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Three Faces of Destiny: An Analysis of the Modern Medea Figure on the American Stage

Melinda M. Marks
San Jose State University

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THREE FACES OF DESTINY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MODERN *MEDEA* FIGURE ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Melinda Marks

August 2013

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by

Melinda Marks

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF TELEVISION, RADIO, FILM AND
THEATRE

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2013

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Dr. Matthew Spangler | Department of Communication Studies |
| Dr. David Kahn | Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre |
| Dr. Alison McKee | Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre |

ABSTRACT

THREE FACES OF DESTINY:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MODERN *MEDEA* FIGURE ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

By Melinda Marks

This thesis examines the ways in which three structural factors contained within three modern American adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* serve to enhance the dominant personality traits of the main character. The plays used in this study are Steve Carter's *Pecong* (1990), Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* (2002), and Neil LaBute's *Medea Redux* (1997). While each protagonist is a re-development of the original Medea, the personalities of each are distinctive to the world of their adaptations. There are three main ways in which the structure of each adaptation works to enhance certain emotional markers within the main character.

The first analysis explores the ways in which supporting characters are used within the adaptations to enhance the personality traits of the Medea characters. Second is an analysis of the ways in which the settings of the adaptations play into each Medea's dominant traits. The final analysis explores how the narrative timeline of each adaptation affects the Medeas' individual characteristics. The purpose of examining these narrative elements together is to create a distinct theory of adaptation by which well known theatrical characters may be assessed.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| I: Overview | 1 |
| II: Strategies of Adaptation..... | 1 |
| | |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW | 3 |
| I: Introduction | 3 |
| II: Examining Adaptation: Critical Perspectives | 5 |
| III: The Modern <i>Medea</i> : Exploring Adaptation..... | 8 |
| IV: The Featured Plays | 11 |
| V: Medea’s Emotional Origins | 13 |
| | |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY | 17 |
| I: Overview | 17 |
| II: Adaptation as an Artistic Practice | 17 |
| III: Adaptation vs. Appropriation | 19 |
| IV: Adaptation in Action: Practicing Perspectives | 21 |
| V: Examining Medea..... | 31 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS | 33 |
| I: The Aegius Problem..... | 34 |
| II: <i>Pecong</i> | 36 |
| III: <i>The Hungry Woman</i> | 41 |
| III: <i>Medea Redux</i> | 46 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF SETTING AND CONTEXT | 48 |
| I: <i>Pecong</i> | 48 |
| II: <i>The Hungry Woman</i> | 52 |
| III: <i>Medea Redux</i> | 57 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TIMELINE..... | 63 |
| I: <i>Pecong</i> | 64 |
| II: <i>The Hungry Woman</i> | 65 |
| III: <i>Medea Redux</i> | 68 |
| | |
| CONCLUSION..... | 71 |
| WORKS CITED..... | 76 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I: Overview

This thesis compares different adaptation strategies used in three modern American plays based on Euripides' tragedy *Medea*: Steve Carter's *Pecong* (1990), Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* (2002), and Neil LaBute's *Medea Redux* (1997), all three of which premiered in the United States between 1990 and 2002. One specific technique of adaptation employed prominently in all three of these works was to isolate and expand upon a distinct aspect of Medea's personality, as it was rendered in Euripides' play, in order to create a unique but recognizable variation of the character within each adaptation.

II: Strategies of Adaptation

One specific strategy of adaptation used within these works was to take supporting characters from Euripides' original version and use these supporting characters in ways that enhance the dominant traits of Medea's character in each of the adaptations. Specific examples within the texts include (1) an expansion of the roles of certain minor characters, (2) the elimination of certain supporting characters from the original story in the adapted work, (3) the combination of two or more characters into one character, or, in some cases, the complete addition of a character or characters to an adaptation that are not found in the source material. This strategy supports the developments within each adaptation because it results in exchanges in which the characters' reactions to Medea serve to verify her dominant traits for an audience. These displays serve to assist in the creation of a clear picture of the protagonist's place

within her narrative world.

Another adaptation strategy used in these three works is that of establishing a set of circumstances that make up the world of the play and serve to highlight the dominant characteristics of its protagonist. These can be found in (1) the time period in which the adaptation is set, (2) the location or multiple locations in which the world of the play is established, and (3) the inclusion of details about the daily lives of and relationships between characters. Context clues of this kind support an adaptive theory based on characterization because these plays work to establish a certain mood, theme, and tone through the setting and context that directly support and connect to the functions of every character on individual and communal levels. The provision of a setting and external context that is textually and environmentally supportive of the Medea character who inhabits it allows for greater narrative clarity for every character. Each environment works with, rather than against, the activities of the protagonist and her dramatic agenda.

The final strategy upon which this thesis focuses is that of the order of events as they appear within each adaptation. In this context, “order of events” is intended to refer to any additions, extensions, or omissions made to the events found in Euripides’ storyline. Like the analysis of setting and context, analyzing the order of time and events in each of these works helps to establish the overall tone of each adaptation and provide a more textually diverse picture of the functions of each character, including Medea. Having a clear understanding of the function of each order of events also provides an additional means of understanding the individual Medea characters based not only on when certain events come to pass, but also how long Medea takes to complete her emotional and chronological arcs and to what degree her characterization is established and shaped by an adapted timeline.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

I: Introduction

This thesis explores a specific strategy of adaptation as it appears in Steve Carter's *Pecong* (1990), Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* (2002), and Neil Labute's *Medea Redux* (1997), three late 20th century/early 21st century re-workings of the Medea myth based on the play by Euripides. While Euripides' *Medea* is mentioned throughout the following analysis, it is not used as a master text to which other the works are compared favorably or unfavorably, nor will the adaptations be judged on the basis of "faithfulness" or "unfaithfulness" to their source work. Instead, this analysis is concerned with the ways in which each version of the Medea character functions within the circumstances of the adapted narrative.

These three plays were selected because they each possess unique qualities that make them conducive to an analysis of adaptation that is not exclusively plot-based, as adaptations are commonly assessed relative to their originals. Though order of events will be discussed within this analysis, these three adaptations do not seek to replicate the plot of the original; rather, they seek to amplify certain character traits of Euripides' Medea. Each adaptation amplifies the dominant traits of Euripides' Medea to the point that these character traits become the central, guiding principle for the tone and structure of the new work.

These plays were also chosen because all three of their playwrights are from the

United States, and because they were first published and performed between 1990 and 2002. This provides a consistent cultural template for the analysis of a “modern” Medea, while still providing an array of differences with regard to scope, style, and overall setting.

A character-based strategy of adaptation is formulated through a textual analysis of the works themselves. Throughout this study, I use examples drawn from within the body of the adaptations to support findings about the ways in which each Medea’s characterization contributes to the tone of the work as a whole. This includes explorations of setting, stage direction, dialogue, or other contextual clues given within the works themselves, which can demonstrate the strategy of a character-driven adaptation. In this respect, I am following Linda Hutcheon, who, in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), argues that adaptation is its own creative form. Hutcheon posits that the merit of an adapted work should not be judged merely on its similarities or differences to an original, but on the basis of its own content and the ways in which the adapted work is inspired by the original. The adaptation is, therefore, subject to many legitimate changes in style, structure, and genre relative to the original text. The experience of an adapted work of theater is not merely a “process of creation, but a process of reception” as well (8). In this context, reception refers to the ways in which adaptation is experienced and interpreted by any reader, spectator, theorist, or even by the adapter themselves. It is a process by which an existing idea, or a well-known character like Medea, may be approached in formerly unexplored ways and an acknowledgement of the validity of those interpretations.

II: Examining Adaptation: Critical Perspectives

Theories of Adaptation

Performance theorist Linda Hutcheon considers any form of thoughtful adaptation to be a valid and compelling stand-alone art form. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon posits a theory about the mechanics (and the appeals) of the adaptive process itself, rather than focusing on the specific function or effectiveness of individual works. The author proposes that part of the pleasure of creating and experiencing adapted works “comes . . . from the comfort of the ritual [and] the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) . . . so too is change”(xvi). Adaptations are never merely simple reproductions of their base work, because the very process of adapting is its own transformative thing.

The author also proposes that when examining adapted texts, the concept of narrative fidelity to a source work should not be a strong factor in the determination of its validity. Instead, Hutcheon examines three distinct perspectives on how to approach adaptation. First, adaptation should be seen as their own “formal entity or product,” a serious and lengthy transposition of one body of work into another (7). This approach lays out the fact that even a textually “faithful” adaptation will undergo a significant change in framing, either in medium of representation, shift in genre, or in a transformation of context and/or environment. Adaptation can also be examined as a “process of creation,” referring to a reinterpretation and a secondary recreation of an existing narrative (8). From “the perspective of its process of reception,” adapted works create and strengthen bonds of intertextuality (8). The spectator absorbs the familiar

work, or its familiar aspects, from one or more original sources, resulting in the creation of new connections and the reinforcement of old ones. After the modes of perceiving adaptations are established, Hutcheon discusses certain types of frequently adapted projects and the most frequent modes of adaptation. She discusses the depth of responsibility of the adaptor to the creation of a new text and qualifies the role of the individual in the interpretation of adaptation (33, 79). Cultural motives in adaptation are also mentioned with respect to the different ways in which creation and reception combine and the role that shifting cultural contexts play in the interpretation and [re]creation of original source materials (113). According to Hutcheon, frequent modes of altering the way a work is interpreted include historicizing or de-historicizing (removing the original historical contexts of a source work or replacing it with another complete but distinct historical context,) culturalizing or de-culturalizing (adding or removing significant social or cultural content in order to realign the narrative), and racializing or deracializing context and/or characters (10-13).

Hutcheon concludes with the critical determination that one of the lasting appeals of adaptation to both creator and spectator is “the ability to respect without copying, embed difference in similarity, [and] to be at once self and other” (174). She states that although adaptation is a careful and highly technical process, it is also an emotionally organic, natural evolution of the preservation of universal stories and themes.

In Julie Sanders’ *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2008), the author expresses strong views about the necessity of modern adaptation, stating early in her analysis that:

All creative work in the late 20th and early 21st century [does by definition] come “after” [an earlier iteration], because nothing new [or] original . . . in

the dimension of art, music, film, or literature is possible anymore. We have come too late to do anything unique. (157)

Like Hutcheon, Sanders describes the influences of creative diversity found in most-modern Western society as an essential and powerful tool in the [re]vitalization of adaptation as its own art form.

Sanders goes on to describe the differences between adaptation and another transformative medium, “appropriation,” described here as “a more decisive journey [than adaptation] away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26). While the products of appropriation still “require the intellectual juxtaposition of . . . one text against another,” the source text’s influences on the finished work may not always be as apparent (26). To better delineate these differences, the author lists a variety of familiar and frequently re/produced texts, characters, stories, and myths and examines their persistent appeal. Throughout her work, Sanders refers, particularly, to the human fascination to “retell” the stories of myths and archetypes and describes the ways in which they lend themselves to both pre- and post-modern forms of representation. For Sanders, the art of storytelling is malleable and appealing, as it is capable of combining the magical with the emotional (159). This combination creates a compelling and flexible canvas onto which any number of artists and spectators may contribute (24). Sanders concludes her critique with the suggestion that adaptation is a way for artists to present a different voice for narratives and characters who may be unknown or unfamiliar to contemporary audiences. This is particularly relevant to the works discussed here. Each adaptation in this study takes *Medea*’s protagonist and narrative structure and uses them in similar ways, maintaining similar narrative arcs

relative to the original work. However, each adaptation is able to reinvent itself, in part, through the emotional interpretation of its main character, and her reactions to her adaptive environment(s).

III: The Modern *Medea*: Exploring Adaptation.

The Euripidean version of the Medea myth, and the eponymous central character, has been an almost continuous source of translation, re-creation, and appropriation in the Western performance tradition, to varying levels of textual “faithfulness.” The dramatic appeal of a strong-willed and desperate woman driven to unthinkable acts of violence has been re-invented over time in various ways, proving that the original figure and story remain popular vehicles for diverse adaptive processes. The last three decades alone (the time period upon which this thesis focuses) have yielded many theatrical adaptations of Euripides’ *Medea*. The adaptations manage to be distinctive in the style, genre, and narrative focus with which they convey the same central narrative.

