to their husband's infidelity and acknowledge that her body belongs to her husband, which further suggests that if her husband desires his wife to be "chaste," then she must comply. What is significant here is that Medea merely brings up how unfair it is for women to not be in control of their own bodies, but she does not do anything in this area to push back against this standard of society.

Additionally, the fact that Medea remains sexually faithful to her husband, even though he has married another and is now lusting after her, “As you [Jason] linger here away from home, desire of the girl you have just married overwhelms you,” suggests that this is the one area in which Medea is unwilling to push the limits (line 624-25). With that being said, Medea’s distant Caribbean relative is willing to push back against society’s rules about sexuality. Contrary to Medea, Mediyah, as a woman, adopts the free sexual nature of the male Jason, who himself admits has earned him “plenty daughter all over Tougou, but that / ain’t no ‘complishment” (Carter 23). It is important to note here that Jason believes that having only female children “ain’t no ‘complishment” because, as in ancient Greece, heirship follows the male line and the *polis*, or in this case “Calypso tent,” is also male-dominated: “None of them woman, them, ever bring me [Jason] boy. All / man need son to carry on he name. Gal pretty, but they / can’t sing Calypso in the tent. The rule say, ‘No woman for / sing in the Calypso tent!’” (Carter 23) Although Mediyah’s society may be similar to her predecessor’s, she differs from Medea in the fact that she does not have to adopt a male persona in order to act in the way she wishes and she can do as she pleases with her body. In fact, Mediyah uses her power to become the dominant sexual partner by putting Jason in a sleep on Miedo Wood Island that only she can wake him from: “You [Jason] goin’ sleep all the time I ain’t / here, so that when I are here, you ain’t goin’ have nothin’ / but energy . . . which you goin’ truly need [it is assumed

for her sexual pleasure]. [ . . . ] (MEDIYAH *throws herself savagely on JASON who, though asleep, reacts in kind* [ . . . ])” (Carter 25; italics in original). Here, Mediyah proves herself to be the sexually aggressive partner, as she “throws herself savagely on JASON” and uses her magic to hold him from leaving Meido Wood Island, as well as to give him more energy for her sexual gratification. After this moment, in a similar fashion to Medea, Mediyah discovers that her relationship with Jason (and the love she feels for him) carries great consequences that will cause her pain, a pain that she will overcome in her quest for revenge.<sup>34</sup>

Mediyah and Medea also share in common a desire to be remembered. To this point, Medea says, “Let no one think of me as weak and submissive, a cipher—but as a woman of a very different kind, dangerous to my enemies and good to my friends. Such people’s lives win the greatest renown” and Mediyah tells Jason: “As long as you does continue to be, / You ain’t never, never, never, ever goin’ forget me! / Wherever you crawlin’ take you, / be it far or be it near, / Make you take you this name for carry / forever in you ear [ . . . ] “MEDIYAH!!!” (lines 808-11; Carter 85-86). While this is a facet of the heroic male persona that Medea embodies, Mediyah shows that she can embody some of the same traits without having to be anything other than what she is, and this is a true testament to the progress that women have made since the fifth-century. Furthermore, the two Medea-figures are also alike in the fact that both face negative

consequences as a result of their actions, while Medea loses her children that she actually loves, Mediyah loses the ability to love completely. It is as Mediyah explains: “That Jason I did love / and that Jason I did hate. / Now, I ain’t feel nothin’ for he / ‘cause me passion ‘bate. / I ain’t feel he a-tall! / I ain’t feel nothin’ a-tall!” (Carter 87) To this point, Foley suggests: “After her successful revenge, Mediyah leaves for *complete isolation from humankind* on the mystical and dangerous Miedo Wood Island, where she now fully replaces Granny Root, her mentor in magic even after her grandmother’s death” (“Reimagining” 172; emphasis added). After Mediyah has experienced such pain and rejection from Jason, she “ain’t feel nothin’ a-tall” and has exiled herself to the confines of the “dangerous Miedo Wood Island” where she will be in “complete isolation from humankind,” which thereby gives her no opportunity to love again. In this way, Foley is proven correct in her suggestion that “[h]is [Carter’s] heroine recaptures her powers [which were lost after she expressed her love for Jason], but only by *renouncing a traditional female and even mortal identity*” (“Reimagining” 172; emphasis added). As love caused Mediyah to lose her power and gain much pain, she chooses to shun all that her society expects of a (m)other, the “traditional female [. . .] identity,” and goes to a place where she can be herself without judgment or condescension.

As we have seen, Jason’s abandonment and rejection of Mediyah is the major source for her pain and suffering, which causes her to react through

abuse, murder, and filicide. This, however, is not the only source of Mediyah's pain. At the beginning of the play we are told that Mediyah's mother had abandoned her two newborn children by committing suicide; she threw herself off the side of a cliff because Creon denied that the children were his.<sup>35</sup> The fact that Mediyah's mother is absent shows her to be, in terms of societal standards, a socially deviant (m)other as well. Diana L. Gustafson confirms this idea in her discussion of the "bad mother," which is in keeping with our cross-cultural description of the socially deviant (m)other:

The stereotypical image of the bad mother that springs to mind is the woman who neglects, abuses, or fails to protect her child. A woman who is unwilling or unable to perform her motherly duties is thought to be motivated by selfishness, self-absorption, and self-indulgence—all individual defects.

Finally and germane to this discussion, the bad mother is the absent mother—absent emotionally or absent physically from her children. (28)

While Gustafson suggests that the labels of good and bad mother are a "false binary" that "functions to regulate mothering identities and encourage conformity," that does not mean that mothers are not judged by these "false" standards (29).

Given that Mediyah's mother is "absent [enough] emotionally" to throw herself off a cliff, and is thereby absent physically, it seems clear that she falls under the category of the socially deviant (m)other. It seems evident that there



are deep parallels that run between Mediyah and her mother, which implies the common phrase, “the apple does not fall far from the tree,” is correct (at least in this instance). In other words, because Mediyah’s mother abandons her in the aftermath of Creon’s rejection of her and her children, Mediyah, unaware of the pain that her mother truly experienced emotionally and physically, repeats the same mistake. The fact that Mediyah’s absent mother is not a fact hidden from the audience’s view implies that this modern version is trying to add further depth to the pain that Mediyah experiences in order to show that there are forces outside herself that are pushing her to react in the way she does. Be those forces: 1) Jason’s abandonment and rejection of Mediyah’s love, 2) the absence of the woman who gave birth to Mediyah, 3) the female chorus’s criticisms of her actions as a mother, 4) both the chorus and Jason’s lack of consideration for her feelings, or 5) Mediyah’s unwillingness to be a mother. With the addition of each of these, more pressure is added that acts as the catalyst for Mediyah’s reaction through abuse, murder, and filicide. That is not to forget that Mediyah’s plight is also part of a larger scheme by Granny Root to take her revenge on the line of Creon Pandit for what he did to her daughter. No matter the circumstance, Mediyah’s status as a socially deviant (m)other of the Caribbean is contingent on these factors and she reacts in the way that she feels will gain her the retribution she desires from those that have disregarded her feelings and caused her pain.

This is a theme that will be continued by the socially deviant Irish (m)other of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Socially Deviant (M)other in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*

As we will see, the Irish mother of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* is no exception to the male-dominated society's rules for mothers sketched out by Adrienne Rich. Like the Caribbean and Grecian societies that have been examined thus far, the Irish society in this play has also established separate roles for men and women. More specifically, men are to be the authority figures that rule over women, while women merely play their subservient, weak role without protest. Xavier Cassidy, the leading farmer in the play, illuminates the importance of the preservation of this facet of the male role in a conversation with Carthage Kilbride, who is the Jason-figure in the play: "You're a fiasco, Kilbride [. . .] ya can't control a mere woman, ya'll control nothin', I'm havin' serious doubts about signin' over me farm" (Carr 55). It is evident that a man's inability to "control a mere [it is implied, helpless and weak] woman" is significant in the broader society, because it reflects directly on a man's ability to control other items of importance, such as the source of their income.

