

MEDEA'S THEATRICAL SPACE: AN OSCILLATION BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT

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In studying fifth century Athenian tragedy, it is important - as Edith Hall said - to "acknowledge the processes of artistic mediation" and to see the tragedies as "documents of the Athenian *imagination* (...) shaped by and shaping the Athenian's collective thought-world", testifying to their social and emotional pre-occupations.¹ With regard to theatrical space², Greek performances were - according to David Wiles - created "within and in response to a network of pre-existent spatial relationships"³, following Lefebvre's definition of Greek theatrical space as "a socially constituted spatial practice".⁴ Because of the particular attention drawn to gender, we have to take into account the role of women in Greek society and the conception of femininity in order to analyse female characters in Greek drama. As Roger Just put it: woman is a "cultural product" and an "ideological formation" which we must "situate (...) within the semantic field formed by Athenian society."⁵

Euripides' *Medea* is analysed here from an extratextual starting point, taking into account spatial conditions and beliefs regulating the *Medea* performance in fifth century Athens. The historical-spatial context encompasses a detailed study of concepts of female space in Greek socio-cultural thought in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

1. Greek spatial beliefs

1. Binary oppositions in ancient Greece: male/right/West versus female/left/East

The importance of binary oppositions in Greek society and its reflection in Greek tragedy has been explored at length by numerous scholars.⁶ In his elaborate study, G.E.R. Lloyd related how Aristotle attributes the doctrine that 'most human things go in pairs' to Alcmaeon, whose theory Aristotle compares with the Table of Opposites of the Pythagoreans. This Pythagorean Table of Opposites undoubtedly made explicit widespread, Greek beliefs concerning symbolic associations with natural oppositions. The following ten pairs of opposites were formulated: limit/unlimited; odd/even; one/plurality; *right/left*;

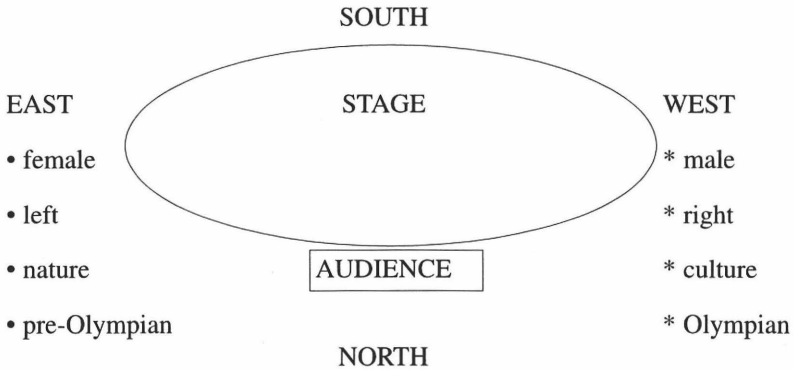
*male/female; at rest/moving; straight/curved; light/darkness; good/evil; square/oblong*⁷.

The use of opposites in Greek philosophy is clearly connected with masculinity and femininity and with spatial concepts. Feminist-conscious scholars will inevitably classify together female, dark and evil. Due to the discussion within modern feminism of the long-standing association of women within the private sphere and the 'private is political' slogan of the early 1970s, there has been an enormous feminist interest in the ancient Greek correlation between the binary oppositions male/female and outside/inside⁸. According to David Wiles, the ancient Greek woman is associated with enclosed space "in accordance with her sexuality (enclosed genitalia), her reproductive functions (the enclosing womb) and her economic role (within the *oikos*, the home), while the male is associated with the public space, where, according to democratic ideology, his major role lays."⁹ In contrast to an increasing interest in the inside/outside dichotomy, the opposition of left/female versus right/male in the Greek theatre has scarcely been examined by feminist scholars, despite the fact that - as Wiles investigated - every Greek tragedy created a coherent topography framed around a binary east/west and left/right opposition.¹⁰

It is assumed that in Greek literature male and right are connected and so too female and left.¹¹ Parmenides assumed that the sex of the child was determined by its place on the right (for males) or left (for females) side of the mother's womb and Anaxagoras thought that the sex-determining factor was the side from which the seed of the male was secreted (again right for male, left for female).¹² Lloyd's further evidence concerning the attitude towards left and right is obvious: right is the auspicious, left the inauspicious.¹³ Parallel with the sun's movement from east to west, all movement from left/east to right/west had a positive connotation in Greek thought, because it was associated with the traditional positive direction of cosmic movement. It meant physical and moral progress, a clockwise movement away from primitive and barbarian life associated with wild nature. Joseph Cuillandre states that "repéré sur l'horizon, le mouvement à droite est de sens conforme, le mouvement à gauche de sens contraire au mouvement apparent du soleil, dans son cours diurne. Il est donc probable, en fin de compte, que c'est le sens du mouvement solaire qui sert de norme ou rôle attribué à la droite et à la gauche dans la pratique augurale."¹⁴