Other high profile examples of modern Medea adaptations include Marina Carr’s play *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), first produced at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland, and Luis Alfaro’s *Bruja* (2012), which premiered at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco in May 2012. While these plays are very different from each other in setting, structure, and use of supporting characters, both works adapt the source material to emphasize the stigmatization of different social groups. In the case of Carr’s play, Medea archetype Hester Swane is an Irish Traveler, whose distinctive heritage and behavior make her an unforgivable “other” in the minds of society at large. *Bruja* uses the story to comment on

the marginalization of undocumented immigrants. In Alfaro's play, *Medea*, a witch from Mexico, struggles unsuccessfully to adjust to the life and the pressures of her undocumented status, her new life as an American, and the memories of the complicated life she left behind.

Other modern *Medea* adaptations move away from social issues and politics and instead center on a reversal of tone and genre. Playwright John Fisher's campy take on the story, entitled *Medea the Musical* (1994), was first staged in Berkeley, California. *Medea the Musical* re-invents the context's style and structure as a musical commentary on gay cultural dynamics in America. In the playful treatment of this context, *Medea the Musical* is similar in tone to an earlier work: Sheldon Harnick and C. Lloyd Norlin's musical comedy/parody *Medea in Disneyland* (1955), first featured in Ben Bagley's *Shoestring Revue*. *Medea in Disneyland* was later adapted (in)directly into a short non-musical parody, Trace Crawford's recent work *Christopher Durang Brings Medea back to Disneyland* (2009). Crawford places Euripidean characters in a modern absurdist setting, adapting the context of the story to take place in a geographically nebulous resort hotel owned by Creon. *Medea* and several supporting characters become the wealthy guests who must negotiate their classical dynamics within a contemporary context.

Caridad Svich's *Wreckage* (2009), which premiered at Crowded Fire Theatre in San Francisco, focuses on gender and sexuality within *Medea's* narrative. *Wreckage* is more of an appropriation of the source material, rather than a strict adaptation. It imagines a story in which *Medea's* sons resume their lives and come of age in a surreal afterlife. Svich makes it apparent that, while the events of the "past" correspond to the

Euripidean timeline, the “present” is the independent domain of the two boys. While the Medea character is featured, and Svich uses some direct lines from Euripides’ text, the context is shifted from mother to child. Medea’s decisions have already been made, and the audience sees the characters struggle with the consequences of those decisions in their own narrative space.

IV: The Featured Plays

Pecong

Pecong was written by African-American playwright Steve Carter, and premiered at the Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago, Illinois on January 9, 1990. It is set on Trankey Island, or *Ille Tranquille* (the Isle of Calm), a fictional Caribbean township. Though the year is not explicitly stated, the play’s context suggests a pre-industrial and/or pre-colonial society. Mediyah lives in relative seclusion with her brother and grandmother in a hut on the edge of town. She is feared by the locals, both for her powers of voodoo, the impunity with which she uses those powers, and, later, for her ability to travel alone to Miedo Wood (the wood of fear), a neighboring island with a lethal reputation. While in the wood, she rescues a stranded Jason, and in the course of nursing him back to health, becomes pregnant with his children. The final scenes of this work deal with the permanent consequences of Jason’s betrayal of Mediyah’s trust when he arrives at Trankey Island and falls in love with the daughter of the richest man in town, and with the slow revelation of Mediyah’s true origins.

The Hungry Woman

The Hungry Woman was written by Chicana playwright Cherrie Moraga and began its development in 1995, but premiered in its complete form at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, California, in 2002. The title of the play is a reference to the Aztec legend of Coatlicue, the goddess of birth, burial, and earth, and who is said to eventually consume all things. Moraga's narrative, while contemporary in style, is meant to take place in "the near future of a fictional past—one only dreamed in the Chicana imagination" (Moraga 1). *The Hungry Woman* chronicles the long-term consequences that arise from Medea's inability to completely escape her past relationship with Jason, repair her current relationship with her girlfriend, Luna, or maintain a relationship with her teenaged son, Chac-Mool. The narrative slowly discloses the buildups, breakdowns, and results of these close connections.

Medea Redux

Medea Redux was written by Neil LaBute as part of a larger one-act trilogy entitled *Bash: Latterday Plays*, though each one-act play is narratively and thematically distinct from the others. It premiered at the Douglas Fairbanks Theater in New York City on June 24, 1997. Unlike the other adaptations being analyzed, this adaptation is performed as one continuous monologue, as Medea begins to tell her life story to an unseen presence. She begins with a discussion of her years as a troubled teen in Illinois, eventually, revealing more and more about the nature and circumstances of her history with Jason, their child, and a reunion the three of them have recently had in Phoenix, Arizona, the place which becomes the breeding ground for her homicidal urges.

V: Medea's Emotional Origins

The original story of Medea of Colchis has proven to be one of the more mesmerizing and permanent stories in the Western cultural canon of performance and characterization. The story has maintained a place in Western art and legend for nearly three thousand years, beginning with her appearance in the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece. Medea's complexity and multidimensionality are largely responsible for her staying power and have made her an object of continued study and interest in both scholastic and practitioner circles. Aristide Tessitore describes Medea's character as "less an object of love and source of inspiration and more an object of fascination" (587). Others, like classicist David Konstan, take this almost-otherworldly comparison a step further, comparing her and her actions to that of "a hero, but also . . . by her language, action, and situation, as a *theos* or at least something more than human. She does not start that way, but that is how she ends" (93).

Medea's history colors every contextual aspect of her character. The sequence and outcome of her story is well-known to generations of readers, theater-makers, and audiences. Euripides' play, which is itself an adaptation of the original myth, remakes the character of Medea into someone unique from the other versions of the story, but someone who is still recognizable as the figure in Jason's tale. By continuing the familiar story of Medea and Jason's union into an unfamiliar place, wherein it is she and not an outside force who kills her children in order to re-invent herself, the Medea of Euripides calls upon all her accumulated skills to act as her own savior by ensuring the total destruction of her old life in exchange for the opportunity to begin anew.

Her part in the original myth, while relatively small, is crucial to the success of Jason's quest. When Jason asks Aeetes, the king of Colchis, for the fleece, Aeetes agrees to grant Jason's request upon completion of three seemingly impossible tasks. It is here that Medea makes her first appearance in myth – as the princess of Colchis, already a powerful sorceress. She sees Jason and instantly falls in love with him. Her powers and spells alone are responsible for the successful completion of his tasks. Early in Medea's story is the first indication of complex characterization, as she possesses the power and knowledge of a seasoned *sophe* (healer or medicine woman) in juxtaposition with the emotional impulses of a love-sick teenager. But by helping Jason, Medea has brought dishonor on her family. Her loyalties are now split. The decision to sacrifice every aspect of her former life for a new one as Jason's companion is the first step in the eventual determination of her character.

In proving herself capable of intense love, loyalty, and devotion, she also proves herself capable of murder and betrayal of those who, until the arrival of Jason, she had been most loyal and devoted to. Medea is willing to kill in order to satisfy the needs of her new husband in keeping with the circumstances of her new life, until they settle in Corinth and start a family, creating the opportunity for further layering of character. Medea is able to become someone else, and this is the narrative point at which Euripides introduces his version of the character. C.A.E. Luschnig describes the complexity of Medea's character:

[Medea] is Jason's wife. She is a mother who loves her children. She is a resident of Corinth who help[s] the citizens with her expertise in the healing arts . . . she is able to be the many things a human being is capable of, good and evil and much that is in between: weak and powerful, loving

and hate[ful], rational and passionate (Luschnig 2).

A legacy of emotional diversity has already made Medea a fascinating figure in Greek culture before Euripides created his account of the events taking place during her final day in Corinth. The manner in which the character uses a lifetime of skills to bolster and transcend her own emotions and improvise a future for herself has made a lasting impression on generations of spectators.

Euripides wrote *Medea* in 431 B.C., and it was first performed at the Dionysian religious festival in Athens. His narrative takes place on Medea's last day in Corinth after Jason has left her and their two children in order to form a more advantageous union with Creon's daughter. Medea is alone, having no family, no friends abroad, and no one with the power or authority to be an advocate for her in Corinth. When the play opens, she is depressed and panicked, angry at herself for having cut all her former ties for a man who would leave her, and angry at Jason for his betrayal of their marriage. Her sense of urgency is compounded when Creon arrives on the scene and banishes her, giving her the rest of the day to get out and guaranteeing her death if she remains, despite her attempts to appeal to his sense of mercy and generosity. The arrival of Aegeus gives her an opportunity to form an escape plan by calling upon her powers as a *sophe* and using the maternal instincts she has developed to appeal to his sense of masculinity. Medea ensures an escape for herself by bartering the power of her femininity for his protection. However, she makes no plans for the children. Despite having secured her own place in a new world, she can provide no life for them. The deal she strikes with Aegeus to begin a new life in his household is the deciding factor in her agony over how to deal with this

transition on her own terms.

Medea then uses the children as pawns in her schemes against Jason and Glauce. Though Jason is concerned with his own status and how the children may affect his new position of power, he has urged Medea to get herself out of Corinth and leave the children with him. He rationalizes to her that, though they will be raised as illegitimate, they will have more honor with him than with her. Towards the end of the original play, she seems to agree, instead using them as vessels for her retribution. When the time comes for their death, she reveals her true feelings of doubt and self-loathing about killing her own children. But by the time she stands before Jason with their corpses, she expresses no outward signs of regret. She has committed to the arc, believing that the consequences of her actions are justified, for better or for worse.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I: Overview

In order to provide an analysis of the three plays under consideration here, it is important to determine the specific ways in which the three adapted works isolate and expand upon a distinct aspect of Medea's personality. For each of the adapted texts, three methods have been selected. The first is an analysis of the way in which certain aspects of the Medea character are altered and enhanced through her interactions with the plays' supporting characters. This category will not only include textual examples of the relationships between Medea and the other characters, but it will also contain a brief examination of the ways in which the augmentations, additions, omissions, and transmogrifications or combinations of certain characters serve to clarify Medea's character profile. The second method is an examination of the ways in which the setting and environment of the adapted version serve to clarify of the dominant traits of Medea's character. The third and final method of examination will be a review of the narrative order of events within each adaptation, including additions, omissions, or changes from the Euripidean model, and the ways in which such constructions serve to enhance the building of the Medea character in ways that are distinct from other adaptations, yet recognizable as clear variations on the original archetype.

II: Adaptation as an Artistic Practice

The perception of adaptation as a stand-alone artistic practice worthy of its own analysis can be attributed in some part to semiotician and linguist Roland Barthes. In his

essay “The Death of the Author,” Barthes describes the modern departure from the idea that the author, or creator of a work, holds autonomy over what it represents. Barthes begins his argument by stating that the concept of “authorship” as we have come to know it is:

A modern figure, produced . . . by [a]society . . . which has accorded the greatest importance to the author’s person . . . the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions . . . [and] the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it (2).

Barthes goes on to state that only recently has Western thinking begun to move away from this rigid mode of thinking. This deviation from equating authorship with ownership is helping to legitimize adaptation as a creative art form and the adaptor as an original artist. When a work is adapted and re-interpreted, the adapter exerts a new creative authority over the original. The adaptation then becomes as legitimate, complex, and valid a work as the one that inspired it. When the message of that work is experienced by a spectator/reader, each individual’s perception/s of the new interpretation lends artistic credence to the adapted work by further augmenting its legitimacy. Thus, the “death” of the author to which Barthes refers results in the “birth” of the reader (6). Barthes suggests that any text “consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected [and] united, and this place is not with the author, but with the reader” (6).

This study will focus on examining the results (or side-effects) of this cultural multiplicity, and how it affects the portrayal of Medea’s character within separate works.

Some important factors in the analysis of these three adaptations are an emphasis on text, context, and narrative structure, as opposed to a reliance on the playwrights' personal intentions with regard to the adapted work. Neither their individual cultural backgrounds nor their overall style of writing will figure into this study, as the adaptors will be "no way the subject of which [the work] is the predicate" (Barthes 2).