In this case, Xavier is insinuating that Carthage's inability to control Hester Swane, who is the Medea-figure and socially deviant (m)other in Carr's adaptation of the fifth-century play, proves him to be unable to run the farm that

Xavier would be “signin’ over” to him. Such a lack of control could cause the farm to falter financially and this is what Xavier was trying to avoid in choosing Carthage to take over his farm. To this point, Xavier explains to Hester shortly before he mentions the above to Carthage, “He [Carthage] loves the land and like me he’d rather die than part with it wance he gets his greedy hands on it. With him Cassidy’s farm’ll be safe, the name’ll be gone, but never the farm. And who’s to say but maybe your little bastard and her offspring won’t be farmin’ my land in years to come” (Carr 52). Not only can we see through Xavier’s statement the importance in this society for a man to be in control, but we also see that Carthage is motivated to leave Hester out of greed, to move up the social ladder. To that end, Carthage should be considered as a representative of the male-dominated society due to his acceptance of society’s standards that demeans a mother, but elevates a father. Even as Hester points out to him that “[y]a’ll only ever be Xavier Cassidy’s work horse. He won’t treat ya right,” he is shown to be blinded and motivated by an ascendancy up the social ladder to accept these standards: “He’s [Xavier’s] treatin’ me fine, signin’ his farm over to me this evenin’” (Carr 24). This is the moment where we see that Carthage cares more for land than he does for the mother of his child, because, even as Hester begs him to come back, he says that he is unable to do so because his new life and role in society excludes Hester due to her “otherness”: “I’m up to me neck in

another life that can't include ya anymore" (Carr 24). For this reason, Carthage should be considered as a representative of the male-dominated society. Additionally, in regards to Xavier's suggestion that Hester and Carthage's daughter Josie Kilbride may one day be working the farm (it is assumed under the management of Carthage), it is apparent that the male-dominated society desires male control and also desires to normalize the socially deviant to make them compliant with society's standards; since Josie is identified as a "bastard," which implies social deviancy, Xavier's remark that she may be reincorporated into a subjugated position on the farm suggests a desire to normalize the "other," to make Josie into the mirror image of his own subjugated daughter.

To this point, Xavier's remark implies that women are to be weak while men are to be strong, which is a charge seconded by Hester in regards to Xavier's daughter Caroline, who is marrying Carthage, and at this moment in the play to be discussed has told Hester that she will get Carthage to reconsider taking Josie away from her. To which Hester replies: "they won't listen to ya. You're only a little china bit of a girl. I could break you aisy as a tay cup or a wine glass. But I won't. Ya know why? Because I knew ya when ya were Josie's age, a scrawky little thing that hung on the scraps of my affection. Anyway, no need to break ya, you were broke a long while back" (Carr 58). The image of Caroline that Hester paints is of physical and verbal weakness. Since Xavier, who I would call a leader in the male-dominated society, is Caroline's father, and Hester

paints such a weak image of her, it is apparent that the male-dominated society desires women to be weak and works to “break ya” in order to condition women to play the role that society wants them to play. To make this image clearer, during Xavier’s speech at the wedding dinner he explains that “[w]e auld fathers would like to keep our daughters be our sides forever and enjoy their care and gentleness but it seems the world does have a different plan entirely. We must rear them up for another man’s benefit” (Carr 37-38). Here we see that the “care and gentleness” expected of a daughter towards a father is to be a continued expectation for a woman into adulthood and marriage. Not only that, but it is the father’s job to “rear [their daughters] up for another man’s benefit,” which means that a father must “break” his daughter, to condition her for a life of perpetual unchallenged subjugation. This idea is what Mrs. Kilbride, Carthage’s mother, indicates when she explains to Josie, “Don’t you worry, child, we’ll get ya off of her [Hester] yet. Me and your Daddy has plans. We’ll batter ya into the semblance of legitimacy yet, soon as we get ya off” (Carr 18). Since Mrs. Kilbride,<sup>36</sup> like Xavier, had previously called Josie a “little girl bastard” because she is the daughter of the unmarried tinker<sup>37</sup> Hester (and Carthage), she asserts that Josie is currently not in compliance with society’s standards and will be made acceptable again by her father for reintegration into the male-dominated society (Carr 18). The reason that Josie is unacceptable is directly tied to Karin Maresh’s assertion that the socially deviant (m)other is “openly sexual rather than

chaste" (179). Because Hester had a child out of wedlock, she and the child face scrutiny from society while Carthage, in keeping with the practices of men in the Grecian and Caribbean societies that came before him, faces no scrutiny.

To that end, not only do we see the desire to "break" women and refashion them for the role society desires for them to fulfill, but this same desire manifests itself in the way the male-dominated society desires to normalize the "other" into alignment with their standards. This goes hand-in-hand with the image of the socially acceptable mother that Rich suggests "demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (42). These are the standards that women and (m)others must comply with. In Hester's case, the confrontation between she and her society stems from her personification of socially deviant attributes that go against her society's standards. What is worse, at least from the society's standpoint, is that Hester embraces her social deviancies rather than seeking to rid herself of them<sup>38</sup>; the latter, as pointed out above, is the goal of the society in which the socially deviant (m)other lives. This is evidenced by what Caroline tells Hester about Carthage: "He was never your husband, he only took pity on ya, took ya out of that auld caravan on the bog, gave ya a home, built ya up from nothin'" (Carr 20). It can be said here that Carthage was attempting to normalize Hester so that she would be compliant with the standards of the larger society, but he was unable to do so. As Hester

says herself, "I was made for somethin' different than these butchery lives yees all lead here on the Bog of Cats. Me mother taught me that" (Carr 27). It is important to remember here that the mother Hester acknowledges "taught [her] that" was also determined to be a socially deviant (m)other, even before she abandoned Hester, by the same society that presently labels Hester as a socially deviant (m)other. This goes to show, as was mentioned in the previous chapter,<sup>39</sup> that mothers (even in their absence) have an impact on their children. In other words, any attempts to force compliance from Hester, who learned and was taught to appreciate social deviancy from her own (m)other, will ultimately fail. For this reason, in conjunction with her "otherness," Hester is heavily criticized by the society that surrounds her.

With the parameters set for the roles and expectations placed on men and women, it is now necessary to turn to an examination of how Hester is specifically portrayed as an "other" in her society, as Hester's status as an "other" is directly tied to her status as a socially deviant (m)other. In other words, Hester's "otherness" presents itself in the way that she mothers her child, which provokes its share of condemnation from the members of the Irish community Hester lives in. Monica Murray (Hester's neighbor) alludes to the fact that the community dislikes Hester because she is an "other" and are unwilling to help her in her situation, even though they know that she does not deserve the treatment she is receiving. This conversation between Monica and Hester is as such:



HESTER. If he [Carthage] thinks he can go on treatin' me the way he's been treatin' me, he's another thing comin'. I'm not to be flung aside at his biddin'. He'd be nothin' today if it wasn't for me.

MONICA. Sure the whole parish knows that.

HESTER. Well, if they do, why're yees all just standin' back and gawkin'.

Think yees all Hester Swane with her tinker blood is gettin' no more than she deserves. Think yees all she's too many notions, built her life up from a caravan on the side of the bog. Think yees all she's taken a step above herself in gettin' Carthage Kilbride into her bed. Think yees all yees knew it'd never last. Well, yees are thinkin' wrong. Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine. I'm the one who chooses and discards, not him, and certainly not any of yees. And I'm not runnin' with me tail between me legs just because certain people wants me out of their way.

(Carr 9-10)

Hester asserts that her community sees her as an "other" because she has "tinker blood" and has gone above the boundaries that such blood allows her, which is namely living as a transient in "a caravan on the side of the bog."

Because she has tried to improve her life by being in a relationship with Carthage (a relationship that at one point she was going to end until Carthage said he would marry her and bought her a wedding dress to keep her from leaving) and

putting down roots on the bog, Hester's community accuses her of "step[ping] above herself" and as a result, receives "no more [retribution from Carthage and the members of the community] than she deserves."

