Mapping Medea: Articulations in the Secret Language of the Body

By

Carey Scott Wilkerson

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Approved

Thesis Director

Second Reader

Director of Graduate Studies

For my parents,

Carey and Candace Wilkerson

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Chapter

Medea is the archetypal vengeful woman of Western mythology. A supreme exemplar of feminine ferocity and cunning, she conjures from the dross of gender distinction a substantial model for the female consciousness. Indeed, she is the principal provocation for our contemporary notions of the female experience in relation to power, sex, and identity. That she projects both the compelling force of feminine intelligence and the lethality of feminine rage is merely a point of departure for the Medean exposition. The secret history of the Medea narrative, as it appears in literature, music, and visual art, is the search for a conception of Medea's body, for the body is the nexus of the feminine principle. Thus, a sustained exploration of Medea's language and her psychology necessarily attempts to trace a descriptive arc over her own elusive, transgressive body.

There exists in the tradition of Medea study an alarming predilection among deconstructionists and feminists for limiting the scope of her achievement to a brutal repudiation of masculine centrality in the world. Certainly, there is no question that she decisively inverts the power credentials between herself and the men in her many lives. But because she is a woman of considerable intellectual attainments, it is important to explore not only her actions, but her words.

She is a dazzling narrator of her own tale. Medea's remarkable

agility within the normal power structures of her story is, therefore, recapitulated in her rhetoric. And, conversely, her language provides evidence of her motivation for acting one way or another. She is a complex figure requiring a complex linguistic apparatus. And it is precisely the complexity of that argumentation--its physicality, its architecture, indeed, its archictectonics--that suggests, withal, the imminent emergence of a body. The corpus of Medean narrative, thus, conceals the Medean corpus proper.

The body is the thing. As a modeling mechanism for literature, the deconstructionist critique unfortunately does precisely what its name implies. Clearly such a project has disastrous implications for a study of something as fragile as a body. Similarly, feminist criticism has attempted to "rewrite" the body as a fiction of social imagination or a proving ground for sexual oppression. I attempt to re-build, from the text up, the broken Medean body of deconstruction, pausing along the way to emend some feminist misreadings of the Medea story.

This thesis investigates the construction of a Medean body in three settings: literature, music, and visual art. I shall turn to the tradition of Medean dramaturgy with detailed considerations of body rhetoric in the Medea plays of Euripides, Seneca, Jean Anouilh and Robinson Jeffers. Rigorous meditation on such a powerfully evocative archetype must take seriously the problem of Medea's relationship not only to the texts in which she appears, but also the relationships among those texts. Here, of course,

the method of comparison will be primarily that of their similarities, the ways in which they complete a cycle of transformation, articulating a feminine principle that rejects the masculine hegemony over political contests and sexual transactions through the evocation of a language surcharged with the determinative physicality of the Medean body.

I demonstrate the significance of Medea's rhetoric in her claims to autonomy and adduce, from that autonomy, a foundational conception of her "body language." However, I shall also reject the normative strategies of recent feminist theory and propose that Medea deploys her charms and spells and body of words-- to say nothing of her words of the body--not primarily as deconstructions of the masculine image, but, rather, as affirmations of the feminine. She is merely doing what comes naturally. The texts in my examination make the positive case for a feminine self and do not confuse the transgression of male identity with a critique of masculinity.

Next, I open the exploration onto the vista of operatic spectacle and the intimacy of pictorial gesture. In showing the interpolative relationship between Eugène Delacroix's extraordinary painting *Medea About to Kill Her Children* and Iannis Xenakis's choral fantasy *Medea*, I make clear not only the metaphoric, but also the physical interdependence between Medea's graphic embodiment and her sung words in the libretto and the accompanying music.

The degree to which these interpolations reveal the Medean "body"

of the body in the painter's narrative imagery and the concomitant echo or imitation of the human voice in the opera. Together they construct a body through visual and aural apostrophe, that is, through eruptions of stylized graphics and harmonics. Again, the principal method will be to illumine similarities and, thus, lay out a positive case for the emergence of a Medean corpus without recourse to vague deconstructionist stratagems or feminist homiletics. I resist the negative case as it reductively consigns my notion of "body rhetoric" to a vision of what Medea is not rather than an exploration of what she is.

I conclude that these threads of body narrative and body representation show how completely the Medean body inhabits its own mythology, displacing, from within, the languid abstractions of feminist dialecticism and the ribbons of haze in deconstructionist theory. I demonstrate that Medea's body does not have to be conjured from her several narratives, that she is not defeated by the monsters of masculine oppression or deconstructionist erasure. I show that the issue of the body is central to the Medean exposition, that it transcends even metaphor and unfolds into a discourse of real things, of determinate objects, of sensory experience in which art is fused to reality through the body and that such a body is the nexus of a self.

Euripidean Body Mode

Euripides's *Medea* is a megalithic display of linguistic sophistication. Its material density and narrative complexity place it squarely in the principal line of succession from Homer to the Shakespearean oeuvre. No less than any of these, *Medea* imbues the immediacy of inner experience with epic dramatic force, at once transforming daily life into myth and making myth deeply personal. Medea herself, more than merely a persona or a pathology, is a projection of complex desires and motives. Indeed, she is the substance of her narrative. And Medea herself places her body at the center of that narrative world, inventing its politics, its aesthetics, and its particular language, a language of the Medean body.

Medea wrests from Hellenistic epic the energies of sweeping panorama and directs them onto the private lives of the Greek gentry. *Medea*'s immense emotional reach and dramatic scale recall the long tales of remote antiquity in that they ritually display the complexity of Medea's exploits in the world and explore the complexity of her imaginative experience . That her name is the play's title decisively and inextricably connects the textual Medea (Medea of the reader's experience) to the fictive Medea. Euripides's play is, thus, not about Medea. It is Medea. It is the map of her body.

Charles Segal's *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow* opens the

discourse without equivocation: "The enactment of mythical narrative through bodies moving, and lying, on the stage is one of the means whereby tragic poets converted epic and choral storytelling into its characteristically theatrical form" (110). Medea's monologues are virtuosic artifacts of linguistic cunning. Her body of words swells from the page, an intumescence of intellect and desire, of brutality and erotic acuity. That monologues constitute both the textual encounter of a character and that character's interior experience imputes to the apostrophic form the capacity to illumine psychological states without the gratuitous speculative intrusions of a narrator or the interruptions of an interlocutor. Yet *Medea* is not without narration. Nor are its psychological ambiguities ever fully resolved. For, indeed, *Medea*'s very singular achievement is its evocation of an entire world of human struggle through a series of dramatic declarations, all of which conjure from cataclysm a vision of Medea's body: "Woman's suffering, the play suggests, is bound up with her body" (Segal 111).

Medea is, at once, the protagonist and antagonist of this tragedy, simultaneously the heroine and the dark force of malevolence, seizing the pages in her inimitably charming style. The word "Medea" contains the agreeable frisson of "madness" and intimations of "demons." In the case of the monologue in which the language truly becomes the speaker, the

relationship between Medea's name and her identity is doubly significant. Medea is her words. Her words are her Self. She is language and identity conjoined in a ritualized body aesthetic.

Her monologues reveal, therefore, not only her maneuvers in the world, but her precise and mythically perverse nature. Her systematic pursuit and destruction of Jason inverts and extends the myth of Philomela, a helpless woman undone by male treachery. Tereus of Thrace marries the maid Procne. While Procne is away he rapes her sister Philomela and tears out her tongue when she threatens to reveal to Procne his brutal infidelity. Philomela nevertheless telis her story in a series of embroidered tapestries like Penelope weaving for her suitors or Calyxa painting constellations for Perseus in heaven. Procne sees the narrative of her husband's ghastly crime and secretly feeds him his own son whom she slaughters in retribution--all echoed in Shakespeare's treatment of the doomed Lavinia in his masterful *Titus Andronicus*. There ensues much horror and desperation and a chase through a magic wood, whereupon mute Philomela is transformed into a nightingale, virtue rewarded and evil punished.

Medea's indefatigable menace and Jason's surprising ingenuousness recontextualize Philomela's mythic drama. Medea's shocking murder of her children and Jason's lover restores to courtly civility

the wildly extravagant style of pagan spectacle. Euripides's long, lithe lines, discursive expatiations, are heroic attempts to forestall indefinitely Medea's vengeful plot. But Jason cannot silence Medea with betrayal. Indeed, she transmutes his dereliction of their marriage into her lexicon of condemnation, the loquacious substance of her resolve. Medea counters Jason's plodding justifications with pure effusive language. She imprisons Jason in the labyrinth of her body of rhetoric and, in an act of lyrical parthenogenesis, creates and liberates herself with a rhetoric of the body.

Here is evidence of Medea's radically ironic style. She fully inhabits the apostrophic form, taking hostage the language of feminine longing, but distorting words of desperation with aggressively theatrical, highly physical inflections of paranoid self-absorption. Medea gives epic language the richness of personal affectation. In the elegance of apostrophic form Medea becomes the tyrannical monstration of vengeance. Her perversity thus transmutes primal energies into linguistic complexity and refracts, through language itself, the prismatic flicker of polymorphous morality. She becomes the embodiment, the very body of revenge.

The mystery of Medea's body is encoded in her language. Her narrative line is a reliquary of Medean physicality, by turns Apollonian and Dionysian, now erotic, now balletic, now creative, now destructive. She is the supreme example of a self-made woman. Hers is the consciousness of

the self proceeding always from the body proper.

Medea does not appear in the opening scene of Euripides's drama. She is the phantom figure of its contemplation, its vertex, its epicenter hidden in some noumenal location beneath the surface. Medea is, thus, more than merely the provocation for the scene's action--the Nurse's anxious monologue and her bizarre encounter with the Tutor of Medea's children. She is the spectral presence of this scene, haunting it with her shadowy modulations of plots and counterplots. Indeed, Medea divides her world in the glamorous style of the Scythian witch--not only between darkness and light, but also between loyalty and betrayal, between repulsion and seduction, between demure quiescence and bellicose defiance. She is at once absent from the scene and integral to its progress and its issue, inhabiting its discourse, infecting its logic, impeding and urging its inertia. The Nurse is palpably alarmed by her own anticipation of Medea's emerging fury of which the body is the nexus:

> Run into the house boys. Everything will be all right.
> You do your best to keep them by themselves,
> As long as she's in this dark mood: don't let them go to her.
> I've watched her watching them, her eye like a wild bull's.
> There's something that she means to do; and I know this:
> She'll not relax her rage until it has found its victim.

God grant she strike her enemies and not her friends.

(Sanderson 77-83)

Here, the Nurse formulates the first proposition of Medean body rhetoric: rage is not merely a state of mind, but has a life of its own. Leaving aside, for the moment, questions of purely psychological character, it is instructive to note that the Nurse does not suggest Medea may not harm her children. Rather, she plainly asserts that Medea, given an opportunity, will exact a vengeful punishment on Jason for his infidelity and kill his (their!) children.

The consequence of Medean rage is, thus, never a matter for speculation. It is as luminously determinate and certain as Medea herself. The Nurse makes no particular distinction between Medea and her rage. Again, hers is neither an exegetical reading of Medea's psychological state nor a hysterical foray into metaphor; she is reporting the facts as she understands them. And her vigilance in matters of the world requires her to confront the prospect of unspeakable violence. Clearly rage itself does commit violence, but is, rather, projected onto the world through a body.

Here, then, is an extraordinarily revealing moment in Euripidean dramaturgy. The Nurse, sensing the imminent convergence of hate and horror, weaves a complex skein of allusive language in order to speak as much to the absent Medea as to the Tutor whom she entreats for help in

protecting his charges, Medea's children, from Medea herself. Thus is Medea woven into the linguistic fabric of the scene; she is the unifying mechanism of its patterns, the decoding device for solving its several riddles.