III: Adaptation vs. Appropriation

Because the three adaptations I will be looking at are so aesthetically different from both the original text and from each other, it is important to establish that they are, in fact, adaptations, as opposed to what Julie Sanders' would call "appropriations" of an original. Sanders describes appropriation as a "riff," or a "sampling" of another text woven into an original narrative, as opposed to a continual referencing of a source material (Sanders 40). This is particularly important to clarify when each play has such different methods of presenting and sustaining the "same" protagonist and the outcomes of her actions. With many older works, or in the reinvention of iconic characters like Medea, an audience may "desire the repetition as much as the change" (Hutcheon 9). While each adaptation has a Medea character, and she is identifiable through her core actions and characteristics as such, not all those traits and actions are the same in each adaptation.

Whereas adaptation and appropriation share many similar traits, the act of appropriation refers to an overlaying of meaning or the use of allusive symbolism on top of the body of an original text (Sanders 31). Sanders discusses different examples of

creative mediums as they relate to each other. She also discusses different uses of source works from a variety of origins throughout Western culture and history, and how they are used to create new ones. She concludes that while adaptation relies more overtly on a source text as a point of origin, it is still a flexible medium:

Consumption need not always be the endpoint of adaptation; the adapted text does not necessarily seek to consume or efface in informing source . . . it is the very endurance and survival of the source text [as its own product] that enables [this] ongoing process of juxtaposition (25).

A character who has achieved such long-standing recognition as Medea has done so in part because of the ability of the source text to remain relevant. Moreover, each version of the story creates a continued interest in the source work/s from which it came.

A more general definition of adaptation, which will be used here, is that of a shift between genres or sub-genres within a performance and/or character in order to create something contextually recognizable, yet distinct in tone from its counterpart. The three plays in this study all present recognizable versions of the Medea myth, and contain similar structural patterns, plot points, characters, and thematic elements while maintaining individual “additions, expansions, accretions, and interpolations,” which create three distinct narrative worlds, and – importantly – three very differently constructed Medeas (Sanders 18).

An analysis of a particular adaptive strategy provides an opportunity to expand the study beyond one version of an adapted text and to illustrate the way in which these adaptations borrow particular elements from the source material in order to create a work that stands on its own artistically, while still evoking a clear and familiar portrait of one of the most well-known and frequently referenced female characters in the Western

canon. Focusing on the ways in which Medea's characteristics are enhanced through her supporting characters, setting, and timeline provides the ability to compare the diversity of these three modern American works not only against the original *Medea*, but also against each other. This analysis intends to demonstrate through the selection of these pieces, its presentation, and the structure of its observations what Linda Hutcheon calls, "an ongoing dialogical process . . . in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing" (21). In this case, any "comparisons" of the source text to the adapted works will be made merely as a way to reference character and as a way of identifying similarities and differences between the adapted narratives.

IV: Adaptation in Action: Practicing Perspectives

In contrast to Hutcheon and Sanders, who focus on the philosophical underpinnings of adaptation, playwright and director Matthew Spangler attends to the cultural politics associated with adaptation, specifically, the ways adaptations might speak back to the contexts in which they are presented. In his essay on the 2004 Bloomsday celebration in Dublin, Spangler describes the process of adaptation as a multi-cultural collaboration. Spangler is writing specifically about the process of "transforming a work of literature [as opposed to a play] from the page to the stage," and particularly about a performance of the "Aeolus" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* entitled *The Parable of the Plums* (47-67). Spangler outlines a central issue in adaptation:

Some argue that performances of literature should represent the text as literally as possible, while others argue that it is, in fact, more faithful to

represent the spirit of the text, even if that means changing some of its particularities. (47)

Spangler describes the ways in which an adaptation of this very famous and culturally important piece of Irish literature became a street performance, which “contained no spoken text, relied exclusively on music and dance, and was a collaborative effort in its construction” incorporated many cultures both native and new to Ireland, including prominent Asian and West African influences, and the use of elaborate puppets and large, choreographed dance numbers (47).

After an extensive description of the performance, Spangler’s article concludes with the observation that the production was both a unique and versatile way of using adaptation in a way which remains “faithful” to a source’s ideology (with a major focus on *Ulysses*’ “outsider” themes) while broadening its cultural scope for a changing audience (and a changing pool of participants), allowing for a multi-cultural appropriation of both text and identity through adaptation. Bringing outsider themes to the forefront of Irish performance practices is particularly significant, as Irish immigration policy in recent years has become increasingly restrictive. In an era in which, as Spangler argues, cultural tensions are high in Ireland and immigration/naturalization has become nearly impossible for some, this performance “invited people of color to participate in a theatrical representation of one of Ireland’s national literary treasures, and in so doing, implicitly conferred equal citizenship upon them at a time when many are struggling for equal rights” (67).

When writing about his own practices of adaptation, specifically about creating a version of T.C. Boyle’s novel *Tortilla Curtain* (1995) for the stage, Matthew Spangler

states he set out to:

[C]reate a performance that would engage . . . Questions [about issues of] power and politics central to courses in performance theory, cultural studies, and ethnography” [and the exploration of] the conceptual roots of some of the myths associated with undocumented migrants in the United States (154).

While the novel provides a wide and complex variety of stories and points of view about the Undocumented immigration to the US in the 1990s, its third person narrative and the wide cast of characters were not wholly transferrable to a 90 minute performance piece. In his article, Spangler outlines his personal process of the creation of a piece meant to retain the novel’s complex and multi-faceted dialogue on a major sociological issue in a playable format. Here, the intention was to maintain and uphold the central thematic messages of the text without adhering to every detail of its narrative structure.

The performance . . . becomes not so much an explication of the literary text, but rather an occasion for speaking back to the text and exploring, at least in this case, questions of identity, race, power, and privilege. (163)

The final product of the adaptation is not concerned only with being able to present its given narrative. Rather, the play and its structure are designed to bring up a host of contemporary issues found within, outside, and beyond the original text.

Spangler’s process did not include a literal fidelity to the original text, though he states one of his main concerns was being able to translate Boyle’s “description of landscape” as accurately as possible on the stage (162-163). The geography of Topanga canyon is a recurring metaphor in the novel. It functions as a literal dividing line between the economic, ethnic, and cultural divisions that are vital to *Tortilla Curtain’s* narrative. Spangler describes the ways in which the scenic design, with its photos and

video footage of the canyon projected onto the stage floor backdrop, served to highlight some of Boyle's descriptions, which could not be conveyed clearly through the changes in structure from novel to performance.

Spangler also describes some of the differences between the adaptation and the novel. These include reducing the number of main characters (that is, characters who significantly drive the novel's narrative progression) from four to three. Many of the supporting characters in the novel were combined into a single character in the play. Elements of the book's third person omniscient narration were replaced by the inclusion of many first person monologues intended to advance the story in a similar manner. Additionally, more Spanish was added to the dialogue than is present in the novel (162).

One of the more conspicuous differences in the adaptation is the change in the novel's ending. At the end of Boyle's novel, Cándido saves Delaney (his sometime antagonist) from a flood. In the play, however, it is Cándido's girlfriend América who ultimately rescues Delaney. Spangler addresses this decision in his article, explaining that by changing the ending, he "[gave] the character of América a more prominent role in the play's final sequence of events [in order] to achieve a more even balance among the three [main] characters on stage" (162). Ultimately, Spangler highlights the role that collaboration plays in many stages of the adaptive process, which allowed these changes to be used as effectively as possible, including input from actors, dramaturges, consultants, designers, and the director on the play's design elements, staging, and use of Spanish language.

Among the issues resulting from taking on a project of this nature and content was

the potential stigma associated with a White playwright's [re]presentation of the undocumented immigrant population in a white novelist's narrative. In short, the adaptor was wary of his work being perceived as "appropriating the trope of the undocumented migrant for the sake of entertainment" (163). Spangler sought to address and counteract this issue through a dialogical process of adaptation in which a wide range of artists from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds were able to collaborate and shape the finished product.

Where Spangler leans more towards a preservation of the political and ideological through adaptation, theater scholar and practitioner Mary Zimmerman's seeks to combine emotional engagement with the material and literal preservation of the text itself.

Zimmerman's article "The Archaeology of Performance" (2005) provides a deeply personal account of the author's own process of adapting classical literature for a modern American audience. Zimmerman describes the adaptive process as being entirely dependent upon two things: the pre-existing text and the adaptor's continuing impressions of it throughout the building process.

When I am devising a performance, the primary factor that determines what goes into the final show is undoubtedly the unconscious and conscious impulses of my own personality in dialogue with the original text: how I read its story, how I can best give that story a body, what I am drawn to, what I feel is beautiful, what formal considerations I value, what I am obsessed with. In other words, my own taste. (25)

Zimmerman goes on to describe the entire collaborative process of building her work from start (deciding on a work to adapt) to finish (the performance stage). This process includes interactions with the design team, the performance space and her cast, the description of her emotional responses at each stage of development, and an examination of how a dialogical engagement of these responses affects her creative process. She gives examples of some issues that arise from bringing works like these to

the stage, as:

. . . Poets, novelists, scientists, and anonymous tellers of ancient myths aren't the least concerned with whether or not what they describe can be realized in the stubbornly material world of the stage, nor with such niceties as unity of time and place. (26)

Zimmerman then addresses issues of reconciling personal artistic preference with a desire to be faithful to original source material by giving examples of regular structures she has found effective in adapting old literature for modern performance. These include constant input from her designers and cast, a reliance on monologues, casting actors in multiple roles (or in some cases casting multiple actors in one role), and finding themes to connect the structure of the story to the emotionality of the characters. Within her article, the author cites the multiple uses of water in her production of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a specific example of this process in action.

Water is apt for *Metamorphoses* not only because the culture that produced these stories was fundamentally maritime, but also because water is an ancient and cross-cultural symbol of transfiguration . . . The water in *Metamorphoses* . . . [can] easily slip into a manifestation of sloppy drunkenness, of grief and tears, of sexual excitement . . . The water itself [can] become a kind of eloquent text, alternately muted and voluble. (27)

Zimmerman's approach to the practice of adaptation is based on emotional response and symbolic fidelity to a source text – representing the ideas already contained within the work remains at the core of her adaptation and performance techniques. Like Spangler, her process relies heavily on an immersive and collaborative process of change. However, whereas Spangler leans more toward the political and/or the ideological preservation of narrative, Zimmerman's main focus lies with an emotional engagement of the material and literal preservation of the text in performance.

In her work in adaptation, Patricia Suchy combines Spangler's attention to the cultural politics of adaptation with Zimmerman's attention to personal detail and textual preservation. Suchy's article "A Complex Double Vision" (2001) is a personal account of her process of adapting and staging Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* as a performable work. The author frames the account from start to finish. She begins by describing her motives for choosing such a culturally significant work to adapt, and the research that went into finalizing the decision. Suchy states that choosing Ellison's novel was not done in the search for a "race project," but in part because of its realism, cultural, historical relatability, and its narrative style of "weav[ing] together diverse strands of oral culture and literary allusion" (146). Ultimately, Suchy wanted to create a performance about the engagement of these racial issues of "invisibility" through a "visible" engagement with multiethnic performers "willing to try a range of different significations [of identity]" (176). After extensive research on both Ellison and of the novel itself, Suchy describes shifting her focus to a contemporary observation of issues of ethnicity and identity among her own students at Louisiana State University. The author describes setting up her class syllabus for the following semester to address the issues and influences of/within the novel with her students and use the novel's material to engage their own contemporary views about culture and ethnicity. Suchy went on to use their creative engagement with the material (including team projects, short films, round-table discussions, and storyboards) in her adaptive process to tailor her adaptation to her performers, and the elements of the narrative that had affected them deeply throughout the class – both communally and as individuals.

The “finished” work (performed on the LSU campus in spring 1999) was meant to engage *The Invisible Man*’s themes of “invisibility” – in Ellison’s time and our own – and challenge them through a form of direct address. Suchy concludes her article by addressing the fact that work like hers and her students’ may not be considered “authentic” by those who consider a multicultural production of a novel on the early 20th century black experience to be an inaccurate representation of the novel’s themes.

Speaking to the validity of her (and her students’) finished work, she states:

[The] . . . performance suggested that the “invisibility” the audience must “look through” is in fact a densely configured, ambiguously metalinguistic collage, full of the sideshadows of performances past, capable of transformations in performances present. (177)

One of the important aspects of Suchy’s adaptation and its subsequent performance was to use past traditions of literature, performance style, and cultural relations to both recall and move beyond them. By creating a “visible” performance of “invisibility,” Suchy and her performers were able to create a new platform upon which to display issues of identity and ethnic relations in past and present terms.