Not only does Hester's statement provide a clear description of her "otherness" in the community, but it also shows us how the community chooses to deal with such "otherness." For instance, even though Monica acknowledges that the community is aware that "He'd [Carthage] be nothin' today if it wasn't for me [Hester]" and that Hester should "not [. . .] be flung aside at his [Carthage's] biddin'," Hester's community simply "stand[s] back and gawk[s]" at the scene unfolding before them because Hester has already been labeled as an "other" in the community. Essentially, the community does nothing and they expect that she will simply acquiesce to the condemnation and mistreatment she experiences, as was described above. However, Hester, in true Medea fashion, exclaims that she is not an "ordinary woman" (Carter 45) who will allow a man to dominate their relationship and disregard her opinion by deciding for both parties that the relationship is over, which was a relationship that she originally decided should end.<sup>40</sup> Hester proves that she is not giving up the man who promised to marry her without a fight, a fight that is much bigger than a dispute between a couple, but between a (m)other and the male-dominated community that seeks to degrade the "other" and at the same time socially elevate its male representatives that they feel are held back by the "other." In this case, Hester is

the “other” that the male-dominated community feels is holding back Carthage from moving up the social ladder, which is not unlike Medea’s situation. In explicit terms, Hester signals to her community that she will defy their stipulation that a woman and mother must remember her role, her place in society, and be subject to the will of a man without contest; as Rich points out, the socially acceptable mother must focus on (and value more) her “relation to others [in this case Carthage and Josie] rather than the creation of self,” with the “self” being the version of herself that Hester wants to be, but is not allowed to be by the larger society (42). Hester, like her predecessors before her, will meet the male-dominated society’s challenge and fight for her right to determine the course of her life and to be who she is without facing condemnation from her society.

It is also important to note here that the above mentioned passage is also the point in the play where Hester, like Mediyah, shows that she is blinded by her love for the man in her life who does her wrong, as Hester explains to Monica, “My life doesn’t hang together without him” (Carr 10). What is different, however, between Mediyah and Hester is that Mediyah loves Jason up to the point where he chooses to abandon her for Sweet Bella, while Hester chooses to love Carthage even though she knows fully that he has treated her poorly. One potential explanation for this difference stems from the fact that Hester has been abandoned and abused during her formative years by her mother,<sup>41</sup> so she has been conditioned to be more accepting of this type of treatment. While it is true

that Mediyah's mother abandons her as well, this happens before Mediyah has the chance to know her, as her mother throws herself off the cliff after she gives birth to the children. Therefore, it takes Hester more time than her predecessors to reach the point where she reacts through more extreme measures than just refusing to leave her home on the bog. This maternal abandonment and abuse is significant to notice because it is mentioned and acknowledged by several characters during the play, but yet it is not taken into consideration when society judges Hester harshly for how she reacts against the mistreatment she experiences from Carthage and Xavier. It is also important to mention because this maternal abandonment has a direct correlation with Hester's determination to commit filicide, as will be discussed later in the chapter. In these ways, Hester is proven to be affected more by the neglect and abandonment of her mother than Mediyah is.

Throughout the play, Hester is presented as "the verbal and physical abuser, the neglecter, the pathological misfit" (Adisa 42), who "harbor[s] violent tendencies that result in abuse, suicides, and filicide" (Maresh 179). Like Mediyah, Hester is also "damaged from maternal abuse or neglect," which plays a role in how she reacts to her treatment (Maresh 179). Further, she is also motivated to act by "maternal aggression toward the father" (Tyminski 28). To begin, Hester and her mother are shown to be "pathological misfit[s]," as the Irish society is afraid of both (Adisa 42). In regards to her mother, Hester explains that

the reason people asked her to sing at their events “wasn’t so much [because] they wanted her there, [as it was that] they were afraid not to have her” (Carr 49). Shortly after speaking about her mother in this fashion, Hester shows herself to take after her mother on this front, as she acknowledges in a conversation with Monica that “there’s things about me yeess never understood and makes yeess afraid” (Carr 50). Common between the socially deviant pair is that the mother and daughter have the ability, as “pathological misfit[s],” to make the members of the male-dominated Irish society fear them. In turn, Hester and her mother are labeled as “others” and as socially deviant (m)others when it comes to how they each raise their child.

In terms of how Hester’s “otherness” translates directly into her ability to mother her child, Hester’s “tinker blood,” which is connected with her need to roam, lends itself to her image as a socially deviant (m)other (Carr 9). As a socially deviant (m)other, one of the qualities exhibited by Hester includes the category of the selfish, neglectful mother as she is shown to leave the house and her child unattended at random hours of the night to walk the bog. In one instance of this, the child’s grandmother, Mrs. Kilbride, is at Hester’s house giving the child her breakfast while Hester is nowhere to be seen because she is out walking. Such an activity is rejected by the society in which she lives, which is seen in the way that Carthage scolds Hester for this and “declare[s] [her] an unfit mother” (Carr 24). To this point, Carthage threatens Hester that he will have her

“declared an unfit mother” if Hester keeps the child from him, using the evidence of her “drinkin’ or [her] night roamin’ or the way [she] sleep[s] in that dirty auld caravan and [leaves] Josie alone in the house” (Carr 24). To this, Hester defends herself by saying that she “always take[s] Josie to the caravan when [she] sleep[s] there” and when she went out “walkin’ the bog [. . .] [she] checked on [Josie] three, four times” (Carr 25).

While society views Hester’s actions as neglectful, Hester’s points for rebuttal suggest otherwise. On the contrary, it seems that Hester is trying to embody society’s stipulation, outlined by Rich, that mothers must be selfless rather than neglectful, but in her own way and without losing her identity (42). In other words, she is modifying society’s rules in accordance with her experiences and what is best for her as a woman. This, however, is not acceptable for the society in which she lives; it is an all or nothing acceptance that is required by her society. Given that is the case, Carthage still threatens to take Josie away from Hester if she prevents him from seeing the child, because he knows that society will consider his evidence, recounted above, without consideration for the mother’s own experiences or needs. Given this evidence, Carthage is signaling that no matter what Hester says, society will be on his side and he will “take [Josie] off of [her]” (Carr 25). Because Carthage threatens to take Josie from her, Hester responds with what Robert Tyminski describes as “maternal aggression toward the father” (28). Before Hester leaves the wedding dinner, she tells Josie

to come with her, but Carthage tells Josie that she needs to “stay[ ] with [him] till [Hester has] moved” out of the house she has been refusing throughout the play to leave (Carr 42-43). Hester responds to Carthage by saying: “I’ve swallyed all me pride over you. You’re lavin’ me no choice but a vicious war against ya. [. . .] Josie, I’ll be back to collect ya later. And you [Carthage] just try keepin’ her from me!” (Carr 43) Carthage’s decision to keep Josie from Hester directly triggers her “aggression” towards him and it is at this point that she decides to take her revenge. Hester remarks to herself about this “aggression” and revenge, “Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? [. . .] Let’s see how ya like this” and she burns down the barn with his “forty calves roastin’” inside and the house that he, Caroline, and Xavier have been telling her to leave from<sup>42</sup> (Carr 44).<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, this revenge shows Hester to be “the verbal and physical abuser” of Carthage and her brother, rather than of her child; this illuminates the fact that Hester seems to be less of a socially deviant (m)other than her counterparts in Greece and the Caribbean being she desires to abuse the man who treats her poorly,<sup>44</sup> as well as the brother who she feels slighted by. Hester only feels slighted by her brother Joseph because of her feelings of abandonment and anger that stem from the absence of her mother. She is particularly angry because Joseph had “three year[s] more” than Hester with their mother, while Hester was “all that time waitin’ for her and her all the time molly

cuddlin' [Joseph]" (Carr 46). Additionally, she explains that she killed Joseph specifically because "she [their mother] stole [Hester's] life from [her]," so "[Hester] stole [Joseph's life]" because "somewan had to pay" (Carr 47). Here, Hester's "violent tendencies" are shown to be motivated by the abandonment she experienced from her mother, which is the same reason why she kills Josie (Maresh 179).<sup>45</sup>