With regard to female space, Charles Segal explored theatrical space on account of characteristic devices of Greek cultural beliefs and Greek symbolic assumptions, but according to Wiles, he failed to notice the extent to which the

oppositional structure east/west and audience's left/right was also fixed by the architecture of the theatre. In the theatre of Dionysus - for which most, if not all, extant tragedies were written - the actors faced north, like seers who interpreted omens faced north. The audience consequently faced south: the east was on the audience's left hand side, the west on the audience's right hand side.¹⁵



The oppositional structure fixed by the architecture of the theatre

The audience of the Theatre of Dionysus faced south and consequently experienced the sun moving from its left to its right in the course of his day in the theatre. Wiles' premise is that the Athenian audience's vision was also determined by the sun's position and movement, being an intrinsic part of his visual field:

The sense of natural left-to-right progression must have been reinforced by the fact that the Dionysiac procession entered the sanctuary of Dionysus from the left, coming along the Street of Tripods. (...) the chorus would probably have gathered in the Odeon (...) [that] suggests a three-fold symbolism: the sunrise on account of its orb, the barbarism of the Persian east, and the darkness of an enclosed female space. (...) To the right, in opposition to the symbol of barbarism, lay the Doric Temple of Dionysus, the destination of the democratic god after the performance was over.¹⁶

I shall examine to what extent these binary oppositions entail gendered oppositions in Euripides' *Medea*. But first, I briefly want to focus on another important Greek spatial belief, namely the centre point as point of reconciliation and equilibrium.

2. Focus on the centre point as point of reconciliation

We must not forget that the monadic in the fifth century B.C. conception assumed that all opposites were reconcilable. The doctrine of obsessively seeking a balance between opposites was extremely widespread in Greek belief. For example, Greeks believed that a disease was caused by one of a pair of opposites and that cures were effected by counter-balancing the opposites.¹⁷ This had its profound effect on the spatial organization of Greek tragedy. In Athenian tragedy the focus was not the hypothetical stage, but the centre point of the *orchêstra*, the *thymelê*. According to David Wiles, the spatial dynamic of Greek tragedy took the form of binary oppositions that converged or collided at this centre.¹⁸ The theatrical space reflected the harmonious relationship between the *thymelê*, the centre and its periphery. The *thymelê* was the theatrical centre point around which male and female, Olympian and pre-Olympian, cultural and natural forces finally balanced themselves.¹⁹

The important relationship of centre and periphery was also reflected in Athenian society at large. Spatial relationships were organised in terms of a fixed centre and a more-or-less circular periphery. In the fifth century B.C. we notice a remarkable shift from a pre-democratic *oikos*-centred towards a democratic *agora*-centred society. This shift is obviously gender-based. Both eras were male-dominated, but the degree and expression of female subordination differed. Sexual asymmetry was present in both periods, but in pre-democratic Athens and Greece, women had achieved considerable social recognition and power, although they did not surpass male authority.

Jon-Christian Billigmeier and Judy A. Turner²⁰ studied the socio-economic status of women in Bronze age Greece (1700-1100 BC) by means of contemporary documents - the so-called Linear B tablets. They suggested that in pre-democratic times, women were an essential part of the Mycenaean Greek labour force, skilled and unskilled. They further concluded that in the upper class, priestesses and other sacerdotal women were as prominent as their male counterparts, receiving the same rations.²¹ These scholars concluded that women in Mycenaean Greece may have enjoyed a more equal socio-economic status than they did in Classical Hellas.

David Wiles' archaeological evidences also tend to support this assumption: all Mycenaean houses were centred upon the circular hearth at the centre of the covered megaron. In pre-democratic Greece, the social centre was the hearth and

Hestia, the goddess of the ever-burning hearth, was a powerful symbol of centrality and rootedness. On a vertical plane, the hearth was the centre caught between the Gods of the underworld and the Olympians above. Referring downwards, the centre emphasized the chthonic and maternal symbolism of the earth, and referring upwards, the centre focused on the Olympian gods receiving the smoke of the fire.²²

H.P. Foley investigated, on the other hand, that in fifth-century democratic Athens, the female citizen was “legally excluded from participation in the political (legislative, judicial and military) life of the city, and this exclusion was of a particular importance in a radical democracy which placed great importance on the participation of the male citizen in public life. In the private sphere, women spent their lives acting under the authority of a male guardian (*kurios*)”.²³ With the arrival of democracy, the domestic hearth was “marginalized in favour of the communal hearth of the polis.”²⁴ The architectural balancing centre became the *agora* instead of the hearth. In other words, women were no longer part of the ‘centre’ in democracy. They moved to the periphery of the circle.