Paul Edwards provides another valuable example of past-and-present adaptation techniques in his historical overview of one particular technique of adaptation: Chamber Theatre, which was developed in the US in the 1940s. Paul Edwards’ article “Staging Paradox: The Local Art of Adaptation” details the evolving culture of “making” adaptation at Chicago’s Northwestern University. He describes the culture of Chamber Theatre, referring to stylized staged readings of novels in which the narrative voice of the literature becomes central to the performance. Chamber Theatre began at Northwestern

with professor and theoretician Robert Breen in the 1940s. Edwards describes Breen's own approach to adaptation as:

. . . [N]ot a timeless theory or set of techniques, but a succession of diverse embodied practices, driven by desire and even desperate neediness. (233)

Chamber Theater was created and expanded as a way in which performer and spectator could "experience" literature through a creative and physicalized reiteration of the text.

The second half of the article describes the movement away from reliance on source text, or what some might consider performance at "the service of literature" (241). Edwards details examples of the ways theater-makers in recent years have tried to find the flexibility of text *through* adaptation and performance workshops, instead of trying to mold performance into a vehicle for text alone. Strategies to achieve this have included collaborative student workshops (similar to Suchy's) in which collaboration and a willingness to experiment with multiple interpretations and staging ideas of source texts and performance styles created what Njoki McElroy calls "avant-garde" staging of the adaptive process at work. Edwards interviews practitioners Frank Galati and Mary Zimmerman, both of whom describe the evolution in their creative processes. Though both began as "purist" adapters (for whom preserving the text was paramount), each describe changes in their modes of engagement with the text. These include condensing the plot to its essentials during adaptation, and rebuilding from there. Another strategy discussed is an adaptive focus on older oral texts – referring to sources based in the tradition of epic storytelling. The inclusion of performers and designers in the creative process of making the adaptation is also discussed positively by both practitioners – both find it engaging to be able to see their work in progress during its development.

Another detailed account of the use of adaptation as a dialogic/communal process and of adaptation as a means to address certain ideologies and cultural issues can be found in Derek Goldman's article on practicing the adaptive process through workshop performance. Goldman's "Ethnography and the Politics of Adaptation: Leon Forrest's *Divine Days*" (2001) gives a personal account of the 1998 performance of his adaptation of Leon Forrest's novel *Divine Days* (1992) (set in 1966, about a week in the life of fictional playwright Joubert Antoine Jones) at Northwestern University. The author describes his project as:

A field site for the multilayered processes of adaptation, especially as they involve the politics of identity and race in the context of cultural production within and among an overwhelmingly white institutional apparatus. (367)

Among the main conflicts discussed by Goldman were concerns over issues of racialization in the play, which was intended for a fairly large cast of mostly black actors. Much of the process of casting and workshopping the play involved getting many of the young people in the cast to open up about their own feelings of marginalization on the Northwestern campus and in the greater community as they explored those same issues within the play and the source material. In order to facilitate this process, Goldman designed the rehearsal process as a workshop built around their exploration, which culminated in their final performance. Ultimately, the collaborative and communal approach to adaptation led the playwright to

. . . [a deep appreciation] of adaptation, not only as an artistic practice but as a life process, as an extension of and corollary to ethnographic practice . . . a fundamental dimension of performance pedagogy . . . an embodied mode of critical engagement, [and] a laboratory for exploring questions of identity and race, textual fidelity and authority, and the operations of

power – both within and beyond a given text. (367)

Like Spangler, Suchy, and Zimmerman, Goldman's adaptation of Forrest's work relied on a dialogic process of creation among many contributors in order to be fully realized. His adaptation relied not only on the source material, but on others' engagement with it. The adaptive/performative process went hand-in-hand with a critical analysis of both Forrest's work, his own, and that of his collaborators.

V: Examining Medea

Each adaptation of *Medea* in this study possesses unique qualities that make it conducive to an analysis of adaptation that is not exclusively text or plot-based. None of the adaptations try to replicate the exact narrative of the original. Rather, each adaptation amplifies the dominant traits of their respective protagonists, allowing the traits themselves, and their narrative consequences, to become the central, guiding principle for each new work. This thesis will offer a new approach in the exploration of the ways in which the nuance of characterization affects each adaptation as a whole.

The strategy of adaptation employed here is distinct from those discussed above in a variety of ways. First, it will analyze the Medea character and the adaptations from a purely textual standpoint. Many of the personal accounts described here discuss the process of creating adaptation, and the effects of that active creation on the finished work. This study, however, analyzes each work as its own written text. Any performative elements discussed in relation to these three plays will be implied or explicitly stated by the written text itself. Additionally, it will not analyze the textual similarity of the

adaptations to Euripides' text, as Spangler, for instance, does in his discussion of the novel and play versions of *Tortilla Curtain*. Any comparisons made between source and adaptation will be made in relation to the Medea character and her personal narrative.

The adaptations chosen for this study were selected in part because they employ very different storytelling styles and character profiles, but still manage to have very similar outcomes. Rather than focus on strictly political, allusive, cultural, or "faithful" adaptations of the *Medea* story, I attempted to find and study a cross-section of contemporary American adaptations, written by adaptors with disparate styles, agendas, and (perhaps most importantly) ideas about who or what Medea should be, and about the world she must inhabit. A character-based approach to the study of adaptation will support any findings about the ways in which the protagonist's dominant personality traits contribute to the tone of the work as a whole, including close viewings of the ways in which setting, stage direction, dialogue, or other contextual clues enhance the traits that create a case for of a character-driven mode of engaging adaptation.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Throughout all of the adaptations in this study, few supporting characters exist as a means to soften or alter Medea's image through exchanges of dialogue or action. In the source work, Medea's absence of support makes sense within the world of the play and within the larger context of Greek drama as a whole. In the source work, the chorus is a constant and mostly positive presence within Medea's world, although they do not have the authority to insert themselves to the degree that characters like Aegius or Creon do. The times at which they address Medea personally, and vice versa, exist only for certain points of view or moral dilemmas to be brought to the surface. The dramatic appeal of the chorus is not for Medea's sense of feeling, but for the audience's. While Medea herself is a moral enigma, they remain the moral compass of the action. Other named characters like the tutor and the nurse lack the leverage to appeal directly to Medea on personal levels. They exist to provide exposition and context, not necessarily as an emotional outlet for the main character.

A lack of influence or intimacy is not an unusual thing between characters within the world of Greek tragedy. However, in adapting plots and characters for a modern sensibility and a contemporary audience, certain characters in Greek tragedies may appear strangely isolated, and certain narrative archetypes in Greek drama, like the chorus, can appear extraneous. All three of the adaptations use characters in ways that serve to highlight Medea's difficulty maintaining social interactions with other characters within the plays.

In Euripides' work, the arc of Medea's actions are spurred by the fact that she has few options left to ensure her successful survival and she uses several emotional tactics to do so. By calling upon many traits she has amassed from her past experiences, she is able to determine the course of action most likely to give her a second chance at control and to inflict the most damage on those she views as having betrayed or endangered her. Her tactics are defensive but strategically made. Although arguments are made for and against Medea and her methods by characters with whom she engages on any emotional level (like the chorus, Creon, and Jason), the final choices are hers alone to make. The supporting characters may agree or disagree with her determinations, but they ultimately must accept them once she begins to execute her plans. In each version of the adaptation, certain characters that are pivotal to the outcome of the original work are shifted from their original functions, combined into one character, or omitted altogether. Important examples of this device within the works include the insertion of a supportive grandmother figure in *Pecong*, a romantic female partner and an older son replacing some of the male influences in *The Hungry Woman*, and *Medea Redux*'s total exclusion of all supporting characters from the play, resulting in a version of the story that does not use anyone except the title character to frame the arc of the narrative.

I: The Aegius Problem

In order to amplify Medea's nature as an outsider who has very little support or understanding from the other characters, all three of these works omit a male savior role from their narratives. In the original work, the arrival of Aegius into the narrative

provides Medea with a valuable character-building opportunity. From Aegius, she wants what she could never fully achieve from her relationship with Jason – the opportunity to begin a life with a man on an equal footing. Aegius is a unique character in the original play, not only in the way he attempts to demonstrate his authority (a trait all male characters share), but in the way he tempers it, and the manner in which Medea responds to it during their single exchange. Aegius does not attempt to use force in his exchanges with Medea. He does not arrive onstage already filled with fear or suspicion of her character. Instead, he greets her warmly, addressing her as a friend, and so she acts accordingly, returning the kind address, but also making no effort to disguise her sadness and anger over her situation.

With Aegius, the role of the helper is played reciprocally, and is spurred not only by good nature, but from positions of mutual need. Aegius is concerned for Medea's well-being, and has the power to do something about her situation. He eventually makes her an offer to hold an honored place in his household, serving as a contrast to the men of Corinth who find her a dangerous nuisance. He wants Medea precisely because of who she is and what she represents to his interests. He is intrigued by her cleverness and known skills as a caretaker and a healer. The acceptance she asks for, and which he gives, comes in the form of an exchange – her livelihood for his. She says:

By all that's honorable and wise in you,
You who recognize the shameful wrongs I've endured,
Save me from friendless exile.
I need refuge in your country, protection in your home.
Do this, and the gods will give you children.
(Euripides 59)

Both characters need the authority of the other in order to prosper and escape their mutual situations. Medea knows this, and she knows that there are limits to Aegius' kindness and to his understanding of her situation. He is not concerned with her children, or Jason, and so Medea does not press those issues. She asks only for her own refuge, not her sons.' Nor does she ask for any help getting revenge on Jason. These are not issues he needs to understand in order to fulfill his function to her. The exchange with him enables Medea to emphasize her sensitivity, her sense of philanthropy, and a sought-after talent for providing the care and nurturing she no longer has the opportunity to give to her neighbors or her children, as well as an effective setup for the emotional reversal to come. After the connection is made, Medea's concerns with maintaining her home and keeping her children become too disadvantageous to maintain. At that point, it becomes easier for her to put this softer part of her personality aside, cut her loose ends, and complete her vengeance against Jason before she begins the next phase of her life with Aegius in Athens.

II: *Pecong*

Pecong has no Aegius character. Instead, the play adds several characters: among them Mediyah's brother Cedric, Creon's daughter Bella Pandit, and Persis and Faustina, two townswomen who fulfill some of the choral responsibilities within the narrative. The play establishes Medea's outsider nature by immediately introducing a new character into the narrative in the role of Medea's maternal grandmother: the witch doctor Granny Root. While Granny Root is sometimes purposed as a chorus-like voice,

her primary function is to establish Medea's depth of passion, her knowledge of black arts, and her capability for acts of physical violence. The only time the audience sees Granny Root alive is in the play's first scene, as she encourages Mediyah to assist her in her own death ritual. In the play's prologue, Granny Root wakes a reluctant Mediyah for a discussion about Granny's impending death. As the scene progresses, it becomes clearer to the spectator that Mediyah is expected to play a role in the final ritual, and that she does not wish to, but is being compelled to do so. After they say their goodbyes, Granny Root urges a still frightened Mediyah to complete her final part in the death rite. The play's stage directions are particularly detailed in this regard (any italics are written as they occur in the source texts).

Mediyah screams and plunges her hand into Granny Root's chest and pulls out her pulsating heart. She wraps it in a large leaf as Granny Root falls back, lifeless, in her chair. Mediyah sinks to the ground at her grandmother's feet. (5)

Establishing both a sense of unusual dedication and an unusual adeptness for physical acts of destruction in the play's early moments shows that Mediyah is capable of extraordinary acts of superhuman brutality, even against those close to her, provided she feels the cause is justified. In this case, the ritual killing of her grandmother when her time had come was not an act of malice or torture, but one of love and devotion. In assisting with this ritual, Mediyah was not only easing Granny Root's earthly pain and showing a sense of duty and respect, but ensuring a strengthening of her own powers, and sealing an emotional bond between grandmother and granddaughter. Granny Root's earthly death provides an opportunity for her to return to the world of the play in the form of a spirit only Mediyah and the audience can see and hear, adding another layer of

depth to her decisions through an encouragement of the displays of violent and reactive personality traits that distinguish this Medea character from those in the other adaptations. For the remainder of the play, Granny Root exists both as a choral function and as an extension of Mediyah's own psyche.