As we have seen, Hester does fit the mold of the socially deviant (m)other as outlined by Maresh, Tyminski, and Opal Palmer Adisa, but when it comes to the play's most dramatic, criticized, and remembered moment of the play since the fifth century, when the (m)other commits her filicidal act, Hester is the closest of all the Medea-figures to compliance with society's stipulation that the mother be selfless; she just chooses to be so in the way that seems most right for her (Rich 42). Such freedom to choose is what each Medea-figure seems to be pushing for, an increased recognition by their respective societies that not all mothers are the same because they have all lived different lives and their ability to mother their children is influenced by their different personal experiences. To continue, when it comes to killing the child that she loves, Hester's motivation for undertaking this act is not only for the purpose of ensuring that Carthage remembers her, but more so to spare the child from experiencing the same pain that Hester herself has experienced after being abandoned by her own mother. Here, we see that Hester is trying to navigate the patriarchal society's rules, but



decides, like the Medea-figures before her, not to give in to their rules; the way in which she does so is most interesting. Hester is motivated by the desire to be merciful and spare her child years of prolonged emotional turmoil. This is a modified version of the patriarchal society's stipulation that mothers should be selfless (Rich 42). In killing her daughter Josie, Hester, who makes evident throughout the play that she loves her child deeply, decides to commit the selfless act expected by society of the mother in order to protect her child from the pain that the loss of her mother would cause; Hester, as we recall from the summary of the play offered in the introduction, was going to commit suicide when Josie caught her in the act and begged to be taken with her when Hester told her that she was "goin' away" to "[s]omewhere ya can never return from" (Carr 59). Hester's decision seems paradoxical; she kills her child to spare her pain.<sup>46</sup> However, when we consider that Hester has lived this turmoil already and that she loves her child in the best way that she knows how considering her upbringing, we see that this is Hester's way of being selfless. Hester's action places the male-dominated society in the unavoidable position of having to take the "good" with the "bad" and see that the lines of social acceptability are not as clear-cut as they may seem. Additionally, they are left to ponder the fundamental questions of what act (and person committing an act) is considered "good" and what act (and person committing an act) is considered "bad." Essentially, Hester is asking her society to consider if they can positively say that she is a bad/

socially deviant (m)other because she spares her child from the endless pain she knows she will experience because of Hester's absence, despite the fact that she is also motivated by the desire to make Carthage remember her.

While Hester's semi-acceptance of the male-dominated society's standard that mothers should be selfless may seem to demonstrate a retrograde shift toward the (m)other's compliance with patriarchal rules and reentry into the patriarchal society, I find on the contrary that Hester's modified compliance with her society's rules is another way to comment on the unfairness of these rules. In adopting a modified version of society's desire for the selfless mother, Hester makes more evident the futility and fluid nature of such rules placed on mothering. In other words, Hester reinterprets the standards placed on mothers in a way that makes clear that such standards are not hard and fast and applicable to every mother and every situation, which is in keeping with the goals of the third wave of feminists, as we saw in the chapter on *Pecong's* Mediyah. These rules can be disregarded (as Medea and Mediyah show), they can be refashioned by the mother herself to suit her needs and psychology (as Hester demonstrates), and as Hester pushes her society to see, the standards can and should be modified by the society at-large in order to adapt to the experiences and beliefs of the mother herself. No longer should the mother's needs and experiences be disregarded. Such is the direction in which the late-twentieth

century version of Medea is pushing the audience, to see the limitations of the standards that are placed on mothers.

Furthermore, in carrying out her revenge and the mercy killing of her daughter without surrendering her status as a woman, Hester demonstrates that she does not as a mother need to take on a male heroic persona, like Medea must, in order to react to her mistreatment, and then return to the female maternal persona in order to commit the selfless act of filicide to spare her child from emotional trauma. She can embody both personas at the same time, as she explains to Caroline: “Caroline, there’s two Hester Swanes, one that is decent and very fond of ya despite your callow treatment of me. And the other Hester, well, she could slide a knife down your face, carve ya up and not bat an eyelid” (Carr 21). We see from Hester’s statement the presence of two personas, but in Hester’s discussion of the two, the audience is reminded by the repetition of Hester’s name as well as the pronoun “she” that Hester is a woman undertaking both. The first persona she identifies is in alignment with the maternal feminine persona, as it is motherly in nature<sup>47</sup> and the other persona presents the desire to punish someone who has wronged her, “[Caroline’s] callow treatment of me,” which is to be aligned with the heroic persona. The fact that Hester does not kill Caroline, who she was like a mother to, and she does not carry out her threat to cut Caroline’s face, signals to the audience that, unlike Medea, the heroic side is not the steady dominant persona for Hester. Given that Hester’s reason for killing

Josie is motivated more by a desire to be merciful than out of a desire for revenge, it seems that the maternal persona often dominates the heroic persona, but more importantly the heroic persona and feminine maternal persona can coexist in one woman. Even though we do see that the maternal persona predominates over the heroic persona, Hester's society chooses only to see her social nonconformities and thereby fails to take into account that she is trying to follow their rules, she just does so in her own way.

Akin to Medea, the embodiment of two personas does not come without a cost, as Hester dies at the end of the play "with [a] fishing knife [. . .] plunged into [her] heart" (Carr 60). This is in keeping with her response to her neighbor Catwoman's<sup>48</sup> question, "What have ya done, Hester? Have ya harmed yourself?" after Hester kills Josie, where she says, "No, not meself and yes meself" (Carr 60). Thus, Hester suggests that, in killing the daughter that she loved deeply, she has suffered tremendously, like Medea does in Euripides' version of the play. However, Hester's death is not simply a consequence she faces for her actions, it also acts as another method for her to gain her revenge against Jason that demonstrates the increasing power of women as the centuries have gone by.

Part of Hester's motivation for killing Josie is that she desires to be remembered by Jason, which is common to the other Medea-figures as well. To this point, Hester remarks to Carthage: "Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and

when all of this is over or half-remembered and ya think ya've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya" (Carr 60). Hester's decision to kill herself is not only a different method to achieve revenge than the paths taken by Medea and Mediyah, but it is also another form of escape, as Judith Mossman states: "The excerpt quoted above [which I have also reproduced above] [. . .] has obvious similarities to Medea's taunts to Jason. There is no chariot of the Sun, no Athens, but for Hester there is escape in death" (1). The decision for Hester to seek revenge through death also appears to be motivated by Irish culture, as Carr implies in an interview when asked if "[her] representation of the dead and the supernatural [were] influenced in any way by the beliefs of pre-Christian Ireland?": "I do think the dead haunt us. Life is a mystery, a complete mystery, and maybe we should bow to that a bit more as we did long ago" (Leavy). By killing herself and becoming a ghost in the supernatural world, Hester will be able to punish Carthage more severely than the other Medea-figures. With the reminder of she and Josie's spectral presences coming in the forms of wind and sounds, Carthage is punished more harshly because he cannot combat against that which he cannot see. He will be perpetually haunted by the unseen, which will likely lead to paranoia. Not only that, but he will be reminded that Hester and

Josie are together for all eternity while he no longer can interact with Josie. Such revenge promises to be unending.

In sum, according to the Irish society at-large in the play, socially acceptable mothers are not to abandon (or neglect) their children, even if it is only overnight. To this point, Hester and her own mother are criticized in the play for engaging in this behavior. But what of the consequences that a father would face if he had committed the same act? Given that Carthage appears to be the one who is working, while Hester stays at home with their daughter Josie, Hester is put in the position to be criticized for child neglect, as this was her role. For this reason, I find it curious that Carthage is made out to be the better parent of the two, despite the fact that he has not had to play the role of mother before his decision to take Josie away from Hester. This goes to show that society often makes assumptions based on their own biases and often without considering the entire make-up of a person.