Fifth century Athens was a developing democratic city-state with many questions, inner conflicts and contradictions due to this development. The tensions between the requirements of civic duties and the requirements of the *oikos*, the tensions between male and female occupied the fifth-century Athenian citizen and were demonstrated on the Athenian stage. I will show that the tragedy of *Medea* is a model of consensus, imagined by men, where the stage took charge of the existing contradictions in society, attempting to balance and surmount them.

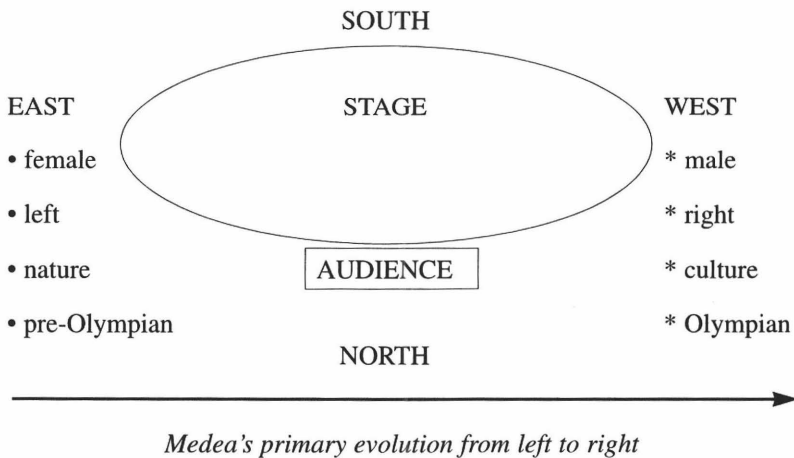
2. Euripides’ *Medea*

In Euripides’ *Medea*, the two opposite characters of Jason and Medea entail a set of polarities similar to the Pythagorean Table of Opposites. Jason and Medea take opposing roles, embodying the many contradictions and tensions that existed within the social order of the developing democratic state of Athens. Jason represents the extreme pole of ‘culture’. He has extreme political ambition and sees his new marriage with the Princess of Corinth, Glauke, as a kind of business relationship to assure his greater financial security.²⁵

On the other hand, we can map out an oscillation of the character of Medea between the two poles of nature/left/east and culture/right/west. Her story can be

interpreted in terms of a primary movement towards civilization (from left to right) on the one hand and a counter-movement towards natural, female and primitive roots (from right to left) on the other. In this counter-movement, Medea's character represents a female claim upon female power, natural primitivism and pre-Olympian religious order. But this counter-movement is blocked by the intervention of Aegeus, king of Athens, who restores balance and equilibrium.

1. *Medea's first movement from left to right: a positive evolution from barbarism to civilisation*



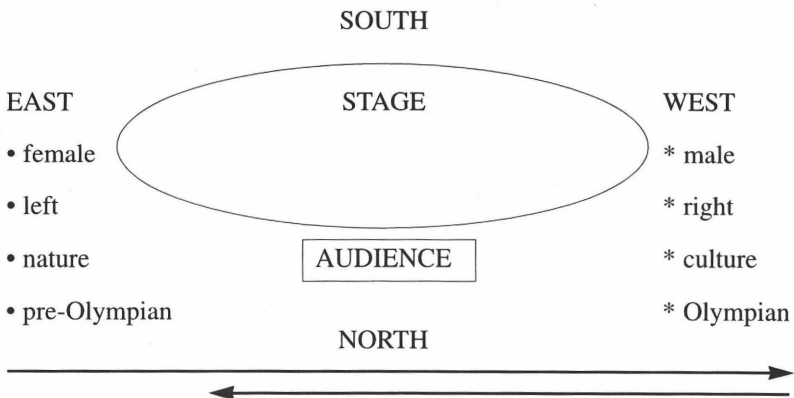
Medea's primary evolution from left to right is almost completed when the tragedy begins, but is extensively related by Medea's nurse who recalls the antecedents of the action in the prologue. She recalls how Jason brought Medea as his bride to Greece from her home in Kolchis in the Black Sea area. This geographical passage from east to west, from Kolchis to Corinth is clearly seen as a bridal journey. Medea takes permanent leave of her family as in a wedding procession to join Jason: "To herself she wails her father once beloved, her land, her home, forsaking which she came hither with him, who holds her now condemned". (Il. 31-33)²⁶

In ancient Greek times, the wedding of a young girl was seen as a fundamental transition or *rite de passage* in the girl's life.²⁷ The passage to her new, married life contained both negative (isolation and separation from her friends and parents) and positive elements (civilization). According to Greek beliefs, the

negative elements had to be overcome in completing the transition. Richard Seaford investigated how the wedding ceremony itself expressed not only “the victory of a positive over a negative tendency, but also in a sense the victory of culture over nature.”²⁸ When Jason enumerates the advantages that Medea obtained by coming to Greece with him, he focuses on the fact that he rescued her from barbarism and primitivism, giving her language, law and fame (ll. 536-539): “First, then, in Hellas dwell’st thou, in the stead of land barbaric, knowest justice, learnest to live by law without respect of force; and all the Greeks have heard thy wisdom’s fame”. Medea, though, does not see Greece as such: “But I, lone cityless, and outraged thus of him who kidnapped me from foreign shores, mother nor brother have I, kinsman none, for port of refuge from calamity” (ll. 255-258).