Mediyah's closeness to her grandmother also serves as a marked contrast to her relationship with the rest of the community of Trankey Island. It is made clear through the way other characters speak about her when she is not there that she is an unwelcome (at best) and feared (at worst) presence on the island. This is implied to be mostly because of her unpleasant temper and lack of social skills, but the feeling is enhanced for those upon whom she uses her magic powers for her own amusement. This vindictiveness is already an established fact within the world of the play, and continues to put Mediyah at odds with her community. She plays on their fears like a predator, enjoying their reactions to her displays of power. The first clear instance of this in the text occurs in the first exchange between Mediyah and the townswomen Persis and Faustina after she appears as they are talking about her. When the two women begin to engage Mediyah in conversation, they act immediately as if they fear a disagreement and struggle to stay in her good graces by agreeing with her statements, no matter how mundane they may seem:

PERSIS: Hello, Mediyah. Where you a go on this hot day?

MEDIYAH: Ah? The day feel hot to you? It feel cool to me.

PERSIS: I notice that. It cool, yet it hot! (18)

However, Mediyah is not interested in any overtures of friendship. She takes full advantage of their apprehension and confirms that she overheard the two women's conversation. In a show of superiority, she mocks Faustina by putting a spell on her forbidding her to speak or move temporarily, a harmless, but extremely frightening

spell, which Mediyah takes much glee in revealing. As Persis looks on and Faustina remains trapped by the spell, Mediyah takes the opportunity to frighten them further, implying that what she has done to Faustina is nothing compared to what she *could* do if she were truly angry.

[Faustina] so light in substance, all I need is me thought, alone, to send she to oblivion if me want. She could hear me, it true, but I feel you should tell she. That way, we make sure you know it, too . . . (20)

As Mediyah leaves them, she tells the women how to reverse the spell, but does not reverse it herself. This is an indication of both her disdain and general lack of regard for the feelings of others and a foreshadowing of the glee she is capable of taking in the fear and suffering of people she perceives as being against her and her interests.

Mediyah's deeper and more personal emotions are largely concealed from the supporting characters. The exception to this rule occurs during the evolution of her relationship with Jason, which begins a third of the way through the narrative. Initially, her feelings for Jason are based on the novelty she experiences from their physical attraction and his sexual desire for her. Her curiosity at finding him and the novelty of interacting with someone who does not already fear her by reputation adds to the confusion she feels about receiving the attentions of a handsome man. Jason is not only grateful to her for saving his life, but he introduces the element of sexuality into her personality, amplifying some emotions and weakening others. His unbridled sexuality and lack of fear is a big change for her, but she begins to embrace him as she becomes more invested in her new relationship. For a short time she enjoys using her powers to

nurture in exchange for some positive attention.

As this emotional connection grows stronger, her powers and strength of will diminish as she becomes more and more dependent on Jason for her own emotional satisfaction. By the time she becomes pregnant with Jason's children, her baser desires and basic self-centeredness have been replaced with a need to maintain her new family unit. When they are forced to return to Trankey Island and Jason falls in love with Bella Pandit, Mediyah, the predator, returns in force, acting purely on vengeance, instinct, and self-preservation. With the encouragement of Granny's spirit, she makes an appeal to the gods for the return of her power – and her hatred.

In her prayer, Mediyah asks for the restoration of her former personality and the amplification of those traits that have made her a source of fear and mystery for so long. She also asks to be stripped entirely of the qualities she believes are responsible for the pain and sadness she feels over Jason's abandonment.

Come to me and make me harder. Steel me! God of Thunder, speak in your most angry temper! God of Lightning, wreak you havoc and illuminate the darkest hour with you blindin' power! God of Wind, be extreme in you violence and blow the path of gentility to Hell. God of Cold, plant icy river in me heart. God of Hell, attend me! Sun, Moon, Star, hide you face and let through the God of Vengeance . . . Fill me with hate and let that hate never depart! God of Vengeance, stay with me forever! God of Hate, stay with me forever! (100)

The revelation at the end of the play - that Mediyah is literally the spawn of the voodoo demon Damballah - eliminates the need for any character to arrive and save her from a dismal fate. By now it has been revealed that Mediyah does not need help or direction from anyone. Reliance on a mortal person diminishes her power. By the play's final scene, Mediyah has learned that in order to transcend her fallibility, she must

embrace the monster inside her and abandon her humanity altogether. Granny explains Mediyah's origins only after she has successfully eliminated Creon, his daughter Bella, and Cedric (who was Creon's illegitimate son), thereby eliminating Creon's bloodline forever.

When you mother come to me and say she power gone. She beg me not to damn he, for she so love he, this Creon. But Granny Root pray and Granny Root do. Spirit appear . . . and, out come . . . you! You . . . all Granny Root perception. You. . .all spiritual conception. You. . .all Granny Root revenge. You . . . all Granny Root say you was and . . . that all you was. (114)

Ultimately, there is nothing human left about Mediyah by the play's conclusion.

Everything she loved, she has destroyed, and any humanity she had goes along with it. In order for the character to reach her full potential of power, she sheds all impulses of love, pity and empathy for her fellow man. In doing so, she literally abandons her human self and becomes the embodiment of a literal spirit of vengeance.

III: *The Hungry Woman*

Similar to *Pecong*, *The Hungry Woman* uses a distinctive setting for its world.

While the action of the play takes place in "contemporary" time and in what is revealed to be Phoenix, Arizona, the characters exist within an alternative timeline from that of the spectator. In the play's world, ethnic warfare has resulted in the self-segregation of different American cultures and lifestyles into distinct nations, from which most citizens cannot stray. Medea, for instance, is unable to leave Phoenix because of her romantic relationship with a woman. The adaptation strategy of *Hungry Woman* establishes Medea as a character of intense emotional variety, and as the most sensual of the

three protagonists under consideration. The Jason character is present in a form similar to the original source, although his expanded position of authority in *Hungry Woman* serves, at times, to replace the functions of a Creon character.

The addition of the character Luna as Medea's current (and female) romantic companion is a synthesis between a secondary Jason character and an emotionally supportive but much less powerful Aegius-like presence in Medea's life. However, unlike Aegius, Luna has no real abilities to solve Medea's problems on either a physical or emotional level – throughout the play, their relationship is in a constant state of emotional flux. Both Medea and Luna act as parents to thirteen-year-old Chac-Mool, whose expanded role in this adaptation creates new emotional avenues for the protagonist. Their tense interactions and the concerns over his coming of age create the beginnings of a third Medea-Jason relationship within the text while still highlighting Medea's concerns over her role as a mother attempting to reconcile what is best for her child with her own desires. From Luna, Medea wants a relationship that stems from love and lust together – she wants to remain Luna's object of fixation. She sees Luna's adoration as a source of pride, of loyalty, and as a source of power for both of them. It is insinuated that in a past time, she saw in Luna's attraction the same escape into her own personal power that Euripides' Medea saw in the initial meeting with the younger Jason and later in the advances of Aegius. Over time, the dynamics of the relationship have changed and they both feel trapped. Luna may have entered Medea's life as an Aegius figure, but it becomes clear in the text that in Medea's mind, Luna is quickly becoming another Jason.

When Medea and Luna first got together, the relationship was a source of emotional empowerment and security for the both of them. Medea was able to leave a relationship in which she felt inferior and be with someone who loved her for her strengths as a female. However, by the time in which the play is set, Medea's inner strength has been broken down by new insecurities and feelings of inadequacy. This has changed the dynamic between her and Luna. Although they still love each other, they now resent each other as well and they are falling into unhealthy and volatile patterns.

MEDEA (*Grabbing Luna*): Don't you give up on me. ¿M'oyes?

LUNA (*Breaking her hold*): I'm getting out of here.

MEDEA: Where to? To see one of your "girlfriends"?

LUNA: Yes, to tell you the truth I miss them a lot right now. Just thought I'd drink a coupla beers with some plain ole unequivocal tortilleras.

MEDEA: Fight for me—for me, cabrona. You're worse than a man.

LUNA: You oughta know. (35)

By this point in the narrative, Luna is frustrated by Medea's suspicions of infidelity and angry at her seeming lack of motivation to save the relationship. Medea's suspicions and feelings of inadequacy remove the sensations of equality and safety she once shared with Luna, making her seem weaker and motivating her own comparisons of her current (female) partner to her former (male) one. Adding to the emotional strain is the changing bond between them and Medea's son by Jason, whom Luna has helped raise for a decade and also considers a son. Though Medea and Luna cannot have any children of their own, Chac-Mool has become, over time, the center of their relationship. His imminent departure into the land of the mainstream becomes as much a threat to Medea's relationship with Luna as it does with Jason or himself.

When the audience is introduced to Medea during the prologue, her self-control

and sense of reality have been in decline for some time. She is an inpatient at a mental hospital, haunted by her past actions and worried about what is to come.

Although the story of her exile and escape is similar to the Euripides narrative, the Medea of *Hungry Woman* no longer has the inner drive for survival and success that the original uses to escape her predicament. The events of the play's arc are spurred by her growing depression, desperation, a loss of identity, and a fear of the unknown. Confined to her room in the hospital, she slips in and out of reality and waits for some relief from her confusion and guilt over what she has done. The memories that compose the arc of the narrative are made up of the events leading to her imprisonment, described by her as "the ghosts of [her own pathetic girlhood]" (2). Throughout the course of events in the play, Medea appears depressed, surly, unhappy with her life at home, unable to function well outside in the world, and dependent on alcohol. She is bitter about the past, yet unable to let it go, afraid of the future. She frequently lashes out at those who for many years have made up her innermost emotional circle. When pressed for the answers or explanations to questions about her life and her decisions, she will not or cannot fully explain herself, and she retreats into sullen defiance. Medea often seems unsure of how she feels, resulting in mood swings during her exchanges with other characters. One example is this exchange between Medea and her teenage son, which occurs after he reveals that he plans on returning to Aztlan with his father. Though for him, it is a chance to discover more about his own identity, Medea takes it as a personal betrayal:

MEDEA: . . . Go pack your bags.

CHAC-MOOL: I don't wanna leave you like this.

MEDEA: Now, that's a line I've heard before. But they leave you anyway, don't they? The line-givers.

CHAC-MOOL: It's not a line.

MEDEA: They're all lines, mijito. Rehearsed generations in advance and transmitted into your little male DNA.

CHAC-MOOL: Why you turning on me, Mom?

MEDEA: I think that's the question I have to ask you. (95)

This exchange is in direct contrast to the next one between mother and son. After this argument, Medea begins to appreciate the reality of her son's departure. Her resentment of men - particularly Jason - her fear of rejection and her panic over the perceived suddenness of this change in Chac-Mool cause her to act impulsively. Medea soon comes to the conclusion that the only way to prevent Chac-Mool from returning to Aztlan and rejecting her is to kill him before he has a chance to leave. Once the decision is made, her feelings of tenderness towards him return. Since she is to ensure that he will never grow to become a man, she can return to seeing him as her little boy. As Medea kills him, the need to nurture, and to maintain the old bond, returns:

(Medea takes Chac-Mool into her arms. She rocks him, singing:)

Duérmete mi niño

Duérmete mi sol

Duérmete pedazo de mi corazón. My sleeping little angel. (104)

Throughout this adaptation, Medea's feelings about her life and those with whom she associates are at in a state of transition, resulting in a deeply emotionally charged and reflexive character. Unlike the more emotionally direct and physical Mediyah of *Pecong*, the Medea of *The Hungry Woman* wavers between pushing people away and pining for deep emotional connections. Unlike Euripides' Medea, who responds defensively to circumstances initially beyond her control, this character's emotional volatility creates obstacles from the inside-out. In this case, the result is Medea's obsessive belief that the only way for her to overcome her sense of self-imposed

alienation is to eliminate the personal relationships she believes to be at the root of her crisis. Rather than being able to call upon or abandon certain traits when needed, the Medea of *Hungry Woman* is ultimately portrayed through her relationships as another victim of her emotionality, rather than its manipulator.

