

***Medea* Re-Imagined: A Wounded Call to Justice**

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Abstract

This article discusses the theatrical re-imagining of Euripides' *Medea* by Peter McGarry. In McGarry's play, Medea is punished for her crime and sentenced to suffer the torment and consequences of her murder by repeatedly performing on stage her tragedy throughout time and space. McGarry's *Medea* places a spotlight on an enduring facet of human experience, namely, the problem of injustice in its many aspects, comparing Medea's "just cause" for revenge and killing her children with the wars that modern societies wage in the name of justice, vengeance, or even Gods, which always involve the sacrifice of children and young people to the greater good.¹

Key Words

Medea, Injustice, Crime, Stage

Introduction

ὦ Ζεῦ Δίκη τε Ζηνὸς Ἥλιου τε φῶς,
νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν, φίλαι,
γενησόμεσθα κεῖς ὁδὸν βεβήκαμεν,
νῦν ἐλπὶς ἐχθροῦς τοὺς ἐμοὺς τείσειν δίκην.
Euripides, *Medea*, 764–67²

Euripides' *Medea* was first performed in 431 BCE along with *Philoctetes*, *Dictys*, and the satyr play, *Theristai*, at the City Dionysia. Euripides won the third prize, and, despite his loss to

¹ I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Eleni Bozia, my colleague Anthony Smith, and the anonymous reader of the proceedings volume for their critical feedback and insightful suggestions. The second half of the title of this article is playing on the title of the article "Medea's Wounds: Euripides on Justice and Compassion," by Devrim Sezer. In this article, Sezer discusses Medea's demand of justice and its relation to the civic and democratic ideals of Athens, arguing that her deeply wounded moral psychology reflects that of the oppressed and marginalized people of the time.

² "O Zeus and Zeus's justice, O light of the sun,
now, my friends, I shall be victorious over my foes:

I have set my foot on the path.

Now I may confidently expect that my enemies will pay the penalty."

For Euripides' *Medea* I am using the text as edited and translated by David Kovacs for the Loeb Classical Library, vol. 12 (1994).

Euphorion and Sophocles, the popularity of the myth of Medea and his tragedy have been continually increasing since antiquity. Rosanna Lauriola, in her chapter on the reception of Euripides' *Medea*, contends that Medea, being “arguably, among the many figures from classical antiquity that have been exerting a continuing fascination for more than two thousand years... has proven to be able to cast a specially enduring spell upon all of us, providing accountable creative and intellectual challenges to thought and culture across centuries and across the world.”³

Euripides' *Medea* is the story of the mother-murderer, the scorned wife, the barbarian, the marginalized woman. The complexity of Medea's nature, character, and actions, her “otherness,” and her tragic story have long fascinated and inspired the imagination of artists worldwide, making *Medea* one of the most widely staged ancient Greek tragedies of the modern world. As Edith Hall has claimed, “Euripides' *Medea* has penetrated to parts of modernity most mythical figures have not reached. [...] *Medea* has murdered her way into a privileged place in the history of the imagination of the West, and can today command huge audiences in the commercial theatre.”⁴ Indeed, Euripides' *Medea* touches upon major issues of the human experience with which contemporary audiences can relate, such as gender politics, social identity, and family dynamics, translating the play's popularity into numerous theatrical, cinematic, dance, and visual arts adaptations.

In this article, I discuss a contemporary adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, written and (originally) directed by Peter McGarry, a UK-based author and award-winning playwright, which explores the whole spectrum of topics that Euripides' tragedy addresses while fundamentally challenging the idea of justice. I argue that McGarry's *Medea* creates a reflection space where his

³ Rosanna Lauriola, “Medea,” in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Euripides*, ed. Rosanna Lauriola and Kyriakos N. Demetriou (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 377.