In the transformative architectonics of Euripides's language, the Nurse's knowing words become oracular divinations: "I've watched her watching them, her eyes like a wild bull's." She places before us the spectacle of herself watching Medea watching her children, darkly contemplating vengeance and terror. These are appeals to the sensory immediacy of vision. Medea, transmuted by rage into a wild bull, usurps the perceptual politics of the Nurse's imaginative experience, showing her precisely what she fears most. Medea's "dark mood" becomes the prevailing ethos of the Nurse's dialogue. Arguing, as she does, from fear, the Nurse is, ironically, closest to the Medean rhetoric and, thus, closest to the Medean body. That Medea is "in" a "dark mood" is significant. The preposition actually locates her in the stylized setting of her black rage. Medea, thus, mediates the narrative space between her body and her rage through the vessel of her "dark mood."

Similarly, this "dark mood" is itself suspended by the wild bull's eye between the Nurse's allusive language and the borders of the Medean body. There is as much confusion about the status of Medea's body as there is

about the nature of her rage. She is simultaneously absent from the scene and yet fully encoded into its language. She is mother of two children and yet also potentially a murderous fiend and an irrational beast cloaked in an enraged state--not a psychological state, but a locative state of being, a state of darkness.

Medea, thus, ensnares the Nurse, the children, and the Tutor in the filaments of their own story, implicating them in the facts of their own circumstance, tripping them on the dramatic threads of her powerful presence without exposing her own body to the same rigorous Euripidean poetics. She conceals herself in the texture of their fear. She liberates her body through the grotesqueries of metaphoric language, displacing the plaintive tones of the Nurse's maternal reflexes, even as she herself dramatizes, without yet taking the stage, the paradoxical exigencies of a mother's relation to the world as it is refracted through questions of marriage and family.

The Nurse's claim that Medea will not "relax her rage until it has found its victim" frames the multiplicity of the Medean body in metaphoric terms, but it is more accurate than she knows. From the conventional understanding of the term "victim," it is reasonable to adduce a culprit, someone or something that commits the crime or precipitates those events that victimize another person, which may appear merely to state

the obvious. However as it relates to the action of this scene and, therefore, the question of the Medean body, it raises yet further important questions.

First, to what extent is the Nurse's rhetorical strategy here a dramatic device for creating a sense of desperation and urgency? Second, how can her language possibly provide a coherent account of a character, that is, a body which we have not yet seen? Because both questions speak to the larger issue of Medea's penumbral shadow over the action of the play, they constitute an inquiry into the causal logic of the Medean absence.

Depending on whether the interpenetration of her entrance and departure from the Nurse's language in various figurative guises is evidence of the Medean body or merely the style of Medean discourse, there is either a shocking mélange of Medean identities, Medean bodies swirling through this scene, or the Nurse has, quite without knowing it, pioneered a new frontier in dramatic phenomenology. Of course, both are true.

Taken together, these are the two poles of the axis about which turn the shifting tableaux of Medean imagery. As there can be no imagery without a referent and no victim without a ritual sacrifice, there exists no body rhetoric without a body. That the Nurse speaks in the charged mode of Euripidean poetics, is, thus, a formulation of an axiom in the Medean

body language. The shape of Medea's body is further complicated by the problem of the Nurse's pronouns: "She'll not relax her rage till it has found its victim. / God grant that she strike her enemies and not her friends." That Medea's rage will find a victim intimates the dual nature of Medea's rage. But, in fact, it illumines the rather more alarming and inexplicably dual nature of the Medean body. This is another way of articulating the first axiom of Medean body language: there is no difference between Medea proper and her body. The name "Medea" may, of course, suggest the history of vengeance or the myths of magic or the intricacies of Colchian politics. But she is ever herself and never separate from her body.

The abstractions of lyrical language do not impute to the Medean body descriptive insubstantiality, but, rather, seem to confer a determinacy unavailable to prescriptive objects in the world. This is not to say that the Medean body is without limitations in the context of Euripidean dramaturgy, but that the borders of a Medean body are contingent in the linguistic world because she is, herself, a creature of physical contingency.

The Medea of "she'll not relax her rage" is the same as that of "till it has found its victim." But it is unclear where the pronominal Medea stops and her rage begins. More than merely an instance of lyrical capriciousness, this oddly provocative phrase is one aspect of the problem with Medea's body: it appears in different forms, always changing, eluding

meaningful investigation. Thus is the Medean body never fully stripped of its rhetorical dimensions and, therefore, its linguistic multifariousness.

Medea becomes the supremely agile witch of self-generative language as well as the elegantly disputatious figure of lyrical fabulism. The image of Medea's rage somehow stalking the corridors in search of a victim is one consequence of the Nurse's perplexed, if strangely telling, fusion of motherly instinct and rhetorical finesse. Certainly, there remains the unresolved problem of Medea's relationship to herself through her own stylized language. But for now, this divided imagery is the model for an exploratory language of the Medean body.

Johnathan Culler's discerning probe into the mechanics of action illustrates the difficulty in assigning final meaning to the structures of representation: "We speak of people as having minds and bodies, as thinking, imagining, remembering, feeling pain, loving and hating, etc., and do not have to justify such discourse by adducing philosophical arguments" (Culler 140).

The Medean problem is, of course, that she inverts the Cullerian program and invites the very philosophical argumentation he claims is unnecessary. Moreover, the Medea of philosophical argumentation may not be the Medea of lyrical representation or anything like an exegetical object. Yet he makes clear that exegetical discourse does not always outstrip

metaphor: "When a text uses such discourse, it is to that extent inherently intelligible, and when it deviates from such discourse the reader's tendency is to translate its 'metaphors' back into this natural language" (Culler 141).

Here, then, is a question of the proportional relationships that inform the triple trajectory of language. As metaphor is to natural language, so is exegetico-philosophical language to metaphor. In the case of the Medean body, the problem for a coherent exploration of its borders is not with its natural state, but with its metaphoric state.

Properly understood then, Medea is, in this first scene, precisely that language the Nurse uses to invoke her. This fact, however true, understates the case in two respects: because Medea is her body, it is important not to confuse the Nurse's integration of her own language in the Medean identity; the Nurse's language does not, strictly speaking, create a Medean body any more than a recipe actually creates a cake. Further, the metaphoric language is, itself, a construction of yet other structures of representation. But it does not follow that the search for Medea's body is doomed to end in a *reductio ad absurdum* or leads otherwise to the wrong body.

Rather, it requires an unequivocal articulation of the metaphor's taxonomy. And this is possible only in terms of its dramaturgical evolution. The progress from Medea's "dark mood" through her vengeful vision in a

"wild bull's" eye to the phantom spectacle of her rage is the accretion of language framing her centrality in the play's action before she is present on the stage.

First, the language locates her "in" the discourse of anticipation and fear. Second, we are all witness to her protean transmogrifications in and out of her yet indeterminate shape. Third, her rage stalks onto the stage in a ghastly prelude to her actual appearance. Before we have even seen Medea, we have felt her body.

Cleanth Brooks's assertion that the language of poetry is that of paradox remains perhaps the most salient reduction of the problems with metaphor and its attendant issues of meaning. A naively semantic reading of the Nurse's lines might lead to the misconception that Medea has always with her, on a leash, the exponential creature of her rage and variously dispatches it to vanquish her enemies. And if that is not the precise meaning of the line, there is a sense in which it is true. Metaphor has, thus, a literal dimension. It is this literal dimension that opens onto the possibility of a real body behind the allusive poetics of the Nurse's language. The paradoxical relationship between the Medea of language and that of actual representation is not limited to the dynamics of text itself. Even the social dimension of Medean complexity begins with her body.

If the scope and scale of Medea's extraordinary transgression in

merely contemplating the murder of her children seem at first unrealistic in social terms, it might be instructive to note that Medea herself remains impenetrable even to those closest to her. It is, therefore, a particularly Medean irony that so few authors have attempted to address the question of the Medean body code; the scholarly literature is hardly littered with remarkable failures. The project itself is perhaps uniquely untenable insofar as it presumes that a construct such as the Medean body is, in any final sense, knowable.

To suggest that mapping the borders of Medea's body would be to know Medea herself is, again, overstating the case in two ways: first, the narrative record is necessarily incomplete and grows ever more fragmentary with each new reading, each new interpretation; second, Medea does not begin or end with a conception of her body.

Yet if Culler's notion of the conversions from metaphor into natural language is correct, it is not only permissible, but requisite that we understand Medea's language as a deployment of her body's action. The acting body is, of course, co-extensive with her maniacal fusion of logical non sequitur and moral affectation. Thus are intellect and desire inextricably linked in the rhetoric of the body.

As the Medean body becomes more readily available to the scrutiny of an exegesis liberated from the notion of metaphor as a dead end,

emerging in this scene, from the Nurse's language and onto the stage, the connections between word and gesture, between language and body are plainly evident.

Medea's theatricality in view of that same question seems closer to the truth than the Nurse's fantastical pronouncements: "Ah wretch! Ah, lost in my sufferings, / I wish, I wish I might die" (Blondell 13).

Medea has yet to enter the scene, for she speaks from off-stage. She thus complicates her absence with a death wish. Here is Medea in her blithely trenchant mode, fused with her immodest narrative ambitions in accumulations of hysteria, confusion, deception, and horror. Withal, we can credit Medea for assembling, from the Nurse's shattered mosaic of fact, speculation, and pure paranoia, a provocative version of the Medea story in which she is dead before she enters the scene; for indeed, Medea, like the prototypical tragic figure, is properly understood not as a person, but a narrative with a secret ending. In this case, the secret reposes in the Medean body, a body her opening lines conceive as a corpse.

Medea's elegant poetry constitutes as elusive a phenomenon as we could imagine in a world of linguistic plurality. Deconstructionist critical literature imagines this plurality as fragmentation and dissemination, fatally misreading, as a loss of meaning, the subtle interplay between body and language:

> How will speech and writing function then? They will once more become gestures; and the logical and discursive intentions which speech ordinarily uses in order to ensure its rational transparency, and in order to purloin its body in the direction of meaning, will be reduced or subordinated. And since this theft of the body by itself is indeed that which leaves the body to be strangely concealed by the very thing that constitutes it as diaphanousness, then the deconstitution of diaphanousness lays bare the flesh of the word, lays bare the word's sonority, intonation, intensity--the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressed gesture which remains in all speech, the unique and irreplaceable movement which the generalities of concept and repetition have never finished rejecting.
>
> (Derrida, *Writing* 240)

Medea's discursive style advances both the open lyricism of her brutal impulses and the cogent formulations of her philosophic mind. Rex Warner's translation makes clear the labyrinthine textures of her narratological body: "Ah, I have suffered / What should be wept for bitterly. I hate you, / Children of a hateful mother. I curse you / And your father. Let the whole house crash" (13-14). Indeed, it is her perverse charm that these

lines so persuasively conjoin her twin sensibilities in multiple permutations. She wields the extraordinary precision and dark humor of a polymath with her head in the clouds, testing the boundaries of her body as she contemplates death and its relation to her condition as wife, mother, and, most portentously, a victim.

As expressive motifs, constructs, constructions, creation, and destruction pervade her imaginative world, in which she assembles from spare parts of speech a matrix of illusion and lunacy. It is as if her world is ours in every way except that she moves the axis of metaphoric exposition, thus disrupting the synchronous tensions between language and object. Superficially, then, she is free to explore the hidden dimensions of non sequitur, perhaps to find ironic truth in fallacious or specious argumentation. But Medean verse illuminates the very asymmetries of its own constitution and is, therefore, at once a rigorous poetics of the body's relation to other bodies and an act of mimesis. There exists also a telling range of mimesis and modulation among translations of the same passage. Philip Vellacott's reading reveals a more exposed body: " Do I not suffer? Am I not wronged? Should / I not weep? / Children, your mother is hated, and you are cursed: / Death take you, with your father, and perish his whole / house" (98-102).