III: *Medea Redux*

Medea Redux is written for only one actress. The play takes place as the title character looks back at the events that put her where she is for the play's duration – a holding cell. At once a confession and a retrospective, the play's structure leaves Medea with the responsibility to tell not only her own story, but requires her to possess the narrative capability to tell the stories of the other characters from her past. This demands a personality very distinct from the other Medea iterations. In this case, she is not required to defend herself or retaliate against anyone; she must simply relate a series of events as they transpired. Throughout the play's one scene, the only other characters discussed in any detail are Jason and Billie, their son.

Medea's control of the story takes the very literal form of a first person narrative. Although the young woman telling the story is clearly trying to provide a thorough and measured statement of events, the audience never hears from these other characters directly. Medea's lack of interaction with other characters serves to accentuate her self-awareness. She has the responsibility of attempting to present everyone else's point of view as well as her own. Whether that attempt is successful or not is not as important to the story as the fact that, in her efforts to be detailed, she attempts to tell her unseen

audience why it happened, not just how it felt.

The Medeas in the other adaptations have other characters to interact with that serve to add dimension to their stories. Whether or not these Medeas feel conflicted about their choices, they have the freedom to imagine themselves as the victims, or the heroes of their own stories and allow those perceptions and their responses to envelop part of their emotional makeup. Rather than present a rigidly one-sided story about all the ways in which she has been jilted and wronged by life, Medea in *Medea Redux* maintains a remarkably detached attitude from the events she describes. Some of the first lines of the play reflect this mindset:

. . . it's interesting, you know, how things'll work out. Well, not "out" not so much that as maybe just "through." Right? Things get worked through . . . or work themselves through. We probably don't have all that much to do with it. We like to think we do, though, right? (74)

This is not a woman who blames others for her actions. However, throughout the work, the audience also gets the sense that she does not hold herself fully responsible for her crime, either.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF SETTING AND CONTEXT

A second adaptation strategy used in the establishment of each Medea's distinct personality concerns the narrative world of the play. Each version contains a set of external circumstances that the characters support. The ways in which each Medea character builds, conforms to, or bucks against this narrative world act as theatrical enhancements to her characterization in several ways. The time period, geographical location, and/or other distinctive contextual details within each narrative world are important to the formation of the protagonist within the world itself, her attitude toward it, and her function within it.

I: *Pecong*

A primary factor in establishing Mediyah's place within *Pecong's* narrative world is the people of Trankey Island's genuine belief in and practice of black magic. It is a strongly established part of Mediyah's identity from the beginning, as the play opens with her participation in a lethal voodoo ritual—her Grandmother's death. It is further established that these beliefs are shared within the community at large. At least a few of the island's other inhabitants possess some experience and ability with mysticism, including Faustina, who is frequently seen consulting a set of Granny Root's old tarot cards throughout the play. Though not nearly as powerful as Mediyah, Faustina's predictions are frequently true, even when none of the characters - including Faustina - realize it. Within this setting, Mediyah is feared largely because her ability to harness this black magic is real and powerful. Her abilities as a sorceress define her identity within

her community. The fact that she chooses to use them vindictively serves to define a somewhat heartless aspect of her personality to the audience.

When Mediyah falls in love with Jason, she loses her ability to harness that magic. Her loss of a physical control - manifested by a loss of magic ability and a relinquishing of her sense of authority to cater to Jason's desires - has two main effects on her character. Outwardly, it causes her to appear kinder and more polite to the suspicious townspeople than she otherwise would. Inwardly, it causes her to sink into a private depression, putting a strain on her still-new relationship with Jason and reducing his attraction to and dependence upon her. When she discovers that he plans to leave her for Bella Pandit, the hate and betrayal she feels restores her control of the occult (with ample encouragement from the spirit of Granny Root) and the audience learns that it is her animosity towards the world she inhabits that has been the source of her powers all along. Once Mediyah regains control of her otherworldly faculties, she is able to use her powers to manipulate characters within her community who have mistaken her new feelings of weakness for a genuine change of personality. For instance, Persis and Faustina now feel pity for her, and with her restored powers and renewed vindictiveness, she is able to use them as vessels for her revenge by bewitching them and forcing them to deliver poisoned clothing to Jason's new wife and her own dead children to Jason.

Her physical disappearance in the penultimate scene, along with the implication that she has fully transformed into a spirit state, continues to enforce the importance of the reality of magic within the text. Granny Root reveals at that moment that Mediyah was herself the product of a voodoo ritual, made for the destruction of mankind (and of

Creon's line in particular) through the perfection of her sorcery and natural inclination to hate and distrust others. The final scene between the townspeople put the final emphasis on their acceptance of otherworldly influences within their community as those affected by the action of the play accept the outcome of Mediyah's wrath and the discovery of her origins and return to their daily lives, despite all that has been lost under her destructive influence.

In the play's epilogue, Persis and Faustina are met onstage by "a group of revelers, stragglers from Carnival . . . still dancing and swilling from rumpots . . . drunkenly trying to keep the spirit going" (115). Though they do not attempt to explain what has just happened, they chide the partiers for their behavior, saying it is inappropriate, and encouraging "all you 'semble here to low you eye and be austere. Go home! Go home!" (115). While the direct context of the play refers only to the stragglers onstage, the larger meaning implied by these words is a message to the spectator. The viewer is encouraged to move beyond the display of evil they have just witnessed and resume their normal lives, free of Mediyah's influence and the threat of black magic – just as they will do.

Another subset of the magical element that enforces Mediyah's strong ties to the otherworldly, as well as her role within the town as an outsider, is the existence of Miedo Wood Island, specifically Mediyah's ability to come and go from there as she pleases. It is established in the prologue as a place that is uninhabitable and dangerous. Even Mediyah fears it initially, but she is encouraged by the near-death Granny Root to go and bury her there. Granny assures her that the magic that protected her from the

dangers of the island has now been passed on to Mediyah. It is further revealed in this exchange that the women in the family (including Mediyah's mother before her) have inherited this protection through bloodline and sorcery.

GRANNY ROOT: Mediyah! You Queen now. No place hold badness for you. You born on Miedo Wood Island like you mother before you and me. You have nothing to fear! You the Queen of Miedo Wood Island. It belong to you, now. Nothing touch you! (4)

The existence of this place and the significance of Mediyah's ability to travel into it unharmed isolates the character further from her society on Trankey Island. It is a place that requires her specific skills and make-up in order to survive within it. When she finds a shipwrecked Jason dying there, her skills in magic are required in order to keep him alive. Once Mediyah develops deeper feelings for Jason than lust and loses her aloofness, neither of them is safe on the island, as her greatly diminished powers no longer protect them from the island's otherworldly dangers.

Her return to Trankey Island also comes with a temporary change in personality. Mediyah is no longer so cruel or so selfish, though she is still secretive, keeping Jason's existence a secret even as she buys him clothes and sets up house for him as she prepares for the birth of his twins. Because she is so focused on Jason and his needs rather than her own, she shows less concern about the whispers and suspicions of the town's inhabitants. This change serves as a metaphor within the play's narrative of her diminished powers and dulled instincts. Rather than a woman who has undergone a real change of heart about the other people within her community, Mediyah's behavior is similar to that of a tranquilized animal. When she learns of Jason's love of another woman on the eve of her childbirth, the love effect wears off, her natural traits and

powers return, allowing her to carry out her revenge with effectiveness and without hesitation.

II: *The Hungry Woman*

In *The Hungry Woman*, like in *Pecong*, Medea is viewed as an outsider by her society and by the population at large, particularly by Jason and other natives of Aztlan – her former homeland. However, in this case, the separation is more literal. The world of the play is established as one in which “ethnic civil war has ‘balkanized’ the United States [and] Medea, her lover Luna and Medea's child Chac-Mool have been exiled to what remains of Phoenix, Arizona.” (2)

Medea has accepted the embarrassing dissolution of her marriage and exile from a mainstream society, in which her position as a member of the fight for cultural preservation and her indigenous Mexican roots gave her some authority, in order to be in a loving, stable relationship with a woman. This act demonstrates Medea’s willingness to be led by her emotions. She has invested a lot of effort into seeking stability through the love and acceptance of others, first with Jason, and then with Luna. However, in contrast to *Pecong*, this character’s control of her situation is tied to her ability to love and be loved, and to accept and be accepted. By accepting exile, Medea made the move to a less stable and much smaller society. It is established within the text that she is not wholly welcome in that community either because she has not always been an “other,” but has chosen to be one voluntarily for Luna. When the bond between she and Luna begins to cool, and her son begins to grow up and show independence, she becomes an even more

isolated presence. Her growing paranoia about abandonment and her transference of her own self-loathing onto others feed into her close relationships, making intimacy unattainable, but separation impossible. She may no longer like Luna or Chac-Mool, and they may not like her, but she cannot let them go. Likewise, Jason's return to her life for the sole purpose of removing their son to Aztlan, (where he will receive civil rights and opportunities which are denied to the people of Phoenix who are "different") weighs heavily on her. The fact that he may return at will to the community Medea no longer has add to her desolation and her obsessive need to restore a sense of intimacy and importance to her life. The threat of losing everything upon which she has built her emotional base fosters the character's deep depression, protectiveness, and a tendency to both romanticize and blame the past for her current state.

Medea's emotional ties to her sense of isolation play strongly into the character's decision to kill, and to her eventual incarceration. Her confinement to a mental institution is the most literal and final form of isolation within the narrative. In the moments when Medea is conscious of her present and her surroundings, she is at her most lonely and despondent. This is not solely because she has lost her freedom, but because in those moments of lucid reflection, she is haunted by the people and the love she has lost as a result of her actions. However, within her confinement, Medea is able to live much of the time through her imagination, her memories, and through another defining character trait, her strong connection to her cultural mythology.

The Hungry Woman ties up much of the character's identities in their cultural heritage. Within the culturally divided country of the play, it was Medea's Chicana roots

that gave the mestizo Jason a more “legitimate” authority within their ethnically driven Aztlan community. Part of her original dissatisfaction with him stemmed from the fact that she felt more like a token or a trophy than a partner – she suspected he had chosen her to aid his advancement, not out of love. Once she is exiled, preserving her links to her culture continue to be an important part of her identity, although in Phoenix, in the world of the play, teaching the myths and practices of “old-world” Mexican culture is against the law. Part of Medea’s emotional conflict arises from her son Chac-Mool’s renewed interest in his national culture as he nears his thirteenth birthday – the age of decision. When he comes of age, he will decide whether or not to return to the country Medea left behind, and will be able to participate in cultural practices Medea no longer has the right to observe freely. When he asks for information about their old home, she is aware that helping him would bring them closer together and create a new bond between them, keeping him close to her emotionally. However, she refuses, thinking that the more he learns about the culture he was taken from, the more he will want to return, and she will lose him physically. The cultural conflict between Medea and Chac-Mool not only feeds her desire to keep people from leaving her, leading to her ultimate decision to kill her son, but to a renewed association of her identity with that of Coatlicue, Aztec goddess of earth, birth, and destruction, and of the Chituateo, goddesses of crossroads, mothers, and warriors who die in battle.

Medea frequently believes herself to be in communication with these gods, and appeals to them, somewhat like Mediyah of *Pecong*, to help them in her conflict against Jason, however, rather than a prayer for a lack of emotion, or a singular set of emotions,

this Medea prays for more emotional freedom, using many conflicting terms to describe the emotions she wants to feel. She makes reference to a desire for Jason's to be helpless "within the folds of her serpent skin," indicative of her belief in the similarities between herself and Coatlicue, who is frequently depicted as half-snake, half woman (54). In her frequent prayers, she often compares her own issues to that of the gods and goddesses, and likens the issues in their myths to her own inner turmoil and asks them for traits like theirs to steel herself against her crises of identity. In her appeals, she consistently asks for qualities which seem to contradict themselves or are unlikely pairings, like "sweet fury," "seductive magic," and "beauty and rage" (54).