⁴ Edith Hall, “Medea and British Legislation Before the First World War,” *Greece & Rome* 46, no.1 (April 1999): 42.

audience is invited to ponder the dynamics of justice as they emerge in two realms: society and theater itself.⁵ More specifically, I contend that McGarry's stage functions as a punitive/justice space for Medea and a reflection/justice space for his audiences to come together and reflect as a community on their actions and the strategies they can engage to change their current practices. Finally, I examine the way in which McGarry decides to punish Medea and consider whether it is fitting or just for Medea as portrayed by Euripides.

In the framework of contemporary criminal justice systems, McGarry transforms the theatrical stage into a prison cell, the socio-spatial instrument of justice, where Medea is sentenced to perpetually re-experience the burden and pain of her crime. Medea performs her punishment within the bounds of the stage that emerges as a Foucauldian heterotopia mirroring the transgressive reality of the audience itself.⁶ Consequently, the administration of justice for Medea's crime creates a reflection space within which the audience is invited to confront their own societal practices, which resemble the intentional murdering of Medea's children. Performed for the first time in the wake of 9/11, this *Medea* provokes its audience to approach Medea as a mother figure comparable to the motherland who sacrifices her children under the pretext of a just cause, behind which cause lies the motive of revenge.

Concerning the realm of theater, I argue that the theatrical space is presented as a space that demands its own justice. Space is a key concept in the theatrical and performance practice. In his study of space in ancient Greek tragedy, Rush Rehm argues that "the theater becomes a theatrical space when it 'houses' a dramatic performance, that is, when the other spaces come into

⁵ I am grateful to Mr. Peter McGarry for sharing a copy of the published version of his *Medea* script with me. The observations, views, and arguments I am making in this article are based on my interpretation of McGarry's script as published by i-Witness Publications.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

play.”⁷ Rehm treats theater as a significant civic space. However, he uses the term *theatrical space* specifically in reference to the spatial constraints and opportunities that the fifth-century theater offered.⁸ Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones adds another dimension to the theatrical space: the interaction between performers and audience.⁹ Discussing the importance of space in contemporary productions of Greek drama, Llewellyn-Jones explains that theater space is the area “occupied by the audience and the actors during the course of a performance and which is characterized by the theatrical relationship fostered between the two.”¹⁰

In this study, the theatrical space extends from the spatial structure of the theatrical stage to the unitary domain of the performer–spectator interactions, which creates the performance experience and spatializes its socio-historic moment.¹¹ Anne Ubersfeld, who has argued that the theatrical space is an image and counterproof of the real space, offers valuable insight into its mechanisms, noting that “a considerable creative effort goes into connecting important categories of stage space with categories of the spectator’s perception of social space.”¹²

The theatrical space bridges the localities of theater and society, identifying not only the physical places/areas where the actors and the audience move, or the imagined places where the characters’ stories unfold, but also the interactive abstract space where actors, characters, and audiences meet, drawing one another out of their comfort zones. The theatrical space aims to stir up discussions to effect change and achieves its goal only when a performance is put on and reaches its end. Therefore, the justice of the stage and the theater can only be served through the

⁷ Rush Rehm, *The Play of Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20.

⁸ Rehm, *The Play of Space*, 20.

⁹ Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, “Understanding Theatre Space,” *The Open University*, June 2002. <http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/greekplays/publications/essays/llewellyn-jones-understanding-theatre-space>.

¹⁰ Llewellyn-Jones, “Understanding Theatre Space.”

¹¹ See also the term *performance space* used by Gay McAuley. Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 26–27.

¹² Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 94.

complete performance of Medea's punishment within the borders of the stage. Medea's punishment compels the spectators to confront the dynamics of justice and injustice in the motives and justifications for crimes, especially those committed against or affecting children, through the justice mechanisms of the theater itself. At the same time, her never-ending journey on the stage and the theatrical space reveals theater as a safe space that "delves into our humanity and reflects it back to us, that we might understand our world and ourselves differently."¹³

Peter McGarry, *Medea* (2002)

*"Taught me a lesson I should have known all along. What you do to children matters. And they
might never forget."*

Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, 43

It has often been argued that Medea is the most theatrical character of the Greek tragic stage and that her intertemporal and interspatial career in theater originates in her innate theatricality and diverse nature.¹⁴ For Hall, one of the main explanations for the longevity of Euripides' *Medea* is the fact that it has often been connected with "discussions about criminal legislation as well as, more broadly, the treatment of women before the law."¹⁵ She also claims that Medea has proved so relentlessly appealing because she perceives her action of murdering her sons as a crime, thus raising questions about the precise definitions of moral responsibility, provocation, and premeditation both in antiquity and modernity. It is precisely this quality of Medea, according to

¹³ Sallie Bieterman, "Can Theatre Ever Be a 'Safe Space'?" *The Theatre Times*, November 2016, <https://thetheatretimes.com/can-theatre-ever-safe-space/>. On the term *safe space*, see Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 24–25.

¹⁴ See Karelisa Hartigan, *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage: Ancient Drama in the Commercial Theater, 1882–1994* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 48; Fiona Macintosh, "Introduction: The Performer in Performance," in *Medea in Performance 1500–2000*, ed. Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Oliver Taplin (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), 1; Lauriola, "Medea," 415.

¹⁵ Edith Hall, "Medea and the Mind of the Murderer," in *Unbinding Medea: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Classical Myth from Antiquity to the 21st Century*, ed. Heike Bartel and Anne Simon (London: Legenda, 2010), 18.

Hall, that is influencing and will influence the continued revival of Medea's story and renewal of interest in her.¹⁶

Most modern reworkings of Euripides' play recreate, on stage or on screen, the full spectrum of Medea's mad passion and revenge, approaching it from different angles. However, they almost always let her go, in the Euripidean manner, unpunished (at least legally) for "the most unforgivable crime in history," her filicide.¹⁷ A thought-provoking and intriguing perspective is offered by Peter McGarry's 2002 award-winning theatrical adaptation and compelling performance of *Medea*.¹⁸ McGarry's *Medea* departs from the norm, presenting the eponymous heroine sentenced to suffer the torment and inescapable consequences of her murder by repeatedly performing her tragedy throughout time and space. McGarry drastically changes Euripides' storyline, rendering the murder of the children a recurring reference and event, as a means of punishment for Medea.¹⁹

In the "Notes" section of the printed version of McGarry's script, it is explicitly stated that his version of *Medea* is an adaptation rather than a direct translation.²⁰ The author explains that contemporary audiences cannot fully fathom the interaction between Euripides' plays and his spectators, and, consequently, an adaptation is essential for the message of Euripides' *Medea* to be communicated to modern audiences. For McGarry creating a theatrical space invested in the social space and historic moment of his spectators is critical, and thus he approaches Medea's story through an intertemporal and interspatial lens so as to make it relevant to his audiences.

¹⁶ Edith Hall, "Murder and Stage History: Medea's State of Mind and Criminal Law," <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/crgr/documents/pdf/papers/medea.pdf>. 10/18/2019.

¹⁷ McGarry, *Medea*, cover.

¹⁸ McGarry's *Medea* was first performed at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg (July 2002). Afterwards, it toured Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In 2008, *Medea* won BBC Best Play at the Manchester Festival.

¹⁹ McGarry, *Medea*, 4.

²⁰ Peter McGarry, *Medea* (Ashton-under-Lyne: i-Witness Publications, 2016), 74–75.

Furthermore, McGarry mentions that a “contemporary bill of fare” seemed more fit for the purposes of his conceptualization of the play and that for this reason his Medea does not follow the linear structure of events as found in Euripides’ tragedy (the murder is not committed at the end of the play). However, McGarry’s version has kept fundamental components of Greek tragedy, such as the chorus, and traces of lyrical lines and dance moves.

In contrast to Euripides, who lets Medea “off the hook,” McGarry punishes her to allow his contemporary audiences to relate to Euripides’ play.²¹ Her punishment administers justice for an ineffable crime and stimulates the audience’s sense of righteousness. Before delving into the analysis of McGarry’s play, and in order to essentially comprehend it, we need to consider two significant aspects of his work: how deeply rooted in the cultural assumptions and beliefs of modern social structures his treatment of Medea is and how it intertwines with his career as a social worker.