This shocking passage is characteristic of Medea's attempts to

retrieve from private moments the subtle amplitudes of sustained terror that anchor daily experience to her dreamed life. That she is also a kind of self-styled victim of the world's random injustice is apparent in her inventive deployment of linear narrative structure against itself to dramatize the mutability of her linguistic universe. Medea reveals her condition and her body strictly on her own terms.

In Ruby Blondell's highly charged feminist approach to the condition of the Medean body, the topology of the spoken line recapitulates the status of Medea's fractured psyche discovering in its corpus of linguistic stratagems a poetics of empowerment. These two lines resolve their problem of suspended argumentation by presupposing the answer to their own question: "May heavenly fire strike me through the head! / Why go on living? What does it profit me?" (Blondell, 144-45). As none may know the book of fate, so none can endure the tortuous perplexity of living an incomprehensible life in the vast matrix of divine contemplation. Occurring, as it does, on the same logical pulse as "heavenly fire," "through my head" here becomes the punning apotheosis of divine invention, all manner of being and being itself in the universal plenum. She is the body, variously impelled by the metaphoric gravity of other bodies.

Placed in the vertex of "heaven" and "head," "living," indeed, life itself conjoins the beginning and the end of the passage to create a

continuum of lyrical quintessence, imputing to Medea's linguistic edifice the a prioristic legitimacy of divine order. The line's triple trajectory anchors mortal verse to the principles of divine narrative. Indeed, it is only in terms of those principles that Medea's desire to die emerges from the energies of the divine aesthetic and moves toward a conception of some permanent, even eternal body.

Her vision of the universe is, therefore, paradoxically both a resonance of limited human understanding and a codification of divine omniscience in which the apparent exigencies of cosmic caprice are configured in the stable forms of metaphoric representation. That the speaking rhythms of the Medean body conceal the fluid patterns of Medea's desire holds her poetry equidistant between the body and the mind. Medea is thus the Cartesian witch of classical body-aesthetics.

Weaving together the unifying force of her death wish and the lithe motion of her body rhetoric in which her head is corporeally imbricated in the effects of heaven's mercy through linguistic invention, Medea stages a dazzling inquiry into the performative dimensions of linguistic artifice.

Her ululation is, at once, an explicit presentation of the rules of a violent universe and an artifact of poetic divinity. Medean verse is, thus, transcribed from the larger text of divine narrative. Human capriciousness is interpreted in the precision of divine scansion. The Medean body is held

in flux by the contrary motions of its own distortions of proportion in the discourse of life and death. Medea's body thus becomes the text of that distortion.

In accordance with her principles of learned argumentation, Medea extends the textual metaphor to include not only the universe as narrative in some divine design, but design itself construed as the cruel teleology of fate. Warner, again, makes this particularly clear:

> Great Themis, lady Artemis behold
> The things I suffer, though I made him promise,
> My hateful husband. I pray that I may see him,
> Him and his bride and all their palace shattered
> For the wrong they dare to do me without cause.
> Oh, my father! Oh, my country! In what dishonour
> I left you, killing my own brother for it. (150-157)

Here is Medea in a most fiercely and fearlessly inventive moment. "I pray that I may see him, / Him and his bride and all their palace shattered" melodramatically resigns humanity to the prescriptive conditions of fate while recalling the hard discipline of narrative teleology from her life-death formulation. But the last line retrieves from hope the human heart's woeful cry; for indeed, her shame is not a lamentation, but a confession. She sets the stylistic frisson of a lyrical lamentation against the

ironic character of divine provenance and implicates the body not only in the traditional politics, but also in the aesthetics of vengeance. This is Medea's visionary innovation in body rhetoric.

However, that she understands her shame at all becomes Medea's reason for celebration. Thus, the lyrical invention of her dark design arcs over the shuffling rhythms of human suffering, inverting the polarity of human consciousness from regret to rejoicing.

Curiously, shame and rage dually animate the true purpose of the Medean existence and, thus, energize the Medean body with vengeful poetry. Here she conceives a blueprint for restoring to the "shattered palace" of her life and the violation of her body a modicum of order on the model of divine justice.

Her first speech on stage is a densely reticulate collage of sexual politics seen through the eyes of the feminine consciousness. Medea transmutes the recitation of natural phenomena into a lurid and lovely apostrophe on divine catastrophe. Kaleidoscopic contractions of imagery threading through a skein of a highly contrapuntal argument dissolve in the phantasmagoria of her encompassing vision. Masculine artifice cannot escape the splendor of feminine perception in which creation and destruction are equitably distributed in the space of linguistic cunning, then interposed on the body in the form of life and death.

As Medea struggles to liberate her body from the metabolic inevitability of masculine teleology, her verse becomes ever more discursive. But because the struggle itself is a component of her perverse imagination, lyrical calculation becomes her mortal ruination. Vellacott's ear for Medea's cunning élan seems to find the correct register of argumentation and thus demonstrates the extent to which Medea is complicit in the metaphoric destruction of her own body poetics. Yet her line grows ever more complex as "Women of Corinth, I would not have you censure me, / So I have come" seems strangely to anticipate "There is no justice in the world's censorious eyes." And in this image, recapitulating, as it does, the Nurse's own eyes censoriously watching Medea watching through her own wild eyes, the Medean body suddenly becomes the object of its own indictment:

> Women of Corinth, I would not have you censure me,
> So I have come. Many, I know, are proud at heart
> Indoors or out; but others are ill spoken of
> As supercilious, just because their ways are quiet.
> There is no justice in the world's censorious eyes.
> They will not wait to learn a man's true character;
> Though no wrong has been done them, one look--and they
> hate.

> Of course a stranger must conform; even a Greek
> Should not annoy his fellows by crass stubbornness.
> I accept my place; but this blow that has fallen upon me
> Was not to be expected. It has crushed my heart.
> Life has no pleasure left, dear friends. I want to die [. . .].
>
> (Vellacott 20)

Medea finds in this moment an intersection between the dark intimacy of figurative language and cosmic mechanics. That her verse can sustain calamity and mediate the perorations of despair and hope is evidence of a real presence, a real body in the text. Language is thus both the physical machinery of desire and the physical mechanism of hope in a shattered world. Poetry recovers, from the inexplicability of human life, textures and meanings entirely lost, except in the body's physical relationship to language. In Medean metaphysics, hate has a life and metaphoric space all its own.

Medea ambitiously attempts to affix the designs of woman upon the designs of man. That she appears ready to fail is, of course, as much a part of her expository strategy as the certainty of that failure is part of Medea's tragic organization of her universe. That her language is endlessly recombinant and self-reflexive imputes to that universe-as-text metaphor a verisimilitude unavailable to other natural phenomena. Medea's stylized

truth is exemplified in the indiscriminate destruction and regeneration of worlds in her imaginative experience.

Medean body language does not repudiate the language of mortal contemplation; the body, dependent as it is upon language does not, cannot destroy language. Thus, the style of Medean revelation and, hence, the representation of the Medean body is the physical agility of linguistic invention. Medean language in Euripides is the beginning and the end of the Medean body.

Beyond Euripides

Jean Anouilh's and Robinson Jeffers's *Medea*s are quintessential artifacts of the post-Romantic imagination. Together, they frame a disquisition on the relationship between humanity and nature. Anouilh attempts also to recover from metaphysical diffidence a love of the physicality in language. Jeffers explicitly searches the universe for a language of the body itself. For her part, Medea conjoins their projects in her calamitous splendor, forcing their poetry to converge on her magic topography, re-tracing the lines of her body.

The two plays are engaged in a mystic dialogue on the scope of human understanding and whether linguistic invention can transcend the limitations of the phenomenal world, the world of bodies. Anouilh moves from the problem of an unjust world to an exploration of mythic destiny. Jeffers, conversely, reaches first beyond the world and thence to the question of the human project. There exists, therefore, a shifting polarity of scale between their projects. But each mirrors the other's exploration of a coherent conception of the Medean body's relationship to these cosmic structures.

The stylized syllogisms of Medean logic transmute all Medea

narratives, molding them to the constitutive rules of the Medean universe, expropriating them as parts of the Medean body, reconstructing them in her metabolic potions. Anouilh's immensity becomes Jeffers's intimacy.

Where Anouilh is prolix, Jeffers is laconic. Their stylistic differences exemplify the extraordinary range of their several gifts; indeed, insofar as the two plays are dazzlingly multifarious displays of virtuosic language, they constitute a kind of lexicon of post-Romantic achievement, an index to formal rigor and imagistic complexity in the corpo-rhetorical mode.

Anouilh's *Medea* documents a crisis of imaginative experience. The opening line's implicit drama is that of the solitary nihilist lamenting a human experience surcharged with quotidian drudgeries and superficial preoccupations. The world of Medea's's regretful contemplation forecloses on the possibility of romantic reverie, repudiates Nature, and sells its soul. But, through an evocation of her own body, she heroically retrieves herself from despair and consigns the world to ruin:

> MEDEA. Do you hear it?
>
> NURSE. What?
>
> MEDEA. Happiness. Prowling around.
>
> NURSE. They are singing in the village. Today may be a feast day.
>
> MEDEA. I hate their feast days. I hate their joy. (97)

Echoing the sound of her own dark name, this opening gesture is the solemn refrain of Medean dirge, the funereal discourse of lost humanity, the double doom of a world in which the structures of rational humanity have displaced the capriciousness of primordial Nature with a human construct, "Happiness." Like a body, it is constructed from the ground up.

The enormity of the world twice encroaches on individual autonomy, crushing between hearing and happiness Medea's commanding voice, imprisoning poetic artifice inside monolithic blocks of monosyllables: "Do you hear it?" The body itself is held in the static matrix of the natural world of prowling emotional states. Medea struggles to discover an exit from her troubled reality. Thus, to escape the world, she must reveal her body:

> But what is this feast day? What happiness is it that stinks here even from their sweat, their cheap wine, and their greasy food? People of Corinth, why do you shout so and dance? What makes you so gay this evening while I am so choked and oppressed...? Nurse, Nurse...tonight I feel as if I were in labor. I suffer and am scared as when you helped me pull a child from my womb...Help me, Nurse. Something stirs in me as in the old days and it is something that says no to their joy over there, something that says no to their happiness [. . .] Hold

> me as you did when I was a little girl, as you held me on the night when I almost died in childbirth. I still have something to bring into the world tonight, something bigger and more alive than myself, and I do not know if I will be strong enough. (99)

Here, Anouilh deploys the poem's metaphysical problem against itself. The startling absence of kinetic participial forms suspends the motion of time; suffering becomes the principal agent of the line's exposition. And though Medea surrenders herself to its suasive powers, Anouilh liberates linguistic invention from the chaos of a world spun wildly out of control through the aperture of Medea's body, indeed, through the portal of her imagination.

"I suffer and I am scared as when you helped me pull a child from my womb" is a marvel of internal rhythmic interpolation recapitulating and modulating the echo effect of the opening line's grim song. "Suffer" and "scared" are, respectively, anticipated and subsumed by "stink" and "sweat" as she solves her own puzzle in a daring and ominous flourish: "something." Anouilh thus orchestrates, through Medea's hysterical display of her acuity, an ironic commentary on the line's resignation to the waste of her own enviable powers and, hence, a repudiation of the integrity of the Medean body.

Her elegant execution nearly displaces the substance of its claim that

there stirs in her some indeterminate force, some malevolent tropism. The status of the Medean body is suddenly, magisterially central to the play's condition and is indeed centered in the line's topography. While the narrative argues that linear memory drives human consciousness, Anouilh celebrates the infusion of his exposition with supple syncopations and fragile webs of contrapuntal sound. The Medean body subsumes human psychology. Marina Warner identifies this motif in its historical context: "The body tremulous, trembling and quaking: the language of sensation draws on the somatic symptoms of disarray from Hellenistic romances [. . .] to the eighteenth century moment of sensibilité" (Warner 9).