Medea has clearly experienced nothing but the negative elements of the marriage passage: she has undertaken a bridal journey to Corinth, but will remain a *metoikos*, someone who has moved in but does not belong, like a stranger, an *epoikos*, isolated from her kin but not yet incorporated into her new home, because Jason abandoned her before the actual wedding ceremony took place. In taking Medea from Kolchis (east) to Corinth (west), Jason started a process of civilization that could be completed by a marriage ceremony, but this never took place. Jason destroyed the chance for balance between culture and nature, male and female by abandoning Medea in search for extreme political ambition and he consequently denies her the final victory of culture over nature, symbolized in the marriage ceremony. In searching extreme political ambition, he gave Medea the reason and the opportunity to start a counter-movement, away from civilization.

2. *Medea’s second movement: a counter-movement from right to left or the regressive evolution*



Medea’s second movement as a counter-movement or regressive evolution

When the chorus relates how Themis led Medea from east to west “far over the boundless sea” (l. 212), Medea makes her long-awaited entry through the door of the *skênê* and enters the *orchêstra*. In this way, the chorus connects Medea’s travel from the far East through the Bosphorus into the Greek world with her passage through the *skênê* into the *orchêstra*. Medea’s journey across the sea is countered by Medea’s exit from her enclosed house into the public domain. Her (narrative) departure from her home in the far East is linked with her (theatrical) departure from her home in Corinth. Both departures represent the beginning of a process, the first one being a (bridal) passage from East to West, from nature to culture, representing a process of civilisation. The second process is a counter-movement and represents a return to nature and matriarchal power. Medea joins the chorus and literally reclaims her spatial centre; she mounts the *thymelê*, the cylindrical stone at the centre of the *orchêstra*.

Medea’s counter-movement is also reflected in the chorus’ lines. It gives utterance to the fact that Medea’s actions will cause a counter-rotation of all natural movement, an inversion of the course of nature. When Medea decided to kill Jason, Glauke, his future bride, and Creon, the chorus says: “Upward and back to their fountains the sacred rivers are stealing; justice is turned to injustice, the order of old to confusion (...) Everywhere change! (...) For woman, the old-time story is ended (...)” (ll. 409-418).

Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz²⁹ remarked that there is a strong tradition that Medea had been a divinity in the past. Rabinowitz pointed out variants of myths that show Medea as the wife of Zeus “in the period before Hera’s worship took over at Corinth”.³⁰ Medea used to be a pre-Olympian female divinity. Rabinowitz remarks: “We will never know how Medea would have been constructed in the cultures in which she was a divinity, because the culture that produced her is lost in the past. Since the Olympian order won and their world view predominated, we can see this earlier time only through the eyes of that later victorious order.”³¹ Rabinowitz interpreted Medea’s belief in the importance of sacred oaths as a proof of her connection with a pre-Olympian period of pre-law. “The oldest doctrine was that oath-breaking was twin to kin-murder, these two being initially the only human crimes of interest to the pre-Olympian divinities.”³² We can conclude that Medea is part of the conquered pre-Olympian period and that Jason is part of the Olympian order that has taken over. Medea’s claim upon female power is also a claim upon pre-Olympian times, where, according to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Gaia, the earth mother, was the first to arise from Chaos, the *primaeva* condition of the universe.³³

Medea's counter-movement is consequently also an evolution from mortal human female towards immortal pre-Olympian inspired goddess. Medea's first reaction to Jason's unfaithfulness is a desire to die: "But me - the blow ye wot of suddenly fell soul-shattering. 'T is my ruin: I have lost all grace of life: I long to die, O friends" (ll. 225-228). Medea sees death as a better lot than solitude and stresses her likeness with the other mortal women of Corinth: "Surely, of creatures that have life and wit, *we women* are of all unhappiest" (ll. 230-231).

Later in the play, when she has decided not to commit suicide, but to take revenge, she shifts from a suffering, passive victim to an active revenger and stresses her difference with mortal females, displaying her godlike powers and her divine ancestry. She calls herself the daughter of Zeus and the granddaughter of Helios, the sun god. She acts as a goddess at the end of the play, when she appears with the bodies of her murdered children in a chariot drawn by dragons. She demonstrates the same power, authority and prophetic knowledge of the gods when she founds a festival and ritual in honour of her dead children and when she reveals her plans for the future and prophesies the death of Jason.