Hall, discussing the correspondences and parallels that are frequently drawn between the portrait of Medea and contemporary reported cases of maternal infanticide, makes the following remark: “It is important to realize that the strong apparent correspondences between the Euripidean Medea and the profiles of modern filicidal mothers are misleading. Our outraged abomination of the simple fact that Medea is responsible for her own sons’ death is a culturally specific reaction. Modern psychologists correctly insist that maternal filicide, far from being universally or absolutely defined as an atrocity, is perceived differently in different cultures.”²² McGarry

²¹ The publisher’s note in the printed version of McGarry’s script states that *Medea* is a play to which modern audiences cannot directly relate, especially because the protagonist avoids any punishment and sanction, escaping in a golden chariot. The note reads: “*Medea* is probably the most famous of Euripides’ tragedies. But given the way he botches an extraordinary dramatic storyline, by letting Medea off the hook, we need to ponder how relevant the play is to modern audiences. Modern—perhaps ultra-modern—Classicists suggest we revisit Greek drama and examine it from a humane rather than historical perspective” (2016:72). Euripides’ choice to let Medea “off the hook” is regarded as a dramaturgical mistake that prevents at least contemporary audiences from viewing Medea’s situation and Euripides’ message as relevant to their own individual and communal state.

²² Hall, “Medea and the Mind of the Murderer,” 17.

perceives Medea in absolute terms, detaching her actions and reactions from their socio-cultural context, and interprets her filicide as the “ultimate example of the ultimate crime,” like most people nowadays do.²³ For McGarry, Medea needs to be punished because she killed her children. This gestures to the core of his professional and artistic endeavors.

McGarry was qualified as a social worker in 1977, and since then he has used his professional experience as a creative platform for his writing and for raising social-care awareness.²⁴ In an article that was written upon his being awarded the Social Purpose Learning Champion Award by the Voluntary Sector North West, a Liverpool community organization, it is mentioned that “[McGarry’s] writing has been bound up with his social work practice as a child protection specialist and he has been deeply attracted to the idea of using performance as a theatrical tool for training and learning in child protection/safeguarding arenas.”²⁵ It is also stated that for this reason he formed Eye Witness Theatre Company, a multi-award-winning international theater company that focuses on workshops and trainings that foster child protection.²⁶ Therefore, McGarry’s choice to condemn Medea, the mother-murderer, and, through her, to denounce the societies that follow similar practices in the name of revenge or supremacy politics, aligns with his broader social concern and initiatives.

²³ Hall, “Medea and the Mind of the Murderer,” 17. McGarry’s interpretation of Medea is reflected in the words of Classics scholar Jasper Griffin, who, examining the Medea *paidoktonos* (child-killer), argues that “we cannot, we will not, accept as justifiable, and even as laudable, the murder of the innocent children. ‘But we didn’t realize!’, we want to shout, ‘that you meant to do THAT!’ The killing of young children by their own mother is an action of ultimate horror and shock: it is the brutal denial of everything that we take to be implied by the very conception, by the very words, of mother and motherhood” (16–17). Jasper Griffin, “Murder in the Family: Medea and Others,” in *Looking at Medea: Essays and a Translation of Euripides’ Tragedy*, ed. David Stuttard (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 11–22.

²⁴ Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW), “Social Purpose Learning Champion Award Winner,” <https://www.vsnw.org.uk/news/2017/5/26/social-purpose-learning-champion-award-winner>.

²⁵ VSNW, “Social Purpose.”

²⁶ VSNW, “Social Purpose.”

Serving Justice: McGarry's *Medea* on the Performing Space

"Man is his own moral measure – not the Gods."