When her appeals (at first sexual and then vindictive) to Jason are denied, and it is clear that her control over Chac-Mool can extend no further, she turns again to the gods. Right before she commits the murder of her son, she prays again to Coatlicue, both asking both for the permission and the strength to kill her son and alternating between a reproach to them that she has been made to take this step and a bid for forgiveness for what she is about to do. In her prayer that precedes Chac-Mool's murder, Medea refers to the act as her "holy sacrifice" (102). In the prayer, she also reveals that the motive for her murder is not one of revenge or rage – she considers giving up her son a substitution for her own life, revealing that she would have liked to have remained in Aztlan and died in the effort to protect her culture, or in childbirth, "prefer[ring] to [have] die[d] a warrior woman/like the Cihuatateo" (102). However, Aztlan is no longer a place in which she is welcome. Since she has lost the ability to connect with the people close to her, offering her son as a sacrifice rather than relinquish him to her "enemies" outside of Phoenix gives

her the illusion of a higher purpose and a stronger connection to her spiritual roots. It is a coping mechanism to help her feel less adrift and more at peace with her decision to kill as a way to exert control.

The final prayer Medea makes to Coatlicue is offered as her son is dying in her arms. This time, rather than a lament or an appeal, it is an accusation, as if Medea is now blaming the Gods for giving her what she asked for. Although she has the strength to commit the murder of Chac-Mool, the completion of the act does not bring the emotional and spiritual equilibrium Medea wanted. As a result, she now views the killing as an act of “betrayal” – not only her betrayal of her son, but Coatlicue’s betrayal of her (106). Medea’s fervent belief that these ancient deities of her past will bring her the peace she has so long been seeking amplifies her internal conflict, now somewhat externalized by the disgust, guilt and shock she now feels at having actually killed her own child. Rather than assume the responsibility for the action, she puts the blame for her decision on the gods for having created a world in which this kind of conflict is possible. The “war” to which she refers is not the war between the sexes, or cultures, or between Medea and other characters, but between the character’s own insecurities and the strength of her resolve. The creation of a narrative world in which Medea ties her own conflicts to the story of a larger cultural mythology enables a stronger tie between her despondency over the loss of her cultural practices and the dissolution of her personal life. Without one, she must have the other. *The Hungry Woman* allows the spectator to see the way the character’s slow loss of identity plays into her emotional volatility and confusion. The consequences of her actions and the motivations behind them are the results of the loss

and attempted recovery of her personal and cultural relationships.

III: *Medea Redux*

Though all the adaptations employ similar tactics in order to make the Medeas seem physically and emotionally isolated from the larger narrative world, *Medea Redux* commits to this separation to an extreme degree. Before the action of the play even begins, Medea's isolation is brought to the forefront in the establishment of setting:

silence. darkness.

a woman sits alone in a chair at an institutional-style table. a harsh light hangs down directly overhead. a tape player, water carafe and cup, cigarettes, and an ashtray are close at hand.
woman finishes a cigarette, stubs it out, and slowly begins to speak. (73)

One contextual factor that helps establish this Medea's emotional identity right away is the obviousness of her incarceration to the spectator. Another element that appears in the first moments of the play's action and repeats throughout Medea's dialogue is the allowance of an obvious passage of time in which there is no "playable" action onstage. As it is, there is no action in the play except Medea's detailed, seated confession to the audience. The pauses in dialogue are hers to control and are indicative of her moments of reflection. She alone has the responsibility of telling the story of several people. Though she has had fourteen years to think the story over (the length of time from her first encounter with Jason to the murder), she has never told any of it aloud and she wants to get it right.

This device creates a perpetually clear-headed, composed, and almost eerily calm character, prepared to relay her life story in vivid detail. She voluntarily assumes the

responsibility of conveying not only her point of view, but others as well. Another contextual effect of the sedentary structure of the work is the sedateness of a confession that is by turns sad and disturbing. Though Medea has been through much trauma, nothing about her demeanor suggests agony, sadness, or duress. From a narrative standpoint, she has already reached catharsis. Medea has already felt the emotional highs and lows of the resulting events. Here she is finally able to take her time and reflect on things, carefully providing the details needed to determine the course the remainder of her life will take. The result of this effect is a Medea character that has fought a long time for control of her life, finally achieved it in a moment of violence, and is now content to relinquish it again.

Another aspect of the play's context that helps to define Medea's character is her repeated inability to remember a certain word. This pattern begins when she tries to recall it early on to help define how she feels. She claims it sums up her attitude about life and the choices she has ultimately had to make. It is a word she originally heard from Jason fourteen years ago, when he was her eighth grade teacher. The concept attributed to the word has been on her mind on and off for fourteen years. She is reminded of it again when Jason says it to her during their reunion together, right before she decides to kill her son. Finally, she remembers, and says it aloud – *adikia* - “the world out of balance.” Her search to remember the word during her confession is reflective of her struggle to achieve a balance in her life after the affair with Jason leaves her pregnant. She continues to love him, but he no longer loves her. She struggles through life and raises their son alone while keeping his identity and actions a secret. He has been

allowed to continue to live happily without fear of the consequences of his actions as a result.

Medea reveals during her confession that she has kept her secrets because she loved both her son and Jason deeply and for years the memory of that love has been enough:

that's how it happened. a few presents now and again, and he had a son, and the son's mother loved him, and kept the secret all while the father was away. and i know you'll just think i'm talking shit now, but honestly, if i closed my eyes and thought about it, i could still feel his kiss on my lips. even then . . . (86)

However, something changes in Medea's mentality during their face-to-face reunion. Suddenly, her feelings of love are no longer enough to sustain the massive inequality of their separate lives. He reminds her, not just with his words, but with his presence, of the lack of control she has really had over her life all this time. She still does not blame Jason outright, but an older and more jaded Medea now sees the injustice in Jason's escape from consequence. Keeping the secret of their affair is no longer a sacrifice she is willing to make without the restoration of balance to the universe. Under the circumstances, Medea sees only one effective bargaining chip to play – Jason's feelings for his son.

but I saw something there, there in his eyes . . . he loved this boy, and all that shit he'd said to me years ago, it was true about kids. he loved 'em . . . (87-88)

Like the other Medeas, her decision to murder her son can and should be attributed to a need to control her circumstances. However, unlike the others, this young woman does not do so as part of a larger escape plan. She does not act out of pure vengeance or

desperation, but provides a sacrifice she feels will restore some balance to her universe. She does not care what happens to her after that, because she is secure in the knowledge that Jason will never again be free of the situation he helped to create.

and I worry about what's gonna happen, i mean, to me and all, i do – 's natural, though, right, to wonder about things – but i'll tell you. tell you what gets me through today, the next hour . . . it's him. (89)

This passage reflects Medea's attitude throughout her past during all the years that she was living on the memory of Jason's love and telling herself that by raising their son in secret, she was living (and supporting) life for them both. Once she realizes that was not true, she is willing to spend the remainder of her life without any love at all. However, she will be consoled by the fact that she has restored a balance of loss, and taught Jason the lesson she had to learn slowly: there are no true escapes from your choices.

A third factor influencing Medea's attitude about the nature of justice and her fixation with *adikia* is the recurring theme of several ancient Greek allusions sprinkled throughout the work. As this is an adaptation of *Medea*, this is somewhat self-referential, a larger reflection of this Medea's fixation with the nature of the world at large. For instance, Jason tells Medea he first loves her when they are out on a boat, a reference to the affair aboard the Argo. When Jason leaves her after she tells him about the pregnancy, he covers his disappearance by saying he is leaving to finish a degree at Delphi University (a city in Greece, and home to the oracle of Apollo). During the time that Jason and she are engaged in their relationship, he gives her a book of Greek stories by Euripides. Medea asks Jason why he chose this gift for her, and he tells her that he admires Euripides because he was "the most humanistic" and the writer most at war with

his own *adikia* (83). He also tells her she will appreciate Euripides more as she gets older. During the only reunion between mother, father and son, which immediately precedes Medea's crime, Jason presents Billie with a similar book of myths as a gift. This is one of the moments that begin to trigger Medea's reversal from introspection to observation of Jason. Since she has not seen him since she was Billie's own age (fourteen), she has never had the opportunity to see herself on equal terms with him. She has always thought of him as the dominant force in the relationship, and his influence has colored her entire adult life. However, the meeting between the three of them begins to change her point of view.

Throughout the text, Medea's speech patterns are a mixture of direct facts, rhetorical questions, and careful, considerate pauses. She wants to be sure of what she says, and she wants to be understood correctly the first time. Her concern is that her life be accurately portrayed, both the good and the bad parts of it, and for the most part, her measured telling of Jason's side of the story gives a similar desire for a level judgment field. In this way, Medea is like her own choral figure, using the opportunity of her confession to weigh in on the larger picture. She does not just tell her story. She presents the facts, not trying to sway her listener to her side, but informing them of what has passed. Acting alone, Medea must represent every role. This narrative structure, and Medea's consistent level-headedness within it, gives her a highly methodical, introspective, but still emotionally impassioned character structure. These elements also enhance an idea about Medea's personality that the other adaptations do not share. While the other representations show women reacting to a loss of identity or reacting to what

has been taken from them, the young woman in *Medea Redux* represents the loss of identity that results from the burdens and forced responsibilities added to her childhood.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TIMELINE

As a stand-alone work, Euripides' work is only a fragment of the total story of Medea, or perhaps more accurately, Medea and Jason. Though the endings of the Medea adaptations are similarly structured, the backstory of Euripides' original work is dependent on a series of specific events that precede the action of the play. They are, in general terms:

- Jason travels to Colchis and meets Medea.
- She helps him obtain the fleece.
- She kills her brother during their escape.
- They arrive at Iolcus with the fleece.
- Medea kills King Pelias.
- Medea and Jason flee to Corinth and raise a family.
- Jason leaves Medea for a more advantageous marriage.

Throughout the adaptations, there is a divergence in the way certain elements of the entire Medea arc are utilized. Although these adaptations are based on Euripides' model, each begins its narrative history at an earlier point in narrative time than Euripides, expanding the timeline of their stories to cover earlier events than just those occurring on the day in which the children are killed. Each adaptation is definable as a variation on the Medea narrative, but the larger origin myth is less familiar to contemporary audiences, even those familiar with the Medea archetype. It also creates a less flexible template from which to adapt and individualize Medea's characteristics. In order to tell the story of each Medea within her adaptive context, a variation on the

backstory must also be developed and represented within the narrative along with the more familiar arc of events.

I: *Pecong*

Pecong differs from Euripides' timeline in several ways. First, the time span of the entire play takes place over a year. Despite the longer narrative structure, it is extremely condensed, as it contains within its arc a demonstration of Mediyah's life before she meets Jason, their encounter, her pregnancy, his betrayal, the birth of twin boys, Creon and his daughter's deaths, the deaths of the two children and Mediyah's escape.

One way in which this chronology serves to enhance Mediyah's characterization is by providing examples of her behavior before any of the major Euripidean events take place. This way, it is made clear that Mediyah was not made bitter or unpleasant or ostracized through her interactions with Jason – she has always been perceived as a surly and cruel outsider. This device also provides a solid contrast for Mediyah's change of behavior after she meets Jason and his influence over her begins to grow. This “extra time” also establishes Mediyah's fraught relationship with her only surviving relative, her brother Cedric, and sets him up as Jason's competitor for both the *Pecong* tournament within the play and Mediyah's limited affections. This allows for some of the mythological context to color the work when Mediyah chooses to help Jason over Cedric, resulting in a final altercation between them. The encounter makes some references within the text to the fate of Absyrtus and Medea's role in his death, as Cedric accuses

Mediyah of “tearing [him] up into [little] pieces” “help[ing] to kill [him]” and claims that he could have been “king of this place, but [she abdicated him].” (92). Later on, this figurative accusation becomes more real and more telling of Mediyah’s lack of empathy when Cedric is found hanging from a newly sprung, yet fully grown calabash tree. Because of his ties to Creon’s line, his relationship with her could not save him when her powers returned and her “purpose” made clear.

Pecong also raises the stakes for Mediyah by framing Jason’s betrayal (through his proposal to Creon’s daughter Bella), Cedric’s defeat, the birth of her twins, and Jason’s proposal to take them away from her, in scenes 3 and 4 of the second act, leaving only one scene for the return of Mediyah’s power, the killing of her children and Creon’s line, and the ruination of Jason. At this point in the narrative, like the Medea of Euripides, she now needs only one day to complete her new objectives. However, because the rest of the play has demonstrated the passage of time and action so much more slowly, it makes Mediyah’s sudden recovery of her powers and total embrace of her murderous urges all the more jarring and vicious, and makes the character’s transformation seem to occur more quickly than if she had spent the entire play reflecting and planning her final actions.