Medea's claim upon pre-Olympian times is supported by textual evidence: Medea calls upon pre-Olympian gods while Jason calls upon the Olympian goddess Aphrodite.³⁴ When Medea has just left her enclosed *oikos*, she calls upon Themis to console her. In the pre-Olympian era, Themis was one of the twelve Titans and was the daughter of Uranus and Gaia. She was a confederate of Zeus in his battle against Chronos and in the Olympian era, she became the mother of Horae, the goddess of order in nature (expressed in the four seasons) and civil order (expressed in law and civil rights). It is obvious that Medea feels sympathy for Themis because of their similar life-story: Medea and Themis both left their homeland - which the male called 'primitive' and 'barbarious' - to become a man's confederate in his battle against her own kinship. Themis helped Zeus to defeat Cronos, her own brother and Medea helped Jason to defeat the King of Colchis, her own father. She also killed her own brother, Apsyrtus, in order to help Jason escape.³⁵ Both Themis and Medea did not marry the man they helped. Hera became Zeus' wife and Jason wishes to marry Glauke, princess of Corinth.

Later, when Medea has decided to poison Glauke, she calls upon Hecate, her most favourite goddess "dweller by mine hearth's dark shrine (*hestias emes*)", hereby referring to the basic conflict between man and woman, between the hearth or *oikos* and the *agora*. Hecate is a typical pre-Olympian goddess. She was the daughter of one of the Titans and everything which had to do with ghosts,

Athens is obviously depicted as the ideal shelter for outcasts, as Medea's safe harbour. In the third stasimon (ll. 825-865) the chorus describes Athens as a paradise of philosophical and artistic beauty:

Oh happy the race in the ages olden
 Of Erechtheus, the seed of the blest God's line
 In a land unraved, peace enfolden,
 Aye quaffing of wisdom's glorious wine,
 Ever through air dear-shining brightly
 As on wings uplifted pacing lightly,
 Where Harmonia, they tell, of the tresses golden
 Bare the Piered Muses, the stainless nine.
And the streams of Cephisus the lovely-flowing
They tell how the Lady of Cyprus drew,
And in Zephyr-wafts of the winds sweet-blowing
 Breathed over Attica's land their dew.
 On her Sons shedding Love which, throned in glory,
 By Wisdom, shapes her heroic story;
 And over her hair is she throwing, throwing
 Roses in odorous wreaths aye new.

Kephisos' fair streams is a collective noun for some rivers in Greece, containing the main stream of Attika, flowing into Athens, and residing an important harbour/port of Athens, "the city of sacred waters" (l. 844). This 'lovely-flowing' stream with its 'winds sweet-blowing' is in sharp contrast with the wild sea Medea had to cross to get from Colchis to Corinth, with its "blue clashing rocks" (l. 2), where the "brine-mists hover o'er Pontus' Key, unto Hellas far over the boundless sea" (ll. 210-212). The harbour and shelter that Medea will find with Aegeus in Athens, will be calm, without any passionate waves, and far safer than the harbour Jason promised Medea.³⁸ These lines indirectly attack the passionate and unconventional manner in which Jason and Medea were united. Clearly, Medea's union with Jason was no conventional Athenian Greek marriage. Rabinowitz described that "She [Medea] was never given in marriage in the way that an Athenian woman would have been; there was no ritual of betrothal and no exchange of gifts between men. Rather, she chose Jason."³⁹ Stewart Flory stressed the fact that Jason and Medea sealed their bond with joining right hands and swearing oaths, witnessed by the Gods. In a conventional Greek marriage, it was the father and the son-in-law who joined right hands, and the groom normally took the left hand of the bride.⁴⁰ Further in the text, Medea's account of the giving of dowries (ll. 232-233 "buy a husband for an extravagant sum") implies

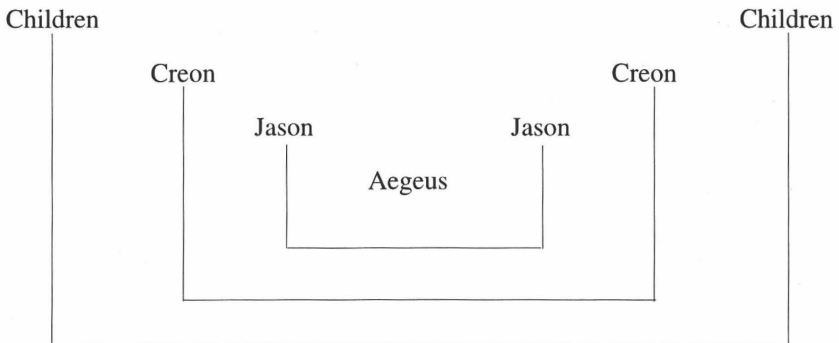
women as an active partner in the wedding transaction. It seems that Medea contracted her own marriage transaction, whereas in a conventional Greek marriage, it is the bride's father or guardian who was engaged in this transaction. In other words: Euripides disapproves of unbridled passion and active female engagement.⁴¹ The forthcoming conventional marriage between Aegeus and Medea symbolizes a positive relationship of the male with the female by male protection against the dark forces of the feminine. The male masters and bridles his passions and thus avoids false projections and compulsions.