Moreover, because Hester's society has labeled her as an "other," it is easy for them to determine that Carthage, a representative of the male-dominated society, is the better parent for Josie; this is despite the fact that Josie loves Hester and vice versa, Hester was abandoned and abused by her mother, and that Carthage decided to abandon Hester to marry another woman, a woman who Hester was like a mother to. I find it hard to believe that a man in Hester's shoes would suffer the same kind of scrutiny that she does. Even

though Carthage is a man that Catwoman explained to Hester was weak, “Tould ya Carthage Kilbride was no good for ya, never grew his backbone, would ya listen?,” his society still rewards him and sides with him and against Hester, the socially deviant (m)other, without questioning their reasoning behind this decision (Carr 15). Furthermore, in a conversation with Caroline where Hester explains that Caroline’s father Xavier left her by herself at night on occasion after her mother died, Hester reveals that men do not face the same condemnation for this act that mothers do: “After your [Caroline’s] mother died, several nights ya came down and slept with me. Ya were glad of the auld caravan then, when your Daddy’d be off at the races or the mart or the pub, remember that, do ya? A pasty little thing, and I’d be awake half the night listenin’ to your girly gibberish and grievances” (Carr 21). In actuality, as evidenced by Xavier’s act of neglect and the lack of societal scrutiny for this act, it can be understood that fathers are not judged as harshly for neglecting their children.

In addition to the Irish society’s evident bias towards men, no thought has been given by the male-dominated society to the fact that Hester has suffered from a traumatic experience, the abandonment of her mother, which has left her waiting for her mother to come back for “thirty-three years” (Carr 49). This waiting has caused Hester extreme emotional pain that has led her to kill her brother, neglect her child by walking the bog, and to even kill her child, and should be taken into consideration by the male-dominated society in determining her level

of social deviancy. Also, society has paid no attention to the fact that Hester does not desire to be deviant for deviancy's sake. In fact, all Hester desires is to be accepted by her community, but for who she is. However, her "otherness" prevents the male-dominated society from granting her the acceptance she needs: "Carthage, ya done nothin' right, your bull-headed pride and economy and painful advancement never moved me. What I wanted was somewan to look me in the eye and know I was understood and not judged. You thought I had no right to ax for that" (Carr 56). Simply because Hester's actions and reactions to her treatment are "[mis]understood and [. . .] judged," she is not permitted to join the ranks of the accepted members of the male-dominated society, even though the male-dominated society, as was previously shown, seeks to include the normalized (m)other. Thus, maybe the problem lies in the formula society uses in order to determine who is an "other" and who is not. On this line of thought, Carr demonstrates this need to reexamine the ways in which we judge and view mothers as either socially acceptable or socially deviant in an interview done in 2016 with Adrienne Leavy.

LEAVY. Do you think that the violent acts that permeate many of your plays, ie, infanticide, suicide, incest and attempted rape, are less controversial from the perspective of the audience if the play has a basis in mythology, such as *By the Bog of Cats* and *Ariel* (2002), as



opposed to the contemporary Irish world of *Portia Coughlin* and *On Raftery's Hill* (2000)?

CARR. No, I don't think a mythic distance provides a lot more comfort actually. It might soften the rage, but generally I find not because the stories are so powerful and so immediate. There is a Medea, a Hecuba, and a Clytemnestra in many of us so their emotions resonate with audiences.

What is important to notice in Carr's response to Leavy is that it mimics Lillian Corti's prescription found in the introduction to this thesis.

If "[t]here is a Medea, a Hecuba, and a Clytemnestra in many of us [and] their emotions resonate with audiences," then it seems that the male-dominated society only criticizes and condemns the Medea-figure due to the desire to "repress[ ] and den[y]" the fact that they too share something in common with her, be that a desire to commit infanticide, an experience of maternal abandonment, or a fear, in one form or another, of motherhood (Corti 3). Essentially, in the process of criticizing and condemning the socially deviant (m)other, the male-dominated society is actually condemning and criticizing themselves. That being the case, Hester from her 1998 podium is attempting to show the audience that something must be changed in the way that society judges mothers. Just like the third wave of feminists were suggesting at that time, Hester expresses to her audience that further consideration must be paid to the

needs and differing experiences of mothers in determining how to judge social acceptability or unacceptability. This is an avenue that later adaptations will continue to explore in an effort to redefine the expectations placed on mothers.

## CONCLUSION

In each of the plays discussed throughout this thesis, the socially deviant (m)others work in some way to push back against the male-dominated society's standards that determines for them, without their input, who they are and are not allowed to be. With each consecutive adaptation of the Medea myth, the Medea-figure becomes progressively more bold and takes on the patriarchy in ways that the prior version of herself had not dared to try. For instance, Medea embodies a male persona because she feels unable to achieve the results she seeks as a female, while Mediyah builds on this inability to act in accordance with the gender one identifies with by taking action as a female. Not only that, but Mediyah is working to address the issue of sexuality that Medea shows herself unwilling to address. Mediyah, like Medea, has limits to how far she is willing to push back, which is made evident by her decision to exile *herself* to Miedo Wood Island, because at least there she could be herself without scrutiny. With that being said, the fact that there are some areas in which they do not fight does not mean that the Medea-figures are attempting to comply with society's rules. Just like the feminist movement that comes in waves, there is only so much that the Medea-figure can do on her own. In other words, disrupting the patriarchal system of

motherhood can be undertaken by each Medea-figure on her own, but it takes time and help from women across time to chip away at deep-rooted social standards (O'Reilly 12). The increasingly positive reception of the later adaptations of the play demonstrate that this work is ongoing and is not futile.

In an interview with Marina Carr undertaken by Adrienne Leavy, Leavy asks: "*By the Bog of Cats* was first produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1998 and was revived last year. [. . .] Was the audience reaction different and if so why do you think that was?" To which Carr responds that "the audience reaction was [. . .] very different. I think the reason for that is because the play has been around for quite some time now [. . .] And the reception was ecstatic the audience for the most recent production just adored it [. . .]" (Leavy). While this could be attributed to a difference in production, as Carr notes "there were huge differences in the production right across the board" (Leavy), I think that the change in the audiences' reaction to the Medea-figure (from repugnance to "fascination" and finally to acceptance) is evidence of the progress that women have made since the fifth century (Foley, "Reimagining" 159). This seems especially true, because, just like the feminist movement that has been challenging society's norms since the "late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," the reception of Carr's play has progressed in the period between 1998 and 2015 (Rampton).

It seems that society has finally decided to build up, what Carr mentions on the utilization of ghosts in her plays, "the courage [necessary] to sit down and

face the ghosts and have a conversation with them. It's about going over to the other side and coming back with something, new, hopefully [. . .]" (Leavy). Here we see what Hester articulated to the society and audience of *By the Bog of Cats*, which is that society must engage with women and mothers to define what these roles mean, rather than dictating for them the role they are to play regardless of a women's needs, desires, and experiences. Essentially, the dominant males of the society need to take the time to see their standards from the perspective of women and mothers, an act which will allow them to come back with something "new" that will lead to greater equality between the sexes. Such progress is what later adaptations of *Medea*, after Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*, have worked to achieve.

Just like the second wave of feminism, Mediyah directly calls out the patriarchal system for its mistreatment of her, which stems from its inflexible categories of the acceptable versus socially deviant mothers that do not take into consideration what the mother feels or thinks. And just like the third wave of feminism, Mediyah's methods for achieving sexual equality are reinterpreted by Hester eight years later in order to continue the fight; Hester works with society's rules in a modified fashion acceptable for her in order to push society to see the limitations of its rules. Again Hester's methods will be reinterpreted by more recent adaptations that have adopted a whole new wave of feminism. The focus of the fourth wave of the feminist movement is on "intersectionality whereby

women's suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders—feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism [sic], and sexual orientation [ . . .]" (Rampton). Even as recent as 2015, this new method for defining and addressing sexual inequality has made its way into a Los Angeles-centric adaptation of the Medea myth titled *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* by Luis Alfaro. In a review of the play by Priscilla Frank, she explains: "As the title –a slur for an illegal immigrant – suggests, the play follows a mother who has recently immigrated from Mexico to the United States." Here we see the issue of "intersectionality" at work, as not only do we have a woman and mother who must face the standards of the male-dominated society, or scrutiny for non-compliance, but she is also part of a minority group that receives scrutiny of its own.