Medea's choked oppression recalls the imagistic program of her condemnatory language for Jason in Vellacott's treatment of Euripides's setting: "It's not even audacity; it's a disease, / The worst a man can have, pure shamelessness" (25, 425-6). But Anouilh inverts its tensions in the crucible of childbirth. Despite the line's dramatic claims, her psychic pain is arresting in its immediacy and affirms the urgent necessity of poetic imagination. But there is no psychic pain without a body nexus. Medea thus lyrically absorbs the destructive energy of her suffering and the grotesqueries of Corinthian revelry, transmuting frenetic excess into an intimation of dark deliquescence, wresting, from the narrative's bleak portents, the splendid possibilities of regenerative magic spilling out from

the font of her damaged body.

"Something stirs in me" retraces the motion of "suffer all alone" and, as a conflation of these two, "something bigger and more alive than myself" becomes Medea's astonishing triangulation of dark language. Thus, the architectonic of Medean verse is cosmic prescription dispelled by improvisational bodily immolation. The Medean body is a repository of pain, her language a cosmology of suffering.

That she can so easily transpose the modes of her own condition from ruination to a kind of consecration is the second axiom in her body rhetoric. Here, Medea begins to reconstruct, in her own terms, a world of metaphoric sublimity in which the wasted powers of human consumption are returned to their preeminent place among the mechanisms of natural fecundity, a place in which profligacy of the spirit becomes a proliferation of imaginative experience. When even the night's pain of memory and the absurd happiness of provincials are discarded as old clothes from the Medean wardrobe, she stages a spectacle of mythic cataclysm from which are reborn the twin forces of luminous poetry and numinous Nature.

Medea thus summons from the epic tradition a rhetoric of fantastical emanations and improbable incarnations, declaring herself the creation not of a divine masculine enterprise, but of her own fierce will: "But tonight it is over, Nurse. I have become Medea again. How good it is" (Anouilh 101).

Medea supplants post-Romantic intellection with Classical majesty and pagan magic. The singular syllables of the play's opening valedictory drone subdivide as metaphoric cells under the transformative scrutiny of her solitary suffering. In the creative economy of Medean body language, the unity of human reality becomes the multiplicity of Protean fantasy. Rigid reason is suspended in the flooding mutability of metaphoric phantasmagoria. The fixed architecture of human design collapses. Her perorations transcribe onto the body a poetics of pain:

> Maimed! Oh, sun, if it is true that I come from you, why was I born maimed? Why have you made me a girl? Why these breasts, this weakness, this open wound in the middle of myself? Would not the boy Medea have been handsome? Would he not have been strong? His body strong as stone, made to take and then to go...firm intact and complete. Ah! Then Jason could have come with his large and powerful hands; then he could have tried to touch me with them! Each of us with his knife - yes! - and the stronger kills the other and walks away free; yes, free. Not this struggle where I only yearned to yield, this wound I was craving for. Woman! Woman! Bitch! Flesh, made with a little mud and a man's rib. A mere piece of a man. Whore. (Anouilh 101)

In this harrowing tableau, the collective female consciousness is breathed across the poetics of desire and into the fluid of Medea's deep corporeal convections, the secret rhythms of poetic artifice, the hieratic pulse of ecstatic sublimity. Reaching thus into language itself, Medea reinvents the barren world of feminine experience as a peroration of quixotic fancy and recovers, from the echo chamber of the womb, the resonant refulgence of the body's voice.

As if taking as his point of departure, Anouilh's parthenogenerative childbirth, Jeffers reimagines poetry as a portal to the mysteries of the female body. Fusing Anouilh's linguistic sophistication with the tropes of feminine ardor, Jeffers's Medea arcs across the narrative sky of vengeance and transforms the quest for love into an encounter with ultimacy and with the limitations of the body:

> I know poisons. I know the bright teeth of steel. I know fire. But
> I will not be mocked by my enemies,
> And I will not endure pity. Pity and contempt are sister and
> brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.
> I will not allow blubber-eyed pity, nor contempt either, to
> snivel over the stones of my tomb.
> I am not a Greek woman. (134, 70-76)

Here, Jeffers dispels Anouilh's meditation with a crystalline vow of

wrath. The painful world of re-imagined birth becomes a scintillating miasma of murderous imagery. "I know poisons" seems almost a rhythmic anagram of "endure pity"; conjoined, thus, by the ligature of bulbous murmurs in "mocked" "by enemies," a constellation of spiking consonants are the pointillistic coordinates of the Jeffersian star chart in which the punning Medean imagination places her body between death and femininity.

Jeffers casts his inventory of evolving metaphors in an intricate ritual of polyrhythmic arabesques. Medean effulgence is warped in the centrifugal vortex of "pity and contempt," and her narrative body of fiendish apostrophe is not permitted to "die tamely" in the night. The eyes of imaginative vision are transfixed on the somnolent, hypnotic fluxion of liquescent poisons, cutting blades, and the metabolic plasma of fire. From the "twin-born" "sister and brother" of her rage cascade the elixirs of poison eroticism, transforming the monastic ambience of Euripidean ritual into the terminal ruin of Jeffersian violence.

Jeffers, thus, radically de-sexualizes Anouilh's Medea. The stirring "something" of Anouilh's broken world reemerges here in the ruminative obsessions of Jeffers's twins, "pity and contempt." The guardian sentinel of feminine imagination, Medea weaves together lyricism and lunacy in the discipline of masculine resolve. In this stylized vision of honor and death,

the stones of her tomb become the supple contours of feminine form. The signature metaphor of the Medean body, the open wound of her vaginal weakness is here transfigured into the hieratic knowledge of deadly philters and savage weapons.

But as Jeffers further refines the scale of his exploration, from the elementary particles of the universe in liquid, metal, and fire, searching ever more closely for the secrets of Medea's own distinctly human experience, his language coils into spiraling gyres of erotic rococo:

> If I should go into the house with a sharp knife
> To the man and his bride...
> Or if I could fire the room they sleep in, and hear them
> Wake in the white of the fire, and cry to each other, and howl like dogs.
> And howl and die...
> But I might fail; I might be cut down first;
> The knife might turn in my hand, or the fire not burn, and my enemies could laugh at me.
> No: I have subtler means, and more deadly cruel; I have my dark art
> That fools call witchcraft. Not for nothing have I worshiped
> the wild gray goddess that walks in the dark, the wise one,

> The terrible one, the sweet huntress, flower of the night,
>
> Hecate,
>
> In my house at my hearth. (149, 379-91)

Here, the blushing temperance of feminine calculation shudders in the thrall of longing and desire. The remote glow of erotic sentience becomes

the guileful glint in the gaze of inverted sexual calculation. Medean sensual delight recreates the primal lethality of feminine jealousy as a sleeping lover consumed in fury's vengeful conflagration. The animating force of Jeffersian poetics is, thus, post-Romantic cosmology refracted through the deadly body of erotic narrative.

Sexual energy is never exhausted in the Medean eros, but, rather, preserved in the relationship between imaginative experience and the geography of the body. For Jeffers, however, a quest for the language of the body is suddenly coherent only in terms of the language of eros itself. The howling and crying of Jason's and his lover's suffering are, at once, an act of supreme linguistic invention and fearless logical induction that consumes the body while replenishing the poetics of sex and encoding the secrets of Medean body rhetoric. Moreover, the language of the body, because it must be articulated through a body, is contained precisely in the language of desire. Vengeance, thus, becomes a logical agent, and death an

instrument of sexual creativity. The Medean body dually fuses language to life and death.

Similarly, the problem of sex and its relationship to the Medean body are central to Jeffers's argument. For Jeffers, there is no question that the poetics of desire are endlessly self-referential, wondrously recombinant and, thus, recapitulate the nature of eternity and perhaps divinity. But the turbulence of Nature itself haunts his vision of Medea as echoes in the language of sex, her "dark art / That fools call witchcraft." Witchcraft in Medea's own understanding of the term moves from the natural state of female cunning, here driven by betrayal to jealous rage.

The slow accretion of rhythmic pulsation punctuates Jeffersian narrative with the frisson of erotic energy. Spondaic filaments are interlaced with the threads of iambic tapestry to evoke the slow unfolding of a gossamer veil behind which the victims of Medean reverie consort in cataclysm. The cool classicism of Anouilh's music becomes the hot confluence of dying lovers' screams. The mythic drama of epic tableau is transformed into the lubricious bacchanalia of murderous ecstasy in which the body of betrayal is implicated, then consumed, and the Medean body preserved and exalted as a blossom on the "flower of night."

Medea, in a grand final gesture, resolves to invoke the forces of the goddess Hecate in the erotic luminescence of poetic artifice, from orgasmic

swoon of her house and hearth. She thus equates imagination with divinity itself and imputes to her quixotic conventions of body rhetoric, the elegance and cogency of poetic technique. For Medea, the language of vengeance is, indeed, the object of a body language, and poetry, the glinting steel of imaginative experience, is the nexus of life.

Anouilh and Jeffers inhabit a universe of post-Romantic experience in which the twin forces of desire and language forever create and recreate reality. That Medea is, in Anouilh's imagination, a creature of ululation from which he exorcizes despair and finds liberation in language suggests a solution to the Jeffersian puzzle of death and sex: their Medeas are two parts of a singular narrative unifying the multiple strands of the body phenomena in the discourse of their unique poetics.

For both playwrights, metaphoric language is the preeminent device for speaking to and through the topography of the Medean body. The resultant Medeas are a sustained penetration into the inexplicable mysteries of desire that adduce to a body proper through investigating the meaning of their own words. Together, they transcend their fragile forms and construct, as from the spare parts of speech or the dreams of femininity, a vision of truth and model for the quantifiable body of Medea.

Medean Space

If a constructed body means anything at all, it must represent more, finally, than merely a complex intersection of its constitutive parts. And certainly in the context of the perceived body, that is, in a discussion of perception, the normally clear distinction between parts and wholes becomes a contested claim. The Medean body, beginning as it does in metaphoric representation, responds differently to the inquiry of body rhetoric from the simple bodies of geometric discourse. But the rules governing the way in which body structures occupy their "space" in the world are immutable from one kind of body to another. What is true of geometric body remains true of the linguistic body. The main divergence is perhaps only methodological; most bodies are constructed from some putative bottom upward while the Medean body is constituted from the inside out.

The inside /outside relationship is particularly useful in showing the distinction between a conception of the Medean body predicated on mere representation of a Medea-like object and the projection of a determinate Medea Self onto the stage of human engagement. A representation has no coherent inner experience, indeed, has no inner dimension whatever.

Medea's vengeful resolve and her stylized language are the two principal artifacts of the Euripidean universe. Weaving together the twin forces of warrior ferocity and political urbanity, they exemplify the dazzling virtuosity of the jealous mind and the rhetorical complexity of desire. Medea, the fiercely imaginative solipsist, conjures from her private ruin a poetics of betrayal. A scheming sensualist of courtly vagaries, wielding deception's dark lyricism, she seduces and traduces her enemies and destroys the ordered world, implicating, at once, her mind and her body.

Medea is, first, a woman and, one imagines, as obsessively loyal as she is, alternatively, obsessively lethal. Thus, she can only regard Jason's sudden flight from the marriage bed and into the arms of his new lover as a betrayal. That Medea's role in the play opens with her victimological raving suggests the degree to which loyalty, justice, and their intersecting problematics inform the dramatic structure and linguistic texture of the play. Warner's exploration of her language in this first scene of Euripides's play moves from plaintive musing to stentorian declaration. And as fury opens onto the vast vista of her indignation, her language spirals into shifting mosaics of vengeful meditation.