Peter McGarry, *Medea*, 11²⁷

McGarry's *Medea* brings on stage only two actors, who enact the roles of the eponymous heroine and the Chorus, played by only one female actor as a single character (who is also later asked to enact Jason's role, donning his mask on stage).²⁸ According to the stage directions in the beginning of the script, the play opens with the Chorus walking on a completely bare stage while a single continuous note ("perhaps from a lyre") sounds.²⁹ Sophie Toland, who played the Chorus in a recent production of the play by Rotten Park Road, explains that the stripped-back setting allows the spectators to focus predominantly on the story that the two characters tell.³⁰ The stark lighting of the stage contributes to the spine-chilling atmosphere, delineating an austere space. The Chorus prepares the performing space by setting up three props: a helmet, a cloak, and a large, intimidating knife, as if a battle is about to be staged.³¹ She then stands at the center of the stage and recites a tribute to Dionysus, the Greek god of theater, hinting from the very first moment at the metatheatrical nature of the performance that is about to be put on.³²

²⁷ The numbers refer to the pages of the printed version of the script (McGarry 2016).

²⁸ McGarry, *Medea*, 57–63.

²⁹ McGarry, *Medea*, 6.

³⁰ I would like to thank Sophie Toland, co-producer and performer of Rotten Park Road's production of McGarry's *Medea*, for taking the time to address my questions concerning their interpretation and staging of McGarry's play. According to Toland, Patrick McConnell, the director of the play, sought to portray McGarry's *Medea* as being in a sort of purgatory—reliving the murder of her children again and again as punishment for her actions. His intention was to draw attention to the deep sadness of *Medea*'s story as she keeps realizing that she committed an unfathomable crime.

³¹ With the term *performing space* I describe the realm of the actors, the physical spaces where they put on their performances.

³² McGarry, *Medea*, 6. Both the Chorus and *Medea* are conscious of the fact that they are in a theatrical space acting as performers (see McGarry, *Medea*, 7). A couple of moments after the characters' initial emergence onto the performing space, the Chorus, who has a directing role in the play, measures the stage and resets the props, making sure that everything is in place for their performance (McGarry, *Medea*, 7).

A sighing Medea enters staring reproachfully, first at the Chorus, and then at the bare stage, uttering words that resemble ancient Greek ones. The Chorus asks Medea to speak in English, explaining that tonight they are performing for an English-speaking audience.

Medea: What time is this?

Chorus: A strange time. A strange land.

Medea: I entreat thee, child. What time is this?

Chorus: The year of Cronus — three thousand four hundred and thirty-four.

Medea: Three thousand four hundred and...are we to perform, then, so far in the future?

Chorus: That we must.³³

The play does not follow Euripides' linear storyline. Medea and the Chorus have been travelling in time and space performing Medea's tragedy. This time they have found themselves in a theater in the future, in the year 3434, when they are again, as the Chorus states, "ordained" to perform tragedy, specifically, Medea's own tragedy.

Medea: What people dwell herein?

Chorus: Future people.

Medea: Are they barbarians then?

Chorus: They do not speak Greek.

Medea: They kill their children here?

Chorus: Aye.

Medea: They send their children for slaughter. They despatch their sons off to war?

Chorus: Aye.

Medea: Do you imagine they might learn from us?

Chorus: We need'st perform the tragedy. Whether they learn from it must needs be their own concern.

Medea: 'Medea?'

Chorus: Aye.

Medea: Always 'Medea.'³⁴

Medea seeks to know more about her new audience. She asks who these people are and, specifically, whether they are barbarians to understand why she has to perform her tragedy for

³³ McGarry, *Medea*, 6–7.

³⁴ McGarry, *Medea*, 8.

them. Her main concern, however, is to find out whether the people of this time and space have a share in her fate, namely, whether they too murder their children. She asks the Chorus whether these people send their sons off to war and, after the Chorus' positive reply, she wonders whether they have to learn a lesson from her crime and punishment. The Chorus responds positively again. Yet, Medea seems hesitant to perform her own tragedy and instead proposes that they enact a comedy or a poem by Sappho. The stage emerges as a restrictive space that presupposes and determines her actions, forcing her to take responsibility for her deeds and inevitably suffer the consequences. Throughout the play, Medea wonders why she must always be the one to commit such a base crime ("Why I to play 'Medea?' Why should it be always, my role?") and the Chorus reminds her that they are obliged to constantly re-perform their play "for the greater good," so that the contemporary audience is taught what is *good* and what is *evil*, what is *just* and what is *unjust*.³⁵

Medea: Why? Why is it written? Why is it ordained?