It is striking that one of the conditions that Aegeus makes is that Medea reaches Athens by her own means. Like in a conventional wedding procession, he wishes her to depart alone from her father's house to her husband's house, where her future husband awaits her. The chariot in which she speaks her final lines, is provided to her by her father, the Sun or Helios. The chariot can thus be interpreted as her father's dowry and her point of departure for a new wedding procession. Many scholars, like Nancy Rabinowitz, had some problems with this inconsistency of the narrative. She wondered: "If Aigeus can give her asylum, presumably he could provide a vehicle; if Helios can give her a vehicle, presumably he could provide asylum."⁴² I see this plea for balance and for a conventional tribal journey and wedding ceremony as the only way this odd condition and narrative inconsistency can be explained.

It is important to notice that in this state of equilibrium, Medea will be protected by Aegeus/Athens from outside assaults of wrongs and violence, but she will not retrieve self-mastery as she desired in the beginning of the play: "Nothing fundamentally changes for Medea once she has lived out her drama onstage".⁴³ She has experienced the complex and difficult position of women, but she cannot change this. In the contest to control domestic space, it is man who finally controls the space. It is because of Jason that Medea is denied a happy *oikos* and it is by Aegeus' grace that Medea finds a new *oikos*.⁴⁴ Medea calls her future shelter "a safe tower" (l. 385), revealing her shelter as a new enclosure, a new *oikos* controlled by men: when she is about to leave Corinth in the chariot she says: "Myself I will go to the land of Erechtheus, to dwell⁴⁵ in Aegeus' house, son of Pandion." (ll. 1384-1385) A harbour easily becomes an anchorage where shelter turns into enclosure. When Medea is 'leaving' on a dragon-wagon, she says that she will bury her children in the sanctuary of Hera, the goddess of Arcae. Hera was the daughter of Kronos and Rea in pre-Olympian mythology and became Zeus' wife in Olympian mythology, thus symbolising a balance between Olympian and pre-Olympian power.

Athens/Aegeus clearly has a reconciling and balancing task. Euripides not only disapproves of Medea's active engagement in the unconventional wedding transactions, he also disapproves of Jason's political ambitions. Helene P. Foley noted how in fifth century Athens, men struggled simultaneously "to uphold culture and to resist its limitations (...) The demands of Athenian political life [competition, war, heartless strife] sometimes put the male citizen in opposition to 'culture' as defined by the institutions of marriage, sacrifice, and agriculture."⁴⁶ Jason is obviously attracted by extreme political ambition. In trying to obtain his goal by all possible means, despite the wrong done to other members of culture, he threatens culture and especially a democratic culture. This is the reason why Aegeus does not prevent the killing of Jason's sons: Jason was not worthy of generational continuity because he is a menace to democracy.

Moreover, Aegeus' position as reconciling centre where all oppositions collide, is affirmed by the structure of the play as a whole. The Aegeus scene, the third episode, stands at the structural centre of the play and the arrangements of the other scenes is chiasmic. According to T.V. Buttrey the structure of Euripides' *Medea* is carefully built and the Aegeus scene is deliberately placed at the centre of things: "the appearance of Creon in the first episode and the harm which he does (or intends to do) Medea, are balanced by the death of Creon and Creusa at Medea's hand in the fifth episode. The appearance of Jason in episode two is balanced by his appearance in episode four. And the Aegeus episode stands at the centre, itself divided into a quiet, almost pale dialogue and a savage monologue."⁴⁷



Conclusion

Most subjective estimates of Euripides' *Medea* are favourable. Some scholars see her as strong, assertive and successful. Pietro Pucci, for example, stated that she "attacks the moral duty that society attributes to women, namely, their function of reproduction."⁴⁸ A.W. Gomme argued that the appearance of rebellious and independent female characters in Greek drama - like *Medea* - proved that women enjoyed power and status at the time the dramas were written.⁴⁹

These scholars all focused on *Medea*'s long monologue against the unfair conditions married women suffer. They failed to put this monologue in its spatial and broader socio-cultural context, though. *Medea* is not a feminist play *avant-la-lettre*, but a demonstration of the existing paradoxes and tensions in a developing democratic society, balancing all opposites in favour of man. *Medea* is a projection of men's fear that women might threaten manhood. Therefore, they must be prevented from rebelling against men. *Medea*'s motif of rebellion is an expression of what Eva C. Keuls calls "men's gynophobia"⁵⁰ or fear of women. In her opinion, male authors and artists depicted female heroines as caged tigers waiting for a chance to break out of their confinement and take revenge on the male world. This male fear was actually a justification for phallocracy: if men weakened the tenets of phallocracy, women might rise against them and in some sense destroy them.