This passage is the first glimpse of Medea's gift for invention on the battlefield of language. At the decisive final moment of her opening gambit,

she declares of woman's nature " [. . .] but, when once she is wronged in the matter of love, / No other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood" (19). The portentous pulse in "other soul," the elusive winds of repeating w's in "when," and "once," are conjoined to the sinister hissing of, again, "once" and "so many thoughts." The entire exposition of this line turns on the axis of the missing first person pronoun. This device punctuates the line's asymmetric architecture, driving spikes into its rhythmic rifts, moving Medea's claim from the declamatory exhortation of public protest to the meditative puzzling of private ruin. She is speaking as much to herself as to the Nurse or the women of Corinth. Indeed, Medea's hortatory style is the shifting tableau of her modulating self. The mutable "I" of this line is the agency of deception. Her name, a collapsing glottive intonation that escapes in its last syllable from the mouth, itself cleverly encodes the dual struggles of the interior and the exterior selves.

Medea condemns Jason's rationalizing logic as meretricious evasion conceived in selfish pride, a curious maneuver given her own duplicitous impulses. But Medea's argumentation seems ever to illuminate her true desire. Thus, in rejecting Jason she invokes in her prosody a lyrical state of siege, ensnaring Jason's warrior reputation (a public persona of Medea's own invention) in a skein of combative invective: the patronizingly trochaic stammer in "And he, my own husband, has turned out wholly vile" (18).

Here Medea summons Jason and indeed all men before her own imaginary jury to indict them for being, first, men, then for being untrue or inconstant, and, certainly worst of all, in yet another woman's thrall. The transformative economy of Medean poetry reduces to a litany of bookish tropes the facts of Jason's résumé and reveals some secret truth about herself; for if Medea could forgive Jason, she would not be merely injudicious, but incapable withal.

And certainly, Medea' central claim is not insignificant. If, in the logical economy of Medean apostrophe, "[. . .] women are the most unfortunate creatures [. . .]" because "[. . .] with an excess of wealth it is required / For [them] to buy a husband and take for [their] bodies / a master," Jason's justifications for betraying her are, again in the Medean view, either specious or plainly spurious. But Medea finally rejects these subtleties as irrelevant to the greater indignity of finding herself suddenly third, not second, in the stratum. However, there remains in Medea's disquisition on these political machinations a triumphal resonance. Medea abjures her allegiance to her husband and inverts her poetry of peroration and fractured torment into the artifice of vengeful duplicity. Yet her verse appears almost to resist this new movement as the body of the victim becomes the locus of vengeance. However, infected thus with the plague of poetic wrath, Medea's despair dissolves in a miasmic ritual of metaphoric parthenogenesis in which she

recreates herself as a dark phantom of retribution. This moment of primordial rage dramatizes Medea's lithe mediation among her multiple selves. Here, moral outrage collapses into perverse cynicism and justice splinters into revenge. Again, the exfoliating "I" becomes the contested center of Medean discourse. Her shattered identity mutates the body into a swirl of paranoid protestations held in flux by execration, which become, themselves, the divine blasphemies of her incantation: "Oh, this is the end for me. I am utterly lost. / Now I am in the full force of the storm of hate / And have no harbour from ruin to reach easily" (Warner 252). Yet again, "end" and "ruin" frame the mystic "I," from which uncoils the grim symmetry of "full force" and "storm of hate" snaking in a villainous brocade over the line break into her psyche in which she is neither ruined nor ended.

Significantly, Medea orchestrates her examination of her own circumstance as a ghastly and chilling parody of the marriage contract in which the bride's body becomes the crucible of masculine capriciousness:

> And now the question is serious whether we take
> A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape
> For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage.
> She arrives among new modes of behaviour and manners,
> And needs prophetic power, unless she has learnt at home,

How best to manage him who shares the bed with her.

And if we work out all this well and carefully,

And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke,

Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die. (Warner, 220-230)

Medea's disappearance into the mystic haze of her evil plot certifies her shifting status as the demon cartographer mapping her chimerical war games, deploying her squadrons of retribution, emerging in this final gesture from the vortex of ignominy into her magic prosody of deception: "I'd rather die." But it is not her own death that she finally imagines.

If Medea is the demonic geometer and bard manquée of vengeance, she is also the sardonic logician and philosophe. Hers is the prosody of mystic augury and cosmic cataclysm framed inside Jason's mercurial disposition and incisive wit. She weaves about the palace a tapestry of obliquity and suggestion, implicating in her scheme to displace Jason's new bride and father not only the vicissitudes of court politics, but, in a dazzling burlesque of cosmological portents, the entire universe and God as well: "Go! No doubt you hanker for your virginal bride, / And are guilty of lingering too long out of her house. / Enjoy your wedding. But perhaps, -- with the help of God --/ You will make the kind of marriage that you will regret" (Warner 568).

Here, Medea inverts her own wounded condition and finds that nature articulates a principle of self-preservation similar to her own. Yet she is

simultaneously bound by the rituals of despair. Nature, thus, imprisons her body even as it liberates her imagination. Linguistically, the prolix Medea is Jason's alter ego. Her lines' complex enjambment impute to his argument a longer, more discursive pattern of reasoning. And if she is not always as inventive or circumspect as the Chorus, she is certainly more direct. As Warner shows, Medea's defense of herself as a legitimate victim searching for justice echoes the Chorus's imagistic protestation:

> When love is in excess
> It brings no man honour
> Nor any worthiness.
> But if in moderation Cypris comes,
> There is no other power at all so gracious.
> O goddess, never on me let loose the unerring
> Shaft of your bow in the poison of desire. (Warner 572-580)

Medea reclaims the figures of Jason's false heart as her own moral geometry. The whirling vortex of Medea's cry collapses into the feverish mantra of retribution that echoes throughout the narrative. In the architectonic of Medean verse, logic is spun out of control in her masochistic fatalism. She seems almost too earnest when she exclaims:

> God, and God's daughter, justice, and light of Helios!
> Now, friends, has come the time of my triumph over

My enemies, and now my foot is on the road.

Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.

For this man, Aegeus, has been like a harbor to me

In all my plans just where I was most distressed.

To him I can fasten the cable of my safety

When I have reached the town and fortress of Pallas. (40)

She inverts Jason's blasphemous dereliction by locating divinity in the abstraction of Nature herself. She, thus, implicitly equates herself with divine agency by doing what comes naturally; she recapitulates the Jasonian program, but rewrites the pathology of betrayal as a methodology of vengeance.

Still, Medea is a divided self impelled by treachery to the poetics of ruin. This sense of inevitability is evident in her lament on the woman's condition. Nothing in the paradoxical mechanism of human rationalism escapes the instruments of Medean intellect, not even her own paradoxical contention that an error in divine providence has cast a shadow on her fortunes. Medean dialecticism thus delivers a sustained critique of human engagement with the universe, but also of the dialectic itself and confirms Cleanth Brooks's admonition that "[. . .]the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox" (3).

That Medea essays ever in a self-reflexive register is, therefore, evidence that her argument reaches to include human nature as well. She retreats to

the interior self. She induces from the self to the world. But she finds an archaic tomb of ruin. It is precisely because of, not despite, her prospects for reinvention that Medea fully embraces her fatalistic opportunism.

Moreover, her positive pronouncements cannot release her from the rigors of a vision of conquest. Still, such portmanteau notions of duality have a useful rhetorical dimension insofar as Medean language and body are engaged in a kind of antiphonal character study, now tragic, now comic, now self-conscious, now moved by unseen forces.

Medea's struggle to mediate her language of the body through the poetics of desire make perhaps the most persuasive case for her poetry as power when she questions her own attempt to reconcile the truth of desire with the prosody of deception. Medea's interiority and her concomitant universalism are two dialects of the same language. Finding herself imprisoned by injustice, she creates a world of reverie in which the truth of the word is the dream of the body and, hence, the self. The complex picture of the body as it proceeds from or even anticipates the self has not only a distinguished history of representation in drama, but a rediscovered significance in recent philosophical inquiry. Medea's learning is vast indeed.

Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi have pioneered new regions of mereology, the philosophy of spatial relationships. They are perversely

brilliant in their willingness to challenge the orthodoxy on questions of whether, for example, holes are part of the objects in which they appear or if holes exist at all. Such privileged contemplations may appear far from the center of daily experience, and there is certainly no disputing that most of us live as though holes do, in fact, exist. But Casati and Varzi's investigations penetrate deeply into the texture of the known world, exposing some remarkable instabilities in our assumptions about what is real and, indeed, about what "real" is.

Their excellent text, *Parts and Places,* represents the kind of adventurous interdisciplinary scholarship that characterizes the best philosophical and scientific enterprises. Because they are not imprisoned in the received account of Euclid's universe or crippled by a post-structuralist nihilism, they are suddenly free to speculate on the constitution of geometric realities and our relationship to them. Is the surface of the table, properly understood, part of the table? What happens to space when it is filled? How is filling space even possible? Are solid objects merely discontinuities in an empty nothing? How do we explain where corners are located? Does anything have to be where it is? And where exactly is that? These are the kinds of delightful and problematical questions Casati and Varzi pursue with a most sophisticated conceptual apparatus and, perhaps like Medea herself, an irreverent sense of humor.

To place the logical problem of the Medean body in some perspective, it is necessary to outline the basic issues respecting how objects are placed and how stable bodies and unstable bodies differ from each other and how both are different from the bodies of non-geometric discourse.

Consider this proposition: corners do not exist. An example of a corner, as the term is conventionally understood, might be the intersection of two lines, an angle. Thus, that point at which the top and right edges of this page meet would appear to fit the criterion for "cornerness." But this is a specious and illusory method of naming the un-nameable. For, indeed, there exists at that intersection nothing whatever to name because corners are metaphysical monsters stalking the geometric universe. Medea might be (imperfectly) understood as a figurative or symbolic monster stalking the universe of letters.

The "corner" problem conjoins two important merological issues: the question of what constitutes an object and how that constitution can be known at all. Together, they frame a fundamental instability in the perceptual politics of the perceptual world and exemplify the tenuous condition of knowledge itself (Casati and Varzi 173). Medea, as a construct, does not proceed from the simple to the complex; she is not a process. Provisionally, this kind of heuristic notion of the Medean body might

usefully account for the many ways in which she is represented. But the purpose here is only to find the Medean body itself, not to articulate a comprehensive taxonomy of Medean body ontologies.

Returning to the case of the non-existent corner of this page, there is no disputing that two lines do intersect; this much, if little more, is uncontroversial. There appears to emerge, from that intersection, a ninety-degree angle. And this place is, intuitively, the locus, the location of the corner. Thus, the vertex of an angle becomes a more refined notion of what constitutes "cornerness." This is admittedly not the same kind of identity that a "Medeaness" commands. But the principle by which each is differentiated from the proper set of other "nesses" or objects is the same.

Again, for the non-existent corner, a vertex definition is hardly conclusive as it leaves, wholly unaddressed, the problem of the two-hundred seventy degree reflexive angle opposite the vertex, and raises the ghastly spectre of spatial identity. Surely, the outer edges of the intersecting lines meet in precisely the same manner as the inner edges. And, strictly speaking, there exists no vertex in a two-hundred seventy degree angle. Yet there again appears to be a corner. Moreover, it appears to be in the same place as that defined by a ninety-degree right angle. But it is counterintuitive to suggest there are two corners in the same space.

Spatial architectonics do not permit double occupancy of geometric

regions. As an object cannot be in two places at once, two objects cannot, at once, be in the same place. Space is neither an a priori void with specific properties of its own nor merely a parasitic property of the body by which it is occupied; rather, it is a condition of symmetry. Symmetry derives from any duality, whether real or imaginary. "Where there is a double condition, where anything has a left and right, an inside and outside or an is and is not, there is an occupied space" (Lefebvre 170).

However, in the case of the right angle and its concomitant reflexive angle, exactly what occupies the space of a vertex and its inverse reflection remains an open question. This is the identity problem. And it is central to understanding why the Medean body is necessarily the locus of a Medea herself, irrespective of the particulars of that conception.