Medea, no matter if she is Greek, Caribbean, Irish, or Mexican, is an agent of change who works to redefine (and push the male-dominated society to redefine) what it means to be a mother and she pushes for greater equality between the sexes. If anything, the Medea-figure strives to be accepted for who she is and not to be scrutinized by society because what she wants differs from a set of inflexible, unreasoned criteria that she had no say in creating.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> All line references made to Euripides' *Medea* are taken from: Euripides. "Medea." *Euripides: Medea, Hippolytus, Electra, Helen*. Translated with explanatory notes by James Morwood, Clarendon P, 1997, pp. 1-38. Given that the "[l]ine numbers refer to the Greek text," all line references made in the thesis are approximate (xxxv).

<sup>2</sup> Corti attributes the quoted material from p. 5 to Thomas Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Effects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*. Edited by Antony Flew, Penguin, 1982. See pages 429-30 specifically.

<sup>3</sup> To this point, Leon Shaskolsky Sheleff explains: "In an analysis of the social and legal position of the family in Athens, Charles Savage recounts the power of the father, at birth, to decide whether or not to 'acknowledge the infant . . . or, as occasionally happened, to repudiate the child . . . or even to condemn it to death outright.' Savage notes that the practice of exposing children was actually sanctioned by law. Contrary to the general explanations given for such practices—controlling population growth, or even of performing propitiatory acts for the gods—Savage offers a far more mundane reason: 'It is probable that children were sometimes exposed in order that parents might escape the trouble of rearing them'" (Sheleff 194-95; qtd in Savage 89, 91). Given that men in ancient Greece held the power to decide whether a child lived or died, it makes sense why Medea's acts of filicide were fixated on and condemned by those in the play, as well as in the Grecian society at large. The fact that it was acceptable, according to the standards of Grecian society, for a father to decide that their child will die, but not for a mother, illuminates the inequality of the sexes in Greece and the double standard at work when Medea commits her act. Savage, Charles A. *The Athenian Family: A Sociological and Legal Study*. 1967.

<sup>4</sup> In a conversation between Xavier Cassidy, the leading farmer in the play, and Hester, we see that Hester believes that she was taken advantage of at the time the deal was signed because she was not in the right frame of mind for agreeing to the deal and was under intense pressure to agree. Xavier explains of the deal: "This is no longer your property and well ya know it, ya signed it over six months ago, for a fine hefty sum, have the papers here." To which Hester responds: "I wasn't thinkin' right then, was bein' coerced and bullied from all sides, but I have regained me pride and it tells me I'm stayin'. Ya'll get your money back. [. . .] Here's some of it." Of course, the offer of money is of no avail because Xavier wants Hester to leave the bog. Thus, the deal remains valid because, according to the male-dominated society who is against the "other," "[a]

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deal[ made under any favorable circumstances for the deal-maker is] a deal” (Carr 27).

<sup>5</sup> Even on this point critics have room for debate, as Sarah Iles Johnston demonstrates. She suggests that “the Corinthian cult of Hera Akraia (with which the mythic figure of Medea was closely connected) supports the idea that fifth-century authors inherited an infanticidal Medea from myth” (Johnston, “Corinthian” 45). She further explains, “the Corinthian cult of Hera Akraia focused on nurturing children, which included protecting them from the manifold diseases and disasters that might befall them before they reached maturity. Building on the idea that Corinthian Medea was originally a goddess of similar interests, displaced by Hera, I have further suggested that she became the mythic elaboration of a demonic force against which Akraian Hera was expected to protect her worshippers—she was a mother who had lost her children and who thus became, after her death, a ‘reproductive demon.’ Like other reproductive demons in ancient Greece and elsewhere, this Medea also became known as the killer of her own children in some versions of her myth. If my reconstruction of Corinthian Medea’s early *persona* is correct, there is no need to assume that any single classical author ‘invented’ the infanticidal Medea whom we know from Euripides and elsewhere; rather, she evolved out of one variant of the original myth” (Johnston, “Corinthian” 65-66; emphasis in original). Alternatively, Knox agrees with Hall on this matter: “And it seems to be suggested by the evidence that the murder of the children by Medea herself is Euripidean invention” (194). Even while there is debate over the origins of Medea’s killing of her children, I suggest that the more substantive debate to be had lies in determining the impact that such an action had on the male-dominated, xenophobic Grecian audience, what Euripides’ play is revealing about the status of women in the culture at large, and what Medea’s actions symbolize in this male-dominated society.

<sup>6</sup> Drawing from Carl Gustav Jung’s idea of “[t]he ‘collective unconscious,’ or racial memory, through which the spirit of the whole human species manifests itself,” I suggest that Medea’s filicidal actions had such an impact on Grecian society at the time (a microcosm of Jung’s macrocosm “collective unconscious”) that her act is remembered in later versions of the myth and in other art forms (Richter 542).

<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, Mastronarde describes the subsequent reception of *Medea* (based on her “act of infanticide”) as such: “cultural assumptions about ‘Greekness’ and civilization in the centuries after Eur. encouraged the ascription of her [Medea’s] extreme behaviour to her ‘otherness’ as Colchian and sorceress” (15). However, he suggests that “Eur.’s own portrayal of Medea is complex and finely nuanced, and it is important not to import into a reading of Euripides the assumptions derived from the later reception of the figure of Medea based on one part of this play” (Mastronarde 15). I am not so quick to discount the audience’s initial reaction to Medea and what they remembered her for because it tells a lot about the social norms of the time with regards to (m)others.



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<sup>8</sup> See Mastronarde pages 22-28 for further explanation of his viewpoint.

<sup>9</sup> The subject of this “dialogue” will be discussed later in this chapter, as it connects to Medea’s selfishness and neglect of her children that are directly related to her donning of the male heroic persona.

<sup>10</sup> Barlow offers a similar reading of this passage: “It is with this violent assertion (a remarkable utterance for a woman to make by any standards in any time, no less at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War) that Medea dissociates herself not just with women’s stereotypes as they are commonly accepted by women as well as men, but more important from the myths and fictions that *men* particularly propagate about women” (159-60; emphasis in original).

<sup>11</sup> Barlow also makes this argument: “she [Medea] differs from them [the chorus] and by implication the general run of Greek women in that she will not acquiesce in her circumstances and she will not, therefore, stay in the labeled pigeon-hole into which society has put her” (159).

<sup>12</sup> To my point that Medea’s actions reveal her as an “other,” S. P. Mills suggests: “Medea’s origin as not merely a foreigner but as someone who entered Greece from outside the whole known world, from beyond the Symplegades[\*], is first mentioned in the Nurse’s opening words (1-2) and evoked again several times in the lyric portions of the play (210-12, 431-33, 1262-64). More important than these reminiscences of the past, however, is the immediate impact of actions which show Medea’s supernatural dimension. These actions begin in the crucial Aegeus scene. First, Aegeus’ eagerness to confide his oracle to Medea [. . .] and her interrogation of him as to its particulars present her for the first time in the play in her ‘professional’ role of wise-woman. Secondly, Medea’s bargain with Aegeus establishes her still more as the possessor of unusual powers (292). \*Symplegades is defined by Mark Morford, Robert Lenardon, and Michael Sham in their chapter entitled “Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts” as “(Clashing Rocks), two huge rocks near the western end of the Black Sea that clashed together driven by the force of the winds. [. . .] it was fated that they should remain fixed once a ship had made the passage” (619). Ultimately, the Argonauts were able to make the passage and therefore make the rocks stay “fixed in place” (Morford et al. 619).

<sup>13</sup> According to David Malcom Lewis, a contributor for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that discusses the background of Pericles, “Pericles, (born c. 495 BCE, Athens—died 429, Athens), [was an] Athenian statesman largely responsible for the full development, in the later 5th century BCE, of both the Athenian democracy and the Athenian empire, making Athens the political and cultural focus of Greece. His achievements included the construction of the Acropolis, begun in 447.”

<sup>14</sup> Pomeroy also points this law out, but she adds that it was enacted because “the number of citizens was too greatly increased. This same law was later relaxed, at a point in Athenian history when the population had dwindled and it was necessary to increase the number of citizens” (66).