In the fifth century, Athens was a developing democratic city-state with many questions, inner conflicts and contradictions due to this development. Helene P. Foley described how the "radical separation of the domestic sphere from the political sphere, and the relatively greater subordination of household to state and of female to male undoubtedly posed more problems in reality than it did in the ideal. Too radical a privatization and cultural isolation of the female accompanied by extensive public demands on the male created a potential imbalance between the values, needs and interests of the two spheres."⁵¹ But, as Goldhill remarks, despite the evident changes in ideology in fifth century democracy, one of the most marked continuities of ethical norms was the belief in the need for the continuity of the *oikos* through both economic stability and the generational continuity of children.⁵² In other words, one of the most marked continuities of ethical norms in democratic Athens was male control over the female and over the *oikos*. Fifth century Athenians wanted to ensure the survival of the *oikos* because of their generational continuity. The function of women was to produce legitimate children. *Medea*'s monologue and Euripides' representation of the

chorus' excited confidence in the coming of a new age of honour for women becomes extremely ironic in this context.

NOTES

- 1 Edith Hall; "The sociology of Athenian tragedy", in: P.E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 99-100.
- 2 For the use of the term 'theatre space' versus 'theatrical space', some terminological problems arise. According to Hanna Scolnicov, 'theatre space' is an architectural concept, while 'theatrical space' is "a composite creation of the play, *mise-en-scène*, acting, choreography, scenery, lighting, etc., as well as the given theatre space." (Hanna Scolnicov, *Woman's Theatrical Space*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 2-3). In *L'Ecole du spectateur*, Anne Ubersfeld distinguished three modes of space: theatrical (the entire building), scenic (the acting area) and dramatic (the text). She approached 'theatrical space' in two ways. First in its external relation to the surrounding city from which it is demarcated and second in the internal relationship which the building sets up between auditorium and acting area. According to David Wiles, this dramatic schema is appropriate to modern drama, but partly fails in respect of the ancient theatre. For analysing ancient Greek drama, he proposed to lay aside any strict isolated segmentation between theatrical, scenic and dramatic space. (David Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 15-16, 18).
- 3 Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Nicholson-Smith. Cited in Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 5 Roger Just, "The Conception of Women in Classical Athens", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, vol. 6, 1975, nr. 3, p. 157.
- 6 See for example:
 - G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
 - G.E.R. Lloyd, "Right and left in Greek philology", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 82, 1962, pp. 56-66.
 - Joseph Cuillandre, *La droite et la gauche dans les poèmes homériques en concordance avec la doctrine pythagoricienne et avec la tradition celtique*, Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1994.
 - Wiles, *op. cit.*
- 7 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A 5 986a 22 ff, discussed in: Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, p. 16.
- 8 See for example:
 - Nany Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*, Ithaca (New York): Cornell University Press, 1993.

- C.A.E Luschnig, "Interiors: Imaginary Spaces in Alcestis and Medea", *Mnemosyne*, vol. 45, 1992, pp. 19-44.
 - George B Walsh, "Public and Private in three Plays of Euripides", *Classical philology*, vol. 74, 1979, pp. 294-309.
 - Margaret Williamson, "A woman's place in Euripides' *Medea*", in: Anton Powell (ed.), *Euripides, Women and Sexuality*, London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 16-31.
 - Hanna Scolnicov, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- ¹⁰ Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
- ¹¹ See for example:
- Lloyd, "Right and Left in Greek Philology".
 - Cuillandre, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
- ¹² Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, p. 17.
- ¹³ For a detailed analyses of the symbolism of Medea's right hand see Stewart Flory, "Medea's Right Hand: Promises and Revenge", *Transactions of the American philological association*, vol. 108, 1978, pp. 69-74.
- ¹⁴ Cuillandre, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
- ¹⁵ See also Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 139. "Although Hellenistic theatres are usually said to be orientated according to the lie of the land, we should observe that the Attic theatres at Thorikos, Rhamnous and Euonymon are all south-facing, suggesting a common pattern."
- ¹⁶ Wiles, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146. According to Lévi-Strauss, the opposition between male and female is also linked to the opposition between culture (*physis*) and nature (*nomos*). Charles Segal - Lévi-Strauss' most influential follower in the field of classical drama - sees the polis and its Olympian-sponsored male-orientated institutions as part of *nomos* or culture and the power of the gods in its elusive, unknown aspects and the threatening realm of women as part of nature. (Charles Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy*, Ithaca (New York): Cornell University Press, 1986, p. 32). In her article "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture" Sherry Ortner defended and explored Levi-Strauss' nature/culture dichotomy in relation to the sexes. (Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", in: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford (Calif.): Stanford University Press, 1975(1974), pp. 67-88. She explained that every culture - including Greek Athenian life - "implicitly recognizes and asserts a distinction between the operation of nature and the operation of culture. (...) Culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform - to 'socialize' and to 'culturalize' nature." (p. 75) Women, then, are identified with nature, men with culture.
- Helene P. Foley affirmed that the nature/culture dichotomy provides scholars with a tool for analysing some aspects of Greek poetic texts, but - like Ortner - she warns against oversimplification by applying the nature/culture dichotomy to a specific text as if it were some easily defined universal. (Helene P. Foley, "The Conception of Women in