The most obvious rejoinder is that a point is in the vertex. But once again, an intuitively correct solution merely masks an indissoluble logical paradox. That this logical objection based on deduction merely equivocates on the received, common sense meaning of the terms "point" and "corner" seems like a promising counterproposal. Furthermore, it is certainly possible for an argument to be logically coherent, but factually false. Similarly, logically incoherent arguments can yield extraordinarily persuasive conclusions. The complexity here is that it is, so far, unclear whether a corner is a phenomenon that follows necessarily from some

given phenomenon, as a mountain implies a valley, an equilateral triangle two equivalent sides, or whether it is some exotic geometric anomaly in the guise of an artifact from daily experience. And in the case of the Medean body, this question is foundational. If there is no coherent conception of the Medean body, there can be no coherent referent for the term "Medea."

Edmund Husserl's answer to this question radically recasts the naming process as a building block of the spatio-temporal world, a sub-atomic particle of all extended, all real objects:

> In the sphere of logical self-evidence, deduction or inference in forms of consequence plays a constant and essential role. On the other hand, one must also take note of the constructive activities that operate with geometrical adulates which have been explicated but not brought to original self-evidence. (Original self-evidence must not be confused with the self-evidence of "axioms"; for axioms are in principle already the results of original meaning-construction and always have this behind them). (168)

Thus, the corner and the Medean body are myth deployed as geometry, speculation advanced as certainty, a ghost, a confabulation, a fantasy, but with logically self-contained physical properties deducible from basic axioms of mereology. Phenomenologically, the best approach to an

account of the Medean body is, as with the corner, from the inside out. If a corner is, in this respect, an instantiation of Kant's conceptual fictions, then the cornerstone of its exposition is not an objective truth: "The absence of an empirical proof does not incontrovertibly demonstrate the falsity of a proposition" (Kant 230).

The discourse of the Medean body, therefore, does not depend exclusively on deductive procedures. Certainly, there are logical principles governing the appropriate semantic use of the word "body," particularly as it may relate to other geometric phenomena, so that her body is never used interchangeably with "dodecahedron" or "Jason". But this same application of semantic propriety presses on yet further questions about the mereological and the metaphorical composition of the Medean body: does the impossibility of Medea by any other name preclude the existence of another name for the same body? And is the deduced Medean body absolutely contingent upon its language? Non-existent phenomena propagate trouble and vexation in alarming quantities.

The Medean body, like the geometrical corner, is a monstrous construct. Its multifarious, incongruous textures are, by turns, elegant and fascinating, grotesque and frightful. To this line of thought, Jacques Derrida in an uncharacteristically lucid moment observes that in language and nature, "[T]he monster is also that which appears for the first time

and, consequently, is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name" (*Grammatology* 107). And the question of the name itself, presumably referring to some thing, reveals a hole in the argument. But, again, Medea is not conceived apart from her body.

Medea's notion of her body as a contemplation of the poetics of objects and of space is as remarkable for its ferocity as for its analytic sophistication. Hers is the freely emotive style of the mad diarist, the wounded parlor demon exorcizing from lyricism the pretensions of grace. Yet her language is grounded in the physical properties of the sensate world, even if that world is a conflation of the familiar and the exotic milieu of the Other:

> As a "barbarian" female witch, Medea is located at the very margins of Greek society. Jason points out that she was raised without the benefits of Greek "civilization," and later claims that no Greek woman would have behaved as she has done. There is heavy dramatic irony here, since he has himself violated the Greek ethical norms of trust and honesty in his treatment of her. But the Greeks, like most peoples, projected their own culturally undesirable qualities onto outsiders. Many such "barbarian" attributes are reflected in Medea: unrestrained emotion (especially extreme displays of grief and

> anger); lust, sensuality and transgression of normative Greek gender roles; bestiality; wealth, especially gold (a motif of this play, starting with the Golden Fleece); luxurious clothing (like Medea's gifts to the princess); brutal violence and lawlessness; untrustworthiness, duplicity, and expertise with magic drugs.
>
> (Blondell 153)

Certainly, as a matter of corporeal artifice, she moves as a stranger in a strange land, ever with a view toward tracing fluid lines forming coherent narratives; but there remains in her rhetoric a sense of imminent dissolution and cataclysm, almost as if her body rhetoric conceals some private apocalypse, even as it argues for restoration and absolution and justice. Although Medea's language seems always to exist outside the primary tradition of deconstructionist theory, we do find in certain passages from Jeffers startling evidence of her dialogue with the text itself as she speaks of murdering her children: "I / am the one who labored in pain to bear them, I cannot / Smile while I lose them. But I am learning; I am learning" (158, 540-1).

Here is a subtle instance of Medea acknowledging herself as a creature of narrative, learning as she goes--and as we read--what she will do. Superficially, this is a kind of modernist nod to the fictive irreality of the play. But in the context of the text itself, her admission ironically displaces

a certain narrative space around the Medean body, implicating whatever is not of that body in her conception of the world of which she is an inhabitant. Certainly it is mainly a narrative world. But because the rules governing the discernment and differentiation of narrative bodies are not different from those governing geometric discourse, this constitutes evidence of the Medean body and is a clear statement of another axiom in Medean body rhetoric: bodies are co-valent with their utterances.

Of course, Medea's utterances are about more than the status of contested bodies. Here, she outlines some of the details of her moral epistemology: "Forgive me, / Jason, / As I do you. We have had too much wrath, and our acts / Are closing on us. On me I mean. Retribution is from the / gods, and it breaks our hearts: but you / Feel no guilt, you fear nothing, nothing can touch you. It is/wonderful to stand serene above fate / While earthlings wince. If it lasts. It does not always last" (Jeffers 159, 549-54).

Medea, thus, raises the pressing question of whether men and women can be trusted to love each other less violently than they love themselves. For her, sex is a stylized immolation framed by naive fantasy and mercurial neurosis. Narratively, these surprising textures impute to her thinking a kind of perverse ennui. But a prevailing good humor delivers her voice from fragmentation and her entire project from despair.

Yet her ability to risk ruin and document her humiliation are central to the superlative achievement of Medean body rhetoric. For her lurid vision conjoins the twin forces of consecration and execration in a ritual of magic philosophy. Because her confessional technique exposes and even dramatizes its own instability, she commits herself to the exploration of deep terrors with largely inadequate formal tools. The Medean body, too, is fragile. It is in this sense that she brilliantly penetrates the problem of love, demonstrating at once that faith is not fiction, that tragedy does not foreclose on romance, that the transformative properties of the body are unpredictable, that nature does not (except by coincidence) proceed from the simple to the complex and that the promise of new possibilities in death does not repudiate the mystery of the old life or the dying body.

For all their shocking splendors, Medea's monologues seem finally to meditate on the failure of her body as a nexus of maternity and erotic force. Their ritualized evocation of masculine resolve and halcyon deliquescence fuses the coherent rhythms of Apollonian civility with the turbulence of undifferentiated Dionysian nature. It is a study of darkness and collapse articulated through the prismatic flicker and hopeful intumescence of a little understood impulse. If fathers and sons are preeminently associated with stability and tradition and if other issues relating to children remain within the purview of motherhood then Medea's transformation is an open

question and, surely, among the last frontiers of body exploration and body mapping.

It is, therefore, perplexing that Euripides's narrative fearlessly reinvents this most problematical of schema as a sustained, lyrical non sequitur, a modulus calculation in the guise of a ghastly fantasia. Proceeding from the fragmented notion of her desperation, Medea takes up the prodigiously terrifying spectacle of a mother killing her children as a way of avenging herself against her husband's betrayal. That she speaks with such resolute authority is, at once, wildly counterintuitive and perfectly rational.

Her disorganized, meretricious argumentation appears to certify the collective intuition that entropy is not merely an axiom of science, but the prevailing mode of feminine aesthetics. This tension produces considerable evidence for the attendant suspicion that torment and calamity are necessarily interposed among the garish phenomena of maternal fancy.

Medea, majestic among feminine voices, commands the rhetorical agility of scholarly and remote Euripides without compromising the populistic exuberance of her Otherly heritage. Indeed, the Chorus to which she addresses the infanticide monologue is compelled to consider her post-maternal program in the context of the larger narrative and the Medean body's seemingly inexhaustible influence on its lyric component. But Medea

is, supremely, a creature of narrative, and the Medean exposition, a great mutable body of stylized epic language. Thus may Euripides move fluidly among the formal properties of the ballad, the ode, the limerick, ever constructing his linguistic edifice and without violating Medea's proprietary claim to her murderous solemnities.

The world of Medean body language, even when it does not illumine the Medean body, is one of incipient violence, dark intimations. Gossiping coquettes vanish into vortices. Phantom images of the female stalk the perimeters. Strange desires punctuate inexplicable spectacles of hilarity and acrimony. Medea's world is the grotesquerie of Hieronymus Bosch framed inside the conventions of "civil" society. But the nursery rhyme is spun wildly out of control, the constitutive rules lost in a torrent of lurid excess and hieratic imagery. And yet the denizens of Medea's sepulchral playground are suspended in a kind of expository nebulosity, at once implicated in her seductions, perorations, garrulous asides, and effete philosophical negotiations.

Whether one accepts or rejects her thesis of fragmentation and dissemination, it is plainly and alarmingly evident that Medea is cataloguing something quite singular in the taxonomy of imaginative experience: a mechanism for diffusing the causative relations that exclude adults from fairy tale conjectures and imprison children in storybook

platitudes. That her parlous world is a real world conjured from the essential premise of the Medean body is not merely a metaphoric sophistry; it is the transcribed fossil record of her own illicit maneuvers in dream sequences, in prayerful supplication to Hecate, in bed, and in court.

In a curious reversal of narrative polarities, Euripides himself appears to have anticipated these vexing complexities and derived from them the procedures for discerning revelation in confusion as Medea herself retrieves from her despair a kind of hope. Medea is a creature of menacing conviviality, moving patiently amid her remote and deadly impulses. There, she is the ruler of a magical bestiary of erotic victimology in which all men are seen through the prismatic flicker of her ironic seductions. She plays with the idea of the body, ensnaring, humiliating, and revising its definition, erasing its borders.

Medea finds her greatest magical potency and her most powerful body projections in eruptions of ritualized language. The monologue from Euripides's play in which she resolves to exact her vengeance on Jason is a magisterial display of hieratic rage. Her arhythmic fury quite nearly shatters the clean linear narrative into a bacchanalian tangle of epithets and profanations. Indeed, it is in precisely this respect that her monologue returns the play's masculine diction to its liquescent feminine origins, displacing the structural authority of Euripidean dramaturgy.

This harrowing tour de force begins with nothing less than an invocation of fate: "Women, my task is fixed" (Warner 1,118). Her first rhetorical maneuver is brilliantly to frame her lurid and shocking plot in terms of a necessary order. As there is a god and as there is justice, so shall her actions proceed according to their design. But there is a twist.

In an act of ingenious perversity Medea imputes to herself the authority to transgress conventionally received moral precepts through what appears to be mere assertion. But her monologue is highly discursive, riddled with embedded clauses and qualifications. Thus, she substitutes the procedures for "legitimate" masculine argumentation with a lethally self-styled theatricality. Massive accretions of pure language, here in wild apostrophe, obscure her troubled logic. She dispels masculine hegemony with feminine cunning.

That Medea, spurned by her husband Jason, should have murderous fantasies hardly seems surprising. Nor does it seem peculiar that she should direct these energies toward Jason's new young bride, the symbol of her defeat on the erotic battlefield of feminine experience. But, given the received view of the status of weddings in the feminine imagination, it is perhaps revealing that she chooses to effect the murder of Jason's new wife with a poison dress that burns her and her father alive.

This demonic bridal shower is the deadly trousseau of her retribution

spell. As chaos and death loom over the palace, her quasi-logical syllogisms evade masculine architectonics, rounding the edges, moving by indirection toward their unspeakable ends. Her lithe exposition eviscerates even the sanctity of the patriarchally authorized marital bond. The ultimate feminine revisionist, she erases wedding vows with her words of execration. And she destroys the bride along with the dress. From the threads of cloth and language, she weaves a skein of horror around her Jason's betrothal.