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<sup>15</sup> Lines 1144-50 (comparable to Mills' reference 1147-49) are as such: "The mistress whom we now honour instead of you, before she noticed your two sons, kept her eager eyes fixed upon Jason. But then, when she saw the boys come in, she put a veil over her eyes and turned away her pale cheek in disgust."

<sup>16</sup> To this point, Medea explains: "My friends, I have now decided what to do—with all haste I shall kill my children and leave this country. I shall not delay and so surrender them to other, crueller hands to kill. There's no escape from it, none at all. They must die. And since they must, I who bore them, shall kill them (lines 1236-41).

<sup>17</sup> Foley makes a similar claim: "For Jason, Medea is a temperamental barbarian concubine who must be cast aside for the advantages of a real Greek marriage. Jason mistakenly fails to treat Medea as a hero, to value their mutual oaths and her favors to himself. He cannot hear the heroic language and values she adopts for herself in their first encounter. And so, like Pentheus, he pays for his misunderstanding" ("Medea's Divided Self" 77).

<sup>18</sup> Blundell describes this case as: "The seriousness with which men viewed the rights and responsibilities exercised by women as conferrers of citizenship is illustrated by the famous case against Neaera, which was heard in the Athenian courts in about 340 BC. In a speech attributed to Demosthenes, two men are prosecuting Neaera, a Corinthian courtesan, for living with an Athenian citizen Stephanus as his wife, contrary to the laws of Athens" (121).

<sup>19</sup> Katz includes as a footnote to this excerpt: "The term is the feminine of *hetairos* meaning 'companion'; the Greek plural is *hetairai*, sometimes Latinized to *hetaerae*" (41; see the 8<sup>th</sup> footnote on this page).

<sup>20</sup> Knox makes a similar suggestion: "She [Medea] is a hero, then, but since she is also a woman, she cannot prevail by brute strength; she must use deceit. She is, as she admits herself, a 'clever woman', *sophe*, and this cleverness she uses to deceive everyone in the play, bending them to her frightful purpose. Creon is tricked into giving her one day's grace; she knows that his initial bluster hides a soft heart and fawns on him (her own term, *thopeusai* 368) to gain time. Aegeus is tricked into promising her asylum in Athens: tricked is the word, for if he had realized that she intended to destroy the royal house of Corinth and her own children he would never have promised her protection. She knows this, and that is why she binds him by a solemn oath. And Jason she takes in completely by her assumption of the role of repentant wife: she showers him with such abject self-abasement, such fawning reiteration of all the male Greek clichés about women (she even says: 'A woman is female – it's her nature to weep' 289) that one wonders how Jason can believe it. But she knows her man. 'That's the way a sensible woman *should* act', he says [. . .] (202-03).

<sup>21</sup> Grube p. 10 provides further discussion on why the question of Euripides' intent is difficult to uncover. Sourvinou-Inwood's assessment (p. 254) is along the same lines as Grube's.

<sup>22</sup> Foley references pp. 238-39 in Wolff's "Euripides." *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, edited by T. James Luce, 1982, pp. 233-65.

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<sup>23</sup> Knox identifies a connection between Medea and Sophocles' Ajax in regards to her embodiment of the male heroic persona: "This is no ordinary woman wronged: in fact the stage situation may have reminded the audience of a play they had (probably) seen some years before — the *Ajax* of Sophocles. There too we hear the hero's desperate and terrifying cries from inside the stage building, where, like Medea, he lies, refusing food; there too a woman fears for the protagonist's child (and has had it taken away to safety). And there are many other resemblances. Both Ajax and Medea fear more than anything else in this world the mockery of their enemies; for both of them a time-limit of one day is set, both in a set speech explore the possible courses of action open to them and, rejecting alternatives, decide, the one for suicide, the other for revenge" (196).

<sup>24</sup> Barlow outlines the qualities that Medea embodies of the male masculine persona as such: "Medea shows all the firm resolve and daring associated with these great male heroes: she is concerned with [. . .] 'honour', with [. . .] 'glory'; she is concerned at humiliation by her enemies (20, 26, 603, 1354), and determined to go to extreme lengths, including her own death if necessary, that her enemies may not laugh at her (383ff.)" (Barlow 161).

<sup>25</sup> In an "Explanatory Note" for line 1080, Morwood remarks: "Medea's final words in this speech make it clear that she is fully aware that her rage against Jason has driven her on an evil course." See p. 177 of *Euripides: Medea, Hippolytus, Electra, and Helen*; the version of *Medea* used.

<sup>26</sup> Granny Root describes her desire to rid herself of Creon's line as such: "It all done now. You revenge. All man what / does do you harshness . . . gone! My daughter, you Mother, / revenge! Creon and all he line . . . gone! There ain't goin' / never be a next Creon Pandit!" (Carter 86).

<sup>27</sup> This is especially apparent in Act two Scene one when Mediyah is expressing to Granny Root how awful her pregnancy feels:

MEDIYAH. Granny, I miserable! And, oh, God . . . them kick  
me again! How baby not even born could do they mother  
such cruelty?

GRANNY ROOT. You is a ordinary woman. You havin'  
ordinary pain. You makin' ordinary complaint. The magic  
gone, Child. Havin' baby is most real!" (Carter 55)

<sup>28</sup> Silva and James Alexander take the quoted material beginning with "parenthood, even more than wifhood [. . .]" from p. 122 of Pat Ellis' book, *Women in the Caribbean*. Zed, 1986.

<sup>29</sup> It seems logical to consider Jason as a representative of the male-dominated society given that he becomes "Grand King Calabash," which is a pillar of the society of Trankey Island that Jason mentions does not allow women to participate (Carter 44). In Jason's words, he "have plenty daughter all over Tougou, but that / ain't no 'complishment" (Carter 23). Furthermore, of his lovers Jason explains: "None of them woman, them, ever bring me boy. All / man need

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son to carry on he name. Gal pretty, but they / can't sing Calypso in the tent. The rule say, 'No woman for / sing in the Calypso tent!'" (Carter 23)

<sup>30</sup> Even Persis acknowledges that carrying two children is no easy feat: "You deliverin' the man baby. Two of / them . . . as if one ain't hard enough" (Carter 73).

<sup>31</sup> Foley discusses the common association of women with nature and men with culture in ancient Greece, a line of argument that she works to reveal has limitations, it is not applicable to all, but her discussion of this position is valuable nonetheless. She offers the position of Sherry Ortner to describe this dichotomy: "Sherry Ortner has offered the most extensive defense and exploration of Levi-Strauss' nature/culture dichotomy in relation to the sexes. She begins with the assumption that human cultures universally devalue women in relation to men and that women are nearly always excluded from that part of the society where its highest powers are felt to reside. Human consciousness is engaged in an attempt to separate itself from the world around it and thereby to control its environment; what is above culture is defined as divine, what is below it is defined as nature. Woman is identified with or becomes symbolic of those orders of existence which are external to culture, and especially with what is inferior to it. Hence she represents principles of transcendence on the one hand, or is linked to the world of beasts on the other. Through her relatively closer position to nature, woman also mediates for man between nature and culture. Woman's affinity with nature and hence her cultural inferiority derive from her greater identification with sexual reproduction, early child care and the unruly world of infancy that culture is designed to control and eventually to repress. Women's lives are dominated by intrafamilial ties and emotional relationships, while men are linked with interfamilial relations and abstract and integrative cultural systems. Qualities attributed to woman – irrationality and subjectivity – derive from her primary association with the family and reinforce her associations with 'nature.' Woman is conceptually both a part of culture and what culture is designed to tame or suppress" (Foley, "The Conception" 140-41). Foley goes on to suggest that "[t]he nature/culture dichotomy also rationalizes woman's association, despite her actual confinement within the *oikos* in life, with animals and the wild in Greek myth. Here, however, we should be cautious" essentially because this seemingly hard and fast rule does not apply to everyone. ("The Conception" 142-43). Nonetheless, while Foley's argument I concede is valid, in Medea's case I see the presence of this dichotomy, the animalistic wildness especially in the Nurse's initial remarks about Medea's behavior. Foley credits Ortner's chapter "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society*, 1974, pp. 67-88 for the above material.