II: *The Hungry Woman*

The Hungry Woman is a contrast to the linear structure and abrupt conclusion of *Pecong*. Although like *Pecong*, it has a prologue and an epilogue, the order of events is more abstractly framed, focusing on key events in Medea’s relationships instead of

relying on a defined story arc. This is the way in which *The Hungry Woman* provides some exposition for Medea's abandonment issues and her desire to maintain her cultural ties without having to tell Medea's story from the very beginning. Instead, the overreaching story establishes itself as a memory, or pastiche, of the events leading up to Medea's insecurity, her breakdown, and her resulting incarceration. In effect, the story the audience is seeing is not actually taking place, but is made up of moments prompted by specific memories of Medea in her "present" state. These moments are vital to the understanding of Medea herself, and the way in which the dynamic of her relationships led to later choices. Not only do they demonstrate the emotional dichotomy of which Medea is capable, but they provide both Medea herself and the audience a picture of the arc of each of her close relationships without having to examine each one from its point of origin.

The final way in which this chronology lends itself to clarity of characterization is the content of the play's final scene, which takes place in the "present" timeline, inside the mental institution. Medea has a vision in which her son arrives to speak to her in a moment of despair. Medea, not understanding why he has come, or even who he really is, believes him to be a ghost, but he replies that he is not. Still confused, she reveals to him her feelings of guilt and daily thoughts of suicide during her moments of lucidity. When Chac-Mool tries to convince her that he's real, she grows more confused and angry. She tells him to leave, but he will not. She then grows despondent, thinking that perhaps his presence means she never committed a crime, and her incarceration has all been the fantastic result of her own imagination.

If you live, then why am I here? I've committed no crime. If you live, why then am I strapped into the bed at night? Why am I plagued with nightmares of babies melting between my hands? Why do I mourn you and no longer walk the horizon at the hour of sunset as I used to? Why are there locks and I haven't the key? Why? (111)

Chac-Mool's presence does not provide comfort to her, nor does it convince her of his reality within her world, though until that point in the play she has displayed a strong belief in the otherworldly. She perceives him as just another consequence of her failed relationships with the gods. Though he has appeared from another plane, he does not appear to possess any god-like or otherworldly tendencies or knowledge. She asks him if she has lost her mind, thinking him perhaps a figment of her imagination and he has no answers for her. The tone of the exchange remains confused he reveals his purpose for being there towards the end of the conversation.

MEDEA: Why have you come here?
CHAC-MOOL: To take you away.
MEDEA: Away ... where?
CHAC-MOOL: Home. (112)

After this section of the exchange, Chac-Mool coaxes Medea to look out the window and gives her something to drink, encouraging her to sleep as he holds her in her arms. The implication is a reversal of the scene in which mother kills son in the same manner. Because Chac-Mool is not appearing as his "live" self, but rather as a ghost or spirit after Medea's attack against him, the ending takes on an added context of otherworldliness which enhances Medea's previously fraught relationship with the gods she worships and, until recently, wished to emulate. The apparition of Chac-Mool exists as a contextual device to demonstrate the possibility that Medea's escape can only come through the release of death. As Medea lies in his arms, the Chituateo appear onstage, indicating that

Medea is now able to join them and be guided by them in the manner she always wished.

While the conclusion leaves Medea's actual physical fate in dispute, the scene acts as a final opportunity for her not only to come to terms with what she has done, but to have a final and comforting interaction with a loved one – something she is not able to achieve successfully in the events leading up to the murder. Even if it is another figment of her imagination, it is cathartic, and frames her emotional arc by allowing her some perspective on the events of her past.

III: *Medea Redux*

Medea Redux is unique in this group of three plays, because a single character must convey the arc of her story and her relationships from start to finish. The fact that Medea is giving a confession requires that the story be detailed and fairly chronologically linear. The confession device is also an effective device for enhancing Medea's character profile, as it provides both a time (after the events of the story) and a safe, confined place in which the character feels compelled to take careful stock of her life and the events that have put her where she is. It also enables her to control where to begin and which details are most important to an understanding of the character as a complete person.

Medea decides to begin the story by explaining her first interactions with Jason and ending with the events directly after she commits her crime. Because this act was fourteen years in the making, Medea only relates certain events in her life that contributed directly to the outcome of her relationships with Jason and Billie, and avoids other details of her life over this same period of time. Medea keeps her detailed description of events

to a handful of key moments: the first time Jason came on to her, the first kiss, the day she lost her virginity, the day she discovered she was pregnant, the day she discovered Jason left town, and the reunion dinner fourteen years later. The events she chooses to relate in detail involve characters other than her and highlight only the memories of events she feels have shaped her life in one significant way. The specificity of these events (with none bleeding into another), the care and detail with which they are related, and the circumspection maintained throughout the confession uphold the calm, methodical, *adikia*-driven character profile. Although Medea has been asked to provide a confession, she cannot or will not simply confess to her recent crime and attempted escape. Her confession is not just that, but an origin story, her own myth of the Golden Fleece, and an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which life's consequences are weighed and tallied in ways one cannot always expect. The murder of her son came upon the heels of Medea's own realization of this fact. She saw an opportunity to even the scales of her own out-of-balance life and took it. Part of her calmness comes from the fact that she is too much at peace with her recent actions and their intended consequences to have an immediate fear of judgment or consequence. The burden of the past is now off her shoulders and is Jason's to bear for as long as he lives, and that is consolation enough for her.

i can almost see [Jason] . . . down there in phoenix, probably wandering around at some playground at school, a saturday, and he's just stumbling around . . . near the monkey bars, can't be consoled, right, the truth all spilled out now like it is . . . yelling up at the sky, these torrents of tears and screaming, the top of his lungs, calling up into the universe, "why?! why?!!" over and over. (BEAT) but you know what? in my fantasy, there's never an answer. uh-uh. there never is . . .

(she sits and smokes now as the tape player continues to quietly hum on.)
(silence. darkness.) (90)

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the ways in which three structural factors contained within three modern American adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* serve to enhance the dominant personality traits of the protagonist. While each main character is a re-development of the original Medea, the personality of the character is distinctive to the world of its adaptation. There are three main ways in which the structure of each adaptation works to enhance these emotional characteristics.

The first analysis explored the ways in which supporting characters are used within the adaptations to enhance the personality traits of the Medea characters. *Pecong* uses both the lesser roles of the chorus and Creon to act as foils for Mediyah's bitterness and isolation. They are used mainly to demonstrate Mediyah's reputation as a menace and establish the fear people have of her skills in sorcery. Her relationship with Jason acts as an obstacle to that power and helps to demonstrate the loss of strength associated with feelings of love and tenderness towards another person. Once Mediyah chooses to abandon these more emotional traits and connections to people, her power returns and she finds her purpose as a vessel of vengeance and retaliation, at which point the supporting characters become the targets of that rage. The only exception to this rule is the ghost of Granny Root, who functions as a sort of choral anti-conscience for Mediyah, encouraging her to abandon her humanity and embrace her "purpose" as a destructive force.

The supporting characters in *The Hungry Woman* serve to highlight Medea's emotional confusion and feelings of lost identity. Both Luna and Chac-Mool represent certain points of transition for Medea (a loss of homeland and a loss of freedom) that she

now regrets, though she still loves them. Jason functions in a similar fashion as he does in the source text. His arrival back into her life to claim their son adds to the pressure of her dissatisfaction and regret. The advanced age and expanded role of Chac-Mool provides Medea with another “man” besides Jason with whom to interact, as she perceives his advancement into manhood as a threat to her identity as a mother and caregiver. Her decision to kill him further reflects upon her state of emotional crisis. She commits the act as a way to keep him from leaving her for a country and a life to which she may no longer return.

Medea Redux deviates from this device by having Medea as its only character, which enables her to frame the way the other characters in her story are introduced and described. Medea describes the characters in such a way that she (and her storytelling style) appears even-handed, thoughtful, and circumspect. The spectator only “meets” the characters as they appear and begin to affect Medea’s life. This effectively makes her both the sole protagonist and her own choral figure.

An analysis was also made of the ways in which the setting of the adaptations played into each Medea’s dominant traits. *Pecong’s* narrative world utilizes a belief in spirits and black magic to solidify an idea of life on Trankey Island, and Mediyah’s role within the larger community. The magical element provides a method by which Mediyah’s propensity for vengeance and cruelty can dominate her personality through the revelation that she is part-demon and her very existence is, in fact, the product of a destructive spell. The added context of Miedo Wood Island further enhances the feelings of fear and superstition of Trankey Island’s inhabitants. The fact that Mediyah is immune

to its danger sets her further apart from the rest of the characters. Her inability to survive there with Jason as her powers diminish is linked to the weakening of her otherworldly qualities as she begins to fall in love with him and experience her humanity.

The Hungry Woman also contains otherworldly elements, mainly found in Medea's desire to commune with Aztec gods Coatlicue and a group of spirits known as the Chituateo. Her prayers to them are an attempt to find her identity through her cultural spirituality, and the murder of Chac-Mool is partly intended as a sacrifice to Coatlicue in exchange for a renewed sense of strength and purpose. The presences of the gods are also significant in their representation of Medea's need to maintain cultural practices she is unable to fully express. Since she has accepted exile from the cultural haven of Aztlan to Phoenix (the land of the undesirables) her desire to hold on to her past self becomes an obsession, and is partly responsible for her conflicted relationships with her loved ones and her decision to kill her son.

Medea Redux establishes Medea and Jason's relationship through the revelation that it began when he was a teacher and she was his thirteen-year-old student. This fact continues to color the dynamic of the relationship throughout the narrative. The play also contains several references to Ancient Greece and Greek mythology, including Euripides himself. Included in these (self) references is the repetition of the word *adikia*, or a world out of balance with itself. Medea returns to it frequently when discussing her relationships with Jason and Billie, and it is implied that she considers having killed Billie a final restoration of balance between her and Jason.

The final analysis was done with regard to how the narrative timeline of each

adaptation affects the Medeas' individual characteristics. *Pecong* begins its story before Medea and Jason meet, which serves to establish her inherent personality and allows the audience to see the ways in which it is altered and (later) enhanced by her relationship with Jason. This includes opportunities to see that way Mediyah interacts with a diverse array of characters (Persis/Faustina, Granny Root, Cedric, and Creon) before, during, and after her encounter with Jason. The extended "pre-Jason" period in which Mediyah is presented as cruel and petty, but not murderous, serves as a powerful contrast to the speedy violence and brutality she displays without hesitation in later scenes.

Both *The Hungry Woman* and *Medea Redux* tell the bulk of their story in a flashback/flash-forward style, as both women spend their "present" time incarcerated. Their stories are a reliving/retelling of the events that led to their imprisonment. Both narratives also describe the ways in which their complex relationships with Jason and their older sons led directly to their decision to kill. However, in the case of *The Hungry Woman*, Medea's instability lends itself to a more confused and fragmented narrative, jumping forward and backward between key moments in Medea's relationship. It focuses more heavily on the destruction of her personal relationships and loss of self and ends ambiguously with the implication Medea may be able to find peace of mind only through death.

The Medea of *Redux* tells the story in a fairly linear fashion, though the fact that it is hers alone to tell allows for her to control the level of detail given to each event. The one-sided narrative enables the character to focus only on moments that she finds significant, and the fact that it is framed as a confession allows for a very careful, self-

aware, and methodical reflection of past events. Unlike the Medea of *The Hungry Woman*, the structure of this narrative allows for the revelation that Medea has achieved her peace of mind through the murder and the restoration of balance and finality she feels it has provided to her relationship with Jason.

The examination of these narrative elements, as they relate specifically to personality traits, creates a theory of adaptation by which well-known theatrical characters may be assessed. It results in a comparison that does not depend on similarity or “faithfulness,” either to the original text, or to one another. Rather, it results in a mode of criticism that depends on finding those individual elements of characterization present and amplified in each adaptation. These can be connected and analyzed to form a whole and complex profile of iconic protagonists within their adapted worlds.

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