Logical inversions multiply as this elegant, terrible inertia builds toward the murder of her children: a wedding has become a funeral and the wedding dress, a burial shroud. But the spell is not yet cast:

> Women, my task is fixed: as quickly as I may
> To kill my children, and start away from this land,
> And not, by wasting time, suffer my children
> To be slain by another hand less kindly to them.
> Force every way will have it they must die, and since
> This must be so, then, I, their mother shall, kill them.
> Oh arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back
> From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.
> Oh come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the sword,
> Take it, step forward to this bitter starting point,
> And do not be a coward, do not think of them,

How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just for
This one short day be forgetful of your children,
Afterwards weep; for even though you will kill them,
They were very dear -- Oh, I am an unhappy woman!

(Warner 1118-1131)

Here, Medea wholly rejects masculine power. Euripides's civilized male line can scarcely contain the purulent geyser of her raging intellect. And Medea's suspension of her maternal identity is the complete breakdown of moral order in the masculine mode. Framed on one end by the pronoun "I" and on the other by "children," the broken moral logic severs the sacred maternal relation, reducing to chaos the structure of the line and of the world; Medea "weeps" in one moment and kills in the next. It is her dodecametrical grimoire of dark transmutations, a system of regular beats impaled on the shards of feminine cataclysm. Medea's vengeful reflexes anticipate the visceral, primordial terror of the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale. Her abstracted environs conspicuously intimate the sinister sexual and homo-infanticidal energy of domestic tranquility. Structurally, this passage is an evocation of the fundaments of body magic, placing both the self and the body in contraposition with fate and politics, leaving us with the cri de coeur: "O, I am an unhappy woman!" Here, the pulsation of the line is fragmented by the irregular syncopations and

undulations of asymmetrical feminine rhythms. The effect here is not specific to the translation, but rather attendant upon a massive breakdown of moral determinacy at the center of which is the spectacle of the protean Medean body.

The determined purity of her long lines retrace the feminine form, lyrically transmuting the hard edges of Greek volcanic rock into the supple curvilinear patterns of the female body. Her magic inverts the rules of masculine order, mixing metaphor, unfolding diaphanous trains of excessive and lyrical language in the manner of incantation and spell casting.

Thus, the refrain "O" echoes the primeval cries of pagan rites, even as it suggests an ominous and vigilant intelligence. Here, the home and hearth, typically attributes of the feminine world, are a cauldron of political calculation and erotic acuity, subsuming masculine identity and power in its roiling convections.

In this astonishing tableau, the archaic force of feminine will outstrips the stability of masculine identity. Vengeance and violence cannot mediate the inviting texture of feminine interiority refracted through the objects of comfort and sensuous pleasures. While the children wait, Medea plies her dark magic in the secret space of her monologue, that most

rigorously feminine of all female settings. She expropriates the tropes of masculine ego, with its stentorian declamations and bravura posturing, conflating them in a feminine alchemy of rage and erotic confections spun out of control.

Thus, through language, she manipulates the male imaginative experience, seducing the senses and transmuting heroic certitude into feminine rage. This resolve and determination at the prospect of the destruction of bodies that proceed from and, therefore, affirm her own body is the imago mundi of feminine intellection, redolent with the opiates of linguistic invention, poisoning the metabolism of masculine power. Medea's fantastically physical language is a codification of her stylized Cythera, a land of lotus blooms and carnal delights. And in this halcyon womb, her linguistic fusion of knowledge and desire reverses the power polarity of gender. In murdering her own children she disrupts the royal lineage and her husband's patriarchal legacy. She claims for herself the exigencies of palace politics, violates the inviolable mechanism of succession from the throne and transcends her identity as a mother. As both creator and destroyer, she implicitly equates maternity with divinity and thereby obviates the father.

What began as a strict inversion of the gender power credentials

ends in a ghastly, glamorous celebration of feminine autonomy conceiving and giving birth to itself in an act of lyrical, homo-infanticidal parthenogenesis. Indeed, to the extent that her scheme is not only the expulsion of masculine authority but the exorcism of male language, it is an act of patricide as well.

Medea represents the metaphoric link between the sophisticated women of high Hellenism and the pioneers in contemporary sexual politics. She accomplishes in her own way the kind of fundamental transmogrification modern feminist theory finds elusive. She does not derive her principal identity from the prevailing structure of power among men and women. Rather, she directs the forces of vegetal, feminine nature against the rigid roles of the male world. In this, she claims for herself the creative discipline of masculine ingenuity and the destructive potential of male aggression. If it is true she frames an argument for the feminine, she also precipitates a debate between her multiple styles of female magic.

Medea is the coquette, the subtle mistress of double entendre and sexy punnery. She is versed in the techniques of the home, the kitchen, the bedroom. But she is also a brutal and pernicious queen of the night. Turned out of her marriage bed, she is the woman scorned, animated by magic, motivated by spite. These several manifestations form a kind of

singular witch, synthesizing the whole of feminine history in a self-contained force; and its several interpenetrations create the matrix though which she affixes her designs on male power.

That Medea connects the two poles of the mystic feminine force suggests the degree to which the masculine principle of linear order fatally misapprehends and misrepresents the image of woman. In this context, the poetics of power inversion are strained to produce a coherent narrative. And it is this struggle that energizes the drama of the isolated woman, wryly concluding that if she cannot have her man, he cannot have her children. These are characteristics of routine female fantasies imbued with mythic resonance and chilling verisimilitude by the tension between an extraordinary woman rejecting first the laws of men and then the laws of nature.

Yet, paradoxically, it is mainly in terms of these laws that Medea can be fully understood. Bringing together the incisive instruments of feminine intellection and the contrary motions of feminine language, she mixes a deadly philter of female primacy, thwarting male aggression with womanly guile, vexing male vanity with erotic frisson, making men her minions and reinventing the world.

Imaging the Medean Body

Eugene Delacroix's masterful study *Medea about to Kill Her Children* reminds us that the poetics of a life are not finally reducible to a system of philosophical representations or a recitation of facts or even a vision of truth. Indeed, the problem of constructing a persuasive Medea was, for Delacroix, as much an instrument of desire as the painting itself: "Each composition has its own internal coherence and effect" (Jobert 295). This revolutionary portrait illuminates the private furies and public charms of a perplexing and singularly monstrous woman.

Yet Delacroix's *Medea* is an unequivocally delightful triumph of artistic revelation. As an objet d'art, *Medea*'s elegant texture engages the imagination as a labyrinth of cataclysmic forces. As an objet d'artifice it is a marvel of technical invention and darkly ironic humor. Delacroix assembles with refined grace and fearless élan, the fragmentary dross of myth, but never betrays his Medea with collage or the vagaries of summation. Coherent and rigorous, his achievement in portraiture here exemplifies, as much as Medea herself, creative intellection with its nexus in the body proper. The image's structure, appearing at first counterintuitive and querulous, encodes the work's hidden language.

Through his surprising and sometimes alarming juxtapositions, Delacroix joyously illuminates thematic relationships among its disparate pieces without imprisoning them in a Delacroixian exposition. He thus demonstrates the adventurous but informed acumen of both a superlative artist and a discerning lover of art. More importantly, he opens the painting's discourse onto the problematical vista of Medea's body.

Taken together, multiple projections of style within the image--now baroque color, now medieval perspective, now pre-naturalistic anatomy--brilliantly transmute a prevailing sense of indeterminate doom into a parable of neo-classical energies framed inside a kind of pre-expressionistic fabulism. Delacroix self-consciously searches for and finds new problems and new possibilities in the insoluble question of compositional balance. He is a proto-Husserlian geometer, conjuring, from the most intransigent materials, a vision of supple elegance and irrefutable logic. An inflected spira mirabilis in the painting's curvilinear design deploys spatial penetration as metaphysics and metaphysics as technique. The image is thus, like Medea, a confluence of hieratic charm and lyrical austerity.

As a kind of counterfactual corollary, the essential materials of the painting are oblique sunlight and asymmetrical shapes articulating the Medean aesthetic of entropy, of Mediterranean volcanic rock and yet

recovering the stately kinesis of the nineteenth-century garden while tracing an arc toward an impressionist florology. Immense cascades of billowing shadow held in flux by Medea's urgent posture and glinting blade form an array of incongruent sightlines and recombinant textures of delicate, diffused light. Wryly negotiating the fragile frisson of primary shading, Delacroix drapes his space in a diaphanous skein of muted creams and yellows, at once comically subverting the traditional propriety of perspective and celebrating the miasma of Medea's vengeful plot as an expressive motif.

Medea and her children writhe in a Laocoönesque humanoid tangle of incandescent light and decontextualized objects (an arm here, some legs there), fixed monstrously on the canvas as a phatasmagorical index to nineteenth-century bucolic consciousness. It is an outrageously hyperbolic dream of stylized erotica transcribed from the glyphic modalities of a post-Hellenic universe in which memory becomes primary text and private terror is reconfigured as public spectacle. Delacroix is a guerilla theoretician in the guise of a Romantic, risking the perils of ambiguous relations and appearing, thus, to correct an impossible phenomenon (the murderous mother) even as he documents the implausibility of his own emendations to reality. The image's complex apparatus of detail indefinitely delays

Medea's unimaginable act of infanticide and becomes, thus, a continuing exploration of the Medean moral program.

Moving, then, from the painting's suspension of its own action to the covalent inevitability of that action, Delacroix stages an astonishing escape from the constraints of the Medean narrative. The image then begins to turn self-referentially on itself and the attendant mysteries of Medea as myth qua art. Delacroixian style is that of the languid voluptuary, folding into an experiment in the normative politics of seeing both formal properties and symbolic gesture. Multiple tiers of irregular topology rising to an unstable surface tension suggest an hierarchical approach to the riddle of causation in his schema. Does Medea create the dramatic motion of this painting? Or is she implicated in the projection of a frame from her myth? Verdurous shadows erupt from the border producing intimations of graphic precision while timorous brocades of light snaking through the edifice terminate in hanging spectral mists receding toward some secret interior. Delacroix's *Medea* is both its own organizational principle and the ghastly, splendid result of a departure from that principle. It would be reductive to suggest that Medea is merely a shocking meditation on the relationship between a purified Romantic vision and a codified naturalism. Delacroix, the quixotic visionary, negotiates a middle passage, conjoining

interpolative methods of preliminary study, as one might expect to find in a painter's notebook, to the interpretive tropes of synthesis and discovers a wholly new dynamism of ritual display. Medea is a discursive collage of stochastic games punctuated by the poetics of the pastoral. Delacroix masterfully reimagines image as relic without equivocating on the procedures for disclosing the dark regions of a lighted world.

Withal this Medea seems to be a kind of theatrical treasure chest in which are held ruminations on ancient Hellenism, jesting riffs on the excesses of the baroque, and a fetishistic preoccupation with incipient violence. Concealed in the warm, fragrant linen robes of its incubating revelations, this most problematical and fascinating creation takes seriously the idea of memory as an object. Proceeding thus from the illusory convexities of Medea's villainy to the miraculous concavities of her maternal self, Delacroix transmogrifies the discipline of vengeance into the rococo of programmatic fantasy. Here is no murder, but an image of murder.

Medea, poised ever at the edge of her crisis point, children in her calculating thrall, oscillates freely between the aesthetics of desire and the architectonics of expressivity. That she ironically ensnares immense quantities of empty space is an irreverent gloss on Delacroix's minimal

lighting and evidence of her commanding incantatory methods. But her oddly asymmetrical form, recapitulating the larger structure's asymmetries, exemplifies the shifting tableau of her moral authority and becomes part of the interplay in his virtuosic sense of proportion.