[...]

Chorus: 'Tis for the greater good, Madame, as well you know.

Medea: Good? Do you know I oft wonder how, in the name of
sweet celestial Hera, might we might unravel—from what
we are about to consummate—any good!

Chorus: Good. Aye. Good from evil—That is the purpose of
tragedy.

Medea: So that they shall discern what justice is.

Chorus: Aye.³⁶

Unlike Euripides' Medea—the controlling character of the stage, the authorial figure who conceptualizes and performs the play-within-the-play to take revenge and then leaves behind her a deconstructed performing space—this Medea, realizing her guilt while experiencing the consequences of her actions, is reluctant to perform her part and is trying to find a way to escape the stage and the theater, which are turning into her cell. Looking towards the exit, as if it were a

³⁵ McGarry, *Medea*, 26.

³⁶ McGarry, *Medea*, 11.

prison gate, she urges the Chorus to leave with her. “Let us await nightfall and flee,” she says. The stage itself becomes her greatest enemy. It emerges as a cell from which she cannot escape or exit unless she has served her sentence, punishing her in the way that her Euripidean enemies could not.

Medea: And if we abandon all of this and flee? Forsake them!
Leave them to lament their own fate. Wherefore should we
care...?

[...]

Chorus: We forget ourselves!

Medea: But to feel the sun on our lips. Wherefore should we not?

Chorus: We should perish.

Medea: Perchance. Perchance not.

Chorus: They wouldn't seek us out. They shall punish us.

[...]

Medea: Let us await nightfall and flee.

...

Chorus: I do fear, I have oft feared, that as directly we witness
light of day...to stone!

Medea: As though sliding eyes on the Gorgon.

Chorus: O not that we should perish into nought and no more. No a
penalty much worse than death itself.

Medea: To portray Medea and slay my children over and over?

Chorus: Is it such a punishment? For an actor. Think on it. Is it?
You are Medea—paradoxical and perilous. Captivating,
covetous...

Medea: But to butcher my children? Throughout eternity. To
commit unholy murder and yet still...

Chorus: A recital. Merely.³⁷

Every time Medea attempts to avoid performing her role or tries to flee from the performing space, the Chorus is there to secure the performance of the tragedy. The Chorus serves the “justice” of the theatrical and performing space, which requires the actors to perform their roles and the plot to reach its end so that the audience experiences their *katharsis* and learns from the suffering of the on-stage characters. The Chorus ensures, either by consulting or instigating Medea to act, that

³⁷ McGarry, *Medea*, 34–5, 39–40.

she will perform her Euripidean identity, and that she will offer the audience the spectacle that will echo the nature of true evil and their share in it. In his discussion of modes of viewing in ancient Greece, Rush Rehm states that when “viewing others in their unique situations (assuming they are recognizable and not completely foreign), a[n ancient] Greek can also see himself,” and this seems to also be the case for contemporary audiences.³⁸ Spectators can reflect on their individual and communal situations, relationships, status and gender dynamics, and the broader conditions of their societies galvanized by the stories that unfold in front of their eyes. Medea’s spectators have rulers who dispatch their children off to war in the name of justice. Thus, she is condemned to murder her children throughout time and space so that her audiences, the people who send their youth off to war, realize what justice is.

Medea: Who here has the moral measure to determine justice?

Chorus: They have rulers who will determine justice for them.

Medea: Are they heroic these rulers?

Chorus: This is another time, Madame, an uncommon time.

Medea: And their rulers despatch their children off to war in the name of...justice?

Chorus: Medea sought not justice. Medea sought vengeance. To butcher children for the singular purpose of vengeance is not human it is...

Medea: ...barbaric?

Chorus: It is evil.

Medea: O! And our purpose is to perform tragedy that they may fathom what evil is?³⁹

Early in the play, McGarry’s Medea strives to establish a connection between her actions and those of the society (represented by the audience) for whom she is currently performing. She questions their conceptualization and application of justice and their motives for murdering children to show that it is vengeance that guides their decisions in waging wars and sending young

³⁸ Rehm, *The Play of Space*, 6.