- Athenian Drama”, in: Helene P. Foley, *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981, pp. 140-148.) Indeed, the relation between nature and culture is simultaneously one of opposition and of complementarity. Women mediate between nature and culture as a part of culture. Ortner described how “(...) women are seen “merely” as being *closer* to nature than man. That is, culture (still equated relatively unambiguously with men) recognizes that women are active participants in its special processes, but at the same time sees them as being more rooted in, or having more direct affinity with, nature.” (Ortner, *op. cit.*, p. 73)
- 17 Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, p. 21.
- 18 Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- 19 For more detailed information see also Wiles, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.
- 20 Jon-Christian Billigmeier, Judy A. Turner, “The Socio-Economic Roles of Women in Mycenaean Greece: a Brief Survey from Evidence of the Linear B Tablets”, in: Foley (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-18.
- 21 This equality among the sexes in the matter of rations distinguishes Mycenaean Greece sharply from contemporary Near Eastern civilizations such as Babylonia, where a man received three times the rations of a woman, and may reflect the greater importance of women in the Mycenaean labor force and perhaps in the society on general, (Billigmeier & Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 6).
- 22 See also Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- 23 Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 24 Wiles, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- 25 Although Medea curses Jason’s sexual lust, it is suggested by commentators that Jason’s new alliance is one of convenience rather than passion.
- 26 All citations from Euripides’ *Medea* are taken from E. Capps a.o. (eds.), *The Loeb Classical Library*, nr. 4.
- 27 See also Richard Seaford, “The Tragic Wedding”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 107, 1987, pp. 106-130.
- 28 Seaford, “The Tragic Wedding”, p. 106.
- 29 See Rabinowitz *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.
- 30 Rabinowitz *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- 31 Rabinowitz *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 32 Rabinowitz *op. cit.*, p. 136.
- 33 Gaia - the earth mother - was the first goddess and the primogenitor, from which all life proceeded in the pre-Olympian era.
- 34 Jason thinks Aphrodite saved him instead of Medea: “I (...) deem Cypris saviour of my voyaging. Her and none other or of Gods or men. Thou art subtle of wit - nay - but ungenerous it were to tell how Love by strong compulsion or shaft unerring, made thee save my life.” (Il. 527-531), thereby explicitly denying Medea’s divine nature and her mediating position between culture and nature.
- 35 Medea cut her brother in small pieces and threw all pieces one by one in sea. The King of Colchis, mourning over every piece he found, quit following Jason and Medea.

- 36 In the third stasimon, the chorus stresses the act of reproduction by calling the Athenians 'Erechtheidai' or descendants from Erechtheus (ll. 827).
- 37 Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 38 For more harbour and sailing imagery see:
 – Rabinowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
 – E.M. Blaiklock, "The Nautical Imagery of Euripides' *Medea*", *Classical Philology*, vol. 50, nr. 4, October 1995, pp. 233-237.
- 39 Rabinowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
- 40 Flory, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
- 41 In the chorus' ode of Athens, Aphrodite is mentioned as the goddess of democracy, whereas Aphrodite has another connotation when she is admired by Jason as the one who protected and rescued him on his wild adventures with the Argo. It is important to notice that Aphrodite was also connected with Adonis and with temple prostitution in Corinth. (See P.J. Reimer, *Woordenboek der Klassieke Oudheid*, Utrecht: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1979¹⁰, (1959), p. 11.) When Jason calls upon Aphrodite, he focuses the goddess' sexual connotations, thereby focusing his own unbridled and thus negative passions. In Aegeus' terms, Athens is the garden of Aphrodite, the garden of democracy where passions are bridled.
- 42 Rabinowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
- 43 F.I. Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek drama", in: J.J. Winkler & F.I. Zeitlin, *Nothing to do with Dionysos?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 68-69.
- 44 In describing the fact that Medea's bed has been prepared to receive a new bride, Glauke, Euripides stresses the fact that Greek marriage was patrilocal, (Seaford, "The Tragic Wedding", p. 123).
- 45 According to Pietro Pucci, 'dwell' evokes the living together of husband and wife. Pietro Pucci, *The violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea*, Ithaca (New York): Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 162.
- 46 Foley, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.
- 47 T.V. Buttrey, "Accident and Design in Euripides' *Medea*", *American Journal of Philology*, vol. 79, 1958, pp. 5-6.
- 48 Pucci, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
- 49 A.W. Gomme, "The Position of Women in Athens in the Fifth and the Fourth Centuries", *Classical Philology*, vol. 20, 1925, pp. 1-25.
- 50 Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus; Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 3.
- 51 Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
- 52 Simon Goldhill, "The Great Dionysa and Civic Ideology", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 107, 1987, p. 67.