<sup>32</sup> Suicide plays a more minor part in this play, as Cedric kills himself because Mediyah helped Jason to win the "Pecong [contest which is] a rhyming game of one-upmanship [. . .] [that] involves a lot of smack talk about voracious mothers and flaccid penises" (Saltz). Cedric is initially thought by Mediyah to be her

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brother, but he is actually not. He is Creon's son and for that reason he must die by the play's end because he stems from the line of Creon Pandit, which is part of Granny Root's revenge plot.

<sup>33</sup> See Carter pp. 69-70 for this interaction between Jason and Creon where Jason's sexual freedom is passed over as a none issue by Creon, Sweet Bella, and Jason.

<sup>34</sup> I owe credit to Saltz's 2010 review of the play on this point, as this article brought to my attention the idea that the Medea-figure's experience pain not simply because their husband or lover abandons them for another woman, but because of the more severe act committed by the dominant male figure in their life who rejects the love that these women offer them. To this point, Saltz explains: "For Mediyah, it's love and it's devastating, so overwhelming it robs her of her powers. For Jason, it's another story. 'I a rascal, but I honest,' he says in the play's patois, and honestly he doesn't love her. This way trouble lies." Indeed "trouble [does] lie[ ]" here, as this rejection plays just as much of a role in how the Medea-figure's react as abandonment does; this just reveals a deeper level of emotional trauma that is experienced by the Medea-figure.

<sup>35</sup> Creon acknowledges this in a conversation with Sweet Bella where he explains: "I know that ol' woman [Granny Root] curse me when she daughter / pitch sheself off Devil Cliff. She deliver twin and then she / pitch sheself into the wind. She body never find in the / water. She mother [Granny Root] swear sheself against me line from there / on out" (Carter 33-34).

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted here that Mrs. Kilbride, like Carthage and Xavier, is a proponent of the male-dominated society's roles for men and women. This is made clear during the following conversation between Hester and Mrs. Kilbride at the wedding dinner of Carthage and Caroline:

HESTER. Have you ever been discarded, Elsie Kilbride? – the way I've been dis–

MRS. KILBRIDE. No, I've never been discarded, Hester Swane! Ya know why? *Because I've never overstepped meself. I've always lived be the rules.*

HESTER. Ah rules! What rules are they? Teach them to me and I'll live by them. Yees don't know what it's like, to be flung on the ashpit and you still alive –

XAVIER. No wan's flingin' ya anywhere! We done everythin' proper by you–

HESTER. Proper! *Yees have taken everythin' from me. I've done nothin' again' any of yees. I'm just bein' who I am [ . . . ]*" (Carr 40; emphasis added)

It is apparent in Mrs. Kilbride's statement that she has only agreed with the subjection imposed by the male-dominated society because she has "never overstepped [herself]" and has "always lived be the rules" enforced by the society at large. Xavier's comment also goes to show that social deviancy is reason enough for the male-dominated society to condemn anyone who is deemed an

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“other,” to “take[ ] everythin’ from [them]” simply for “bein’ who [they are].” Such is the reason why Hester is criticized by her society and why she is offered no help, even though the society is aware that their actions are wrong.

<sup>37</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a tinker is defined as: (noun 1a) “A craftsman (usually itinerant) who mends pots, kettles, and other metal household utensils. The low repute in which these, esp. the itinerant sort, were held in former times is shown by the expressions to swear like a tinker, a tinker's curse or damn, as drunk or as quarrelsome as a tinker, etc., and the use of ‘tinker’ as synonymous with ‘vagrant’, ‘gipsy’ (see 1b). (noun 1b): “In Scotland and north of Ireland, the ordinary name for a gipsy: see tinkler n.1 Also, applied to itinerant beggars, traders, and performers generally; †a vagabond, tramp, or reputed thief (obs.). The chief ostensible business of travelling gipsies in Scotland used to be the sale or mending of pots, pans, kettles, and metal-ware generally; hence tinkers, or rather tinklers, was their ordinary designation” (“Tinker, n”).

<sup>38</sup> To this point, Hester explains to Carthage: “And as for me tinker blood, I’m proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yees around here, allows me see yees for the inbred, underbred, bog-brained shower yees are” (Carr 24).

<sup>39</sup> See pages 79-80 of this thesis to see the similarities in the way that Carter and Carr depict the commonalities between the Medea-figures and their mothers.

<sup>40</sup> Hester makes this claim when she says: “Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine. I’m the one who chooses and discards, not him, and certainly not any of yees [the community]. And I’m not runnin’ with me tail between me legs just because certain people wants me out of their way” (Carr 9-10).

<sup>41</sup> Such mistreatment is described by the Catwoman as such: “I knew your mother, I helped her bring ya into the world, knew ya when ya were chained like a rabied pup to this auld caravan, so don’t you look down on me for handlin’ a mouse or two” (Carr 12). Even Hester’s own mother was trying to chain her daughter to the caravan, which is an object of scrutiny that defines Hester as an “other.” The more obvious explanation for why she does this is because she wants Hester to stay by the caravan. The deeper explanation for this, however, could be that she wanted to physically remind her daughter, in the only way she knew how, to be who she is and not who others want her to be. This is in keeping with Hester’s remark that “I was made for somethin’ different than these butchery lives yees all lead here on the Bog of Cats. *Me mother taught me that*” (Carr 27; emphasis added).

<sup>42</sup> On the desire for Hester to leave her house on the bog, Xavier tells Hester that “[he] ran [her] mother out of here and [he will] run [Hester] too like a frightened hare” (Carr 52). Carthage also tells Hester: “I want you out of here before dusk!” (Carr 25). Caroline also says to Hester, “You’re meant to be gone this week, it’s just not fair,” which is followed by, “I’ll have to get Daddy! He’ll run ya off with a shotgun if he has to,” after Hester insinuates that the property is still hers (Carr 20).

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<sup>43</sup> The full description Hester provides of her actions is as follows: “Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? Ya think I can be flung in a bog hole like a bag of newborn pups? Let’s see how ya like this – Ya hear that sound? Them’s your cattle howlin’. Ya smell that smell? That’s your forty calves roastin’. I tied them all in and flung diesel on them. And the house, I burnt the bed and the whole place went up in flames. I’d burn down the world if I’d enough diesel – Will somewan not come and save me from meself before I go and do worse” (Carr 44).

<sup>44</sup> I am not placing Hester’s act of filicide within the category of abuse because it is motivated by mercy rather than a desire to cause harm to the child. However, that is not to forget that she is motivated by a desire to gain revenge against Carthage.

<sup>45</sup> The impact of her mother’s abandonment is significant and it is made apparent in Hester’s remark to Carthage, Xavier, and Mrs. Kilbride, who are all pushing her to leave the bog: “I can’t lave till me mother comes. I’d hoped she’d have come before now and it wouldn’t come to this. Don’t make me lave this place or somethin’ terrible’ll happen. Don’t” (Carr 42).

<sup>46</sup> Hester describes her reason for killing Josie as follows: “Yees all thought I was just goin’ to walk away and lave her [Josie] at yeer mercy. I almost did. But she’s mine and I wouldn’t have her waste her life dreamin’ about me and yees thwartin’ her with black stories against me” (Carr 60).

<sup>47</sup> I associate this first persona with the maternal female persona because Hester is shown to like Caroline because she has history with her, where she acted like a mother-figure to her when Caroline’s own mother had died. Hester explains to Caroline right before she identifies the presence of two personas at work in her: “After your mother died, several nights ya came down and slept with me. Ya were glad of the auld caravan then, when your Daddy’d be off at the races or the mart or the pub, remember that, do ya? A pasty little thing, and I’d be awake half the night listenin’ to your girly gibberish and grievances” (Carr 21).

<sup>48</sup> Catwoman is blind and is the only one in addition to Hester that can see ghosts. She earns her name by drinking milk from a saucer like a cat and catching and eating mice. Her oddities may seem to place her in alignment with Hester in the “other” category, but she unlike Hester is accepted enough by the community to be invited to Carthage and Caroline’s wedding, which, for obvious reasons besides Hester’s “otherness,” Hester is not invited to.

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## VITA

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