Whatever else is true of Delacroix's achievement here, it is startlingly hierarchical in its presentation of the Medean universe: the resolute gaze, the secret location, that secret space of Medean transgression, the bloom of crimson in the center of a monochromatic painting. Certainly, Medea represents, among other things, the collapse of a particular moral tradition. But within the context of her own self-contained program, precision and order are the foundations of stability. And that stability is crucially dependent upon the status of her body: "Traditionally, Western civilization grounded many of its dualistic theological, legal, medical, and aesthetic notions on the supposition of the body's integrity and rectitude" (Stafford 12). But contrary to the received post-structuralist and feminist lore, the body's integrity and rectitude are not predicated on false, masculine conceptions of political space, but on the geometry of three-dimensional space. Medea is therefore constructed according to the same principles as any object in a representational mode. However, like any trope, she is subject to the rigors of interpretation:

> For the age of encyclopedism, the human body represented the ultimate visual compendium, the comprehensive method of methods, the organizing structure of structures. As a visible natural whole made up of invisible dissimilar parts, it was the organic paradigm or architectonic standard for all complex unions. Whether ideal or caricatured, perfect or monstrous, it formed the model for proper or improper man-made assemblies. (Stafford 12)

Delacroix's Medea transmutes the spectacle of violence into an exploration of the maternal condition. Hers is a body located somewhere between the roles of giving and taking life. The children, plunging through the amniotic sac of Medea's cloak lined in red, are otherwise undifferentiated corollaries to an unarticulated maternal principle. They appear as bizarre extensions of her own body. This is a revolutionary moment in Romantic representation, linking the mythic vagaries of Medea's murder to the apostrophic tradition of Medea as a literary figure.

Delacroix's painting is, thus, like the many translations of the Euripidean Medea and other instantiations of Medea elsewhere in literature, a poly-referential figure, existing at once in the leitmotifs of Romanticism and as part of a historical continuum. She projects a catalogue of Medean

tropes. Similarly, she contains the panoply of Medea-like associations, from the vengeful woman to the ubiquitious theoretical Other:

> Impersonation generated a wide range of tropes. These intersected with the biology, psychology, and philosophy of living historical agents. The metaphor of the body politic, for example, was embedded in the additive and subtractive scatological methods of political satire. Visual and verbal constructions permitted a host of puns fragmenting an all too corporeal state. They literally incarnated features that were out of joint, ill assorted, crippled, and otherwise malformed. (Stafford 12)

Delacroix always seems strangely encumbered with critical approbation. Whether he imagined himself ineluctably enthroned as patriarch of the late French Romantic painters is not evident in his dazzling evocation of Medea. This painting demonstrates his artifice and his willingness to deploy the contrapuntal effects of metaphor against the formal operations of the visual grammar. In the surgical delicacy of his stroke and the complex rhetoric of his palette, it is clear he understood the schizophrenia implicit in the project of opening daily experience to lyrical inquiry and myth to daily routine.

Medea struggles to distinguish herself from the splendor of her own painting without rejecting the mythic tradition of ritual display. Yet this image refuses to cast off its classical influences even as it ghoulishly exploits late nineteenth-century urbanity and the eighteenth century's legacy of analytic integration. These multiple gestures ingeniously recapitulate the double program Medea herself set forth from the beginning.

Hers is the visual puzzle of secret drama illumined in the cathexis of fierce intelligence. Even the spectre of death cannot quell her exposition of the splendors in feminine cunning in which the body is the universe. The act of conjuration is central to the mystery of the Medean body, As she is a creature of magic, so is she best framed inside a discourse of magic. She thus occupies both large canvases and incremental conceptual spaces, as in a musical score. But this precipitates whole new problems of scale and execution: "Composers and librettists are almost always forced to reduce a large fresco into a miniature form while somehow, through the amplifying power of music, retaining the original's expressive magnitude" (Schmidgall 9). Iannis Xenakis's choral fantasy *Medea*, similarly, extends to a sonic universe the spectrum of Medean representation. Its violent evocation of an ancient, even primordial dreamscape returns the Medean

body to its origins in the liquescent bower of archaic night. Scored for a small chamber ensemble and large chorus, Xenakis explores Medea as an expressive motif, a node of lore, tradition, myth, cautionary tale, fable, epic adventure, and classical tragedy. But these several stable forms are shattered on the sharp edges of his primeval edifice. His "open score" permits a considerable degree of latitude in interpreting the music to which the chorus chants the Medean myth, based in this setting on Seneca's Latin treatment. Like Medea, Xenakis's solution to the problem of representation lies in the transformative economy of language, in this case, a musical language, though one heavily informed by speech: "The youthful Xenakis often wondered how the music of ancient Greek theatre might have sounded [. . .]. He treated the instruments as voices and the voice as instruments to create an implacable work, extending the language with whispers and hisses, repeated phrases and even banging of stones. The atmosphere is archaic with a setting that is both raucous and primitive" (Matossian 8).

Indeed, his Medea is a singular experience, moving fluidly as it does among the conceptual, the determinate, and the irrational. Xenakis's approach to the question of compositional technique suggests a solution to the same problem in narrative authority. Whose story is it anyway? There

exists in the Medean mode a tension between the authorial vision of moral order or political structure or familial identity and the narratological vision of morality, politics, and family as premises for stories of a particularized experience, refracted in this instance through a musical language. As the Medean self remains forever in flux, so, too, does Xenakis's score evolve as an object, shifting through its inventory of unstable manifestations, now contemplative, now furious, at once widely referential in its source material and hermetically impenetrable.

Xenakis himself has been circumspect on the issue of whether the status of a musical object should be understood properly as an articulation of its predicate or whether it is predicated from within:

> One always comes back to the same question--what is true or what is false in artistic matters?--or to the only response worth considering, to refuse all rules outside the work is to refuse to be crippled, blind, and deaf. All philosophical thought, all rules are provided in an original way by the actor, by the artist. We touch here upon the foundation of art: what is originality?
>
> (Rahn 158)

The Xenakisan gloss on Medea's body is a pre-operatic tragedy assembled in the manner of a body recovered from cataclysm and

reconstructed from fragments of language. But he never questions whether the architecture of the Medean body can sustain the rigors of his stylized medium: "After so many readings of ancient tragedies the attempt was bound to be subjective in nature. That's why it ought not to go beyond the domain of music" (Varga 191). If Guy Davenport's sense that "[l]anguage itself is continuously an imaginative act" (3) correctly identifies the proportional relationships between narrative and mind, then it follows that language in all its forms, written, mathematical and musical, does not obviate, but rather affirms and necessitates the body. Xenakis's score is, thus, another location of the Medean corpus. She creates her body, destroys western logic and with it the world, but summons as through incantation from the destruction a new self, a new body, composed in space:

> What was the prize
> of this voyage? The golden fleece
> and Medea, an evil greater than the sea.
> Every boundary has gone and cities
> set up their walls in a new land,
> and nothing is left in the place it once was
> by the accessible world. (Matossian 10)

Conclusion

On July 28, 1995, a judge in Spartanburg, South Carolina, sentenced Susan Smith to life in prison for the murder of her two sons, Alexander and Michael. The world had been astonished and horrified at the spectacle of a mother on trial for a crime that seemed at once unimaginable and yet which resonated with popular culture in ways that perhaps remain beyond the conventional modes of inquiry. The real story about Susan Smith was, of course, that she emerged from the distinguished tradition of the Medean mother as its first post-modern incarnation. But insofar as she is a person and not a character in a myth, she is a primary constitution of the Medean body.

But without the narrative tradition of Medean discourse outlined in this study, her act is not merely inexplicable, but finally meaningless. Contemporary accounts of the body in its culturally performative apparition do not clarify the body-language relations in this pressing matter:

> In modernist and post-modernist performance, the precarious border between body and cultural embodiment has provoked acts of anamorphic catharsis addressed not only to spectators, but to a cultur deemed ill and oppressive. Despite the efforts of scholars to purify the term of its primitiveness, residues of ritual purification and medical purgation have returned to

> twentieth-century performance, dilating its connotations outside the precincts of the theater to areas of social behavior and health. (Parker 156)

This exposition is splendidly characteristic of the attempts in feminist culture studies to invoke the contested topography of the body as a battlefield for social pathology. Far from illuminating the source of anomie, to say nothing of crime (in this case, a terrible violence), this modeling technique is merely a cover story for an ideological assault on the Aristotelian conception of the self.

In framing itself as a corrective to the historical error (in some literature, conspiracy) of western metaphysics, performance theory explains away Susan Smith's murder of her children as a trangression of the enculturated role of "mother." However, it is a syllogistically incomplete solution as it does not locate the murder in the same value-free zone of inquiry, but merely assumes the body is a social construct and the actor is an instantiation of some anomalous social consciousness, forging " [. . .] a conceptual overlay between the space of theater and the space of social action" and is " [. . .] less about product that cultural rehearsal, a means of discovering new, revolutionary embodiments" (Parker 156).

Certainly, Parker's gambit appears promising to the extent that a

performativity model offers a paradigm based on the same metaphors as the principal history of the Medean body: the stage. But such pedestrian stratagems as the assumption that social conditioning displaces biology lead inevitably to the absurd conclusion that a body, particularly the Medean body and therefore Medea, is merely the convergence of social proscriptions and anamorphic perversities.

It is, however, instructive to take seriously the deeply felt intuition that the Medean crime is, somehow, inhuman and the Medean body is, thus, invalid. Here, again, post-modernist theories of the body as a social object misread the causal relations between tropoi (action) and topoi (space). This theory denies the systemic notion of the human and yet searches for the post-human: "If the announcement of the discovery that 'the body' has a history has become conventional, the field that it inaugurates has only begun to be established. Even so the emergence of 'the body' in history, and thereby its partial reification and relativization, also opens a space for posthistorical bodies to establish themselves" (Halberstam 1-2).

Given the centrality of the body proper in the myth of Medea, such arch fabulisms of encoded space seem oddly unnecessary. Indeed, the idea that a body narrative must be recovered presumes it was lost. But that

presumption is contrary to the very fact that there exists a myth in history: "The tragedy of Medea, of Love turning to hatred when betrayed, until the woman's soul is dominated by a lust for vengeance that overpowers even maternal love, is one which no modern reader should, in its essentials, find difficult to make his own" (Grube 147). Her story is our own in the sense that the body and the self are ensnared in a struggle to escape consciousness. Put simply, "Medea haunts the imagination" (Klauss 297). And because her body is real, her suffering is our own. Yet the classical conception of her condition is a useful counterpoint to the empathic rhetoric of contemporary appeals to the body: "Pity evokes a violent pathos, often provoking tears. We should therefore understand pity as a more violent and possessive emotion than the consolatory empathy and responsiveness that we often associate with the word today" (Pucci 169).

Medea is thus both a projection of ourselves and something luminously not ourselves, the Other. There exists a whole world of unexplored imaginative territory for the body's relation to language. Medea fearlessly exploits the perils and wonders of that world, delivering an extraordinary critique of her own condition for the new millennium while documenting and preserving her secret history.

The Medean tradition is a catalogue of transmogrifications tracing

her encyclopedic approach to the body's expressive complexity. The economy and precision of her narrative style unify the discourse in mythic, pictorial, musical, and philosophical tableaux without obscuring its most singular ideas. Euripides's *Medea* is the preeminent rigorous experiment in Medean body consciousness; its language and evocations of corporeality are marvels of refined grace. Robinson Jeffers's and Jean Anouilh's *Medeas* constitute an ethereal modernist collage cast in a neo-classical idiom. Eugène Delacroix's and Iannis Xenakis's Medeas transpose the rules of expressivity from the page to the eyes and ears, confirming the Medean body in an orthopraxis of sensory immediacy. Withal, she is the proto-Other of Western discourse. Weaving together visions of terror and garlands of lucent beauty, she is the most virtuosic exhibit in our gallery of the living body.

Appendix

Appendix A

Eugène Delacroix's *Medea About to Kill Her Children*

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