³⁹ McGarry, *Medea*, 12.

people to fight them. Later in the play, the interrelation between Medea's filicide and the killing of children by the people of that future land is exposed when the Chorus tells Medea that she has to verify her cause if she is to butcher children in that land.⁴⁰ A confounded Medea wonders how any creature with a soul may ever offer just cause for the slaughter of children to receive the Chorus' bald answer that she needs to *claim* such a cause, like the leaders of that place do.⁴¹

Chorus: But you must *claim* such, Madame. The people that dwell
herein, do e'en as we recite this, wage war in the East.
When there is battle, in this future time, there is always the
ensuing carnage of children. Tis the customary order of
prevailing warfare.

Medea: And this they fathom? This future people?

Chorus: Indeed Madame, and have lent their approbation. There is
here a demokratia.

Medea: It cannot be...heroic. This slaughter of children.

Chorus: Heroic, Madame? This is not Greece, Madame.

Medea: Then there is blood on *their* hands.

Chorus: Indeed, Madame, blood aplenty though their rulers assert
just cause.

Medea: Just cause?

Chorus: The leaders here are righteous, Madame, rather than
heroic and assert frequent and intimate discourse with their
Gods.

Medea: But how do they claim just cause if...

Chorus: If they murder children, Madame? Indeed Madame,
whether be it be in the name of justice or vengeance or
even in the name of the Gods the slaying of children will
always be evil. Here. They know nought of their guilt—that
is their tragedy. Medea knows full well her guilt—and that
is her tragedy.

Medea: Blood on my hands. Like them.

Chorus: Aye Madame.

Medea: And I may claim just cause, like them?

Chorus: Your spouse horns another woman, you have been
notoriously betrayed, you seek vengeance. There is your
cause.

Medea: It is good here. These people—this future people—ignite
the fire. They will not judge me so harshly if they too have
the blood of children on their hands.

⁴⁰ McGarry, *Medea*, 47.

⁴¹ McGarry, *Medea*, 47–48.

Chorus: Is the murder of one child more tainted than another?
Howsoever it is executed.
Medea: They are too evil.
Chorus: Indeed, Madame, and they too are weary of being
judged.⁴²

In this almost ironic scene, Medea exposes the absurdity and cruelty of wars in which societies, even in that future time, send their children to be killed for a supposedly just cause. The quintessential child-killer cannot fathom how these future people can justify the murder of their children. Her punishment has made her realize the enormity of her crime, face her guilt, and notice the blood that is trickling from her hands. This blood is also on the hands of her audience who are here confronted with the repercussions of their decisions and act as Medea's own counterparts. In this scene, the stage-prison exposes itself as a *heterotopia*, a textual or imaginative place, which, according to Foucault, somehow reflects and at the same time challenges or contests the real spaces we live in. Medea's punitive/justice space reveals itself almost as a courtroom—a justice space for the audience—where the spectators, as members of a community that implicitly murders or intends to murder their young people, stand against their indictment.

Edith Hall has insightfully argued that “Medea has transcended history partly because she enacts a primal terror universal to human beings: that the mother-figure should intentionally destroy her own children.”⁴³ The reflection space of McGarry's Medea explores the dynamics of a similar real-life threat: that the motherland would intentionally “kill” her own young people. Euripides' Medea is presented as a wronged woman with a deeply wounded psychology, after Jason and Creon violate the principles of *philia* (family relationships) and *xenia* (hospitality), respectively.⁴⁴ This Medea murders her children for what she considers to be a just cause, namely,

⁴² McGarry, *Medea*, 48–49.

⁴³ Hall, “Medea and British Legislation,” 42.

⁴⁴ Devrim Sezer, “Medea's Wounds: Euripides on Justice and Compassion,” *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 216.

revenge. In McGarry's *Medea*, Medea's murder and just cause are translated into the wars that modern societies wage in the name of justice, vengeance, or even God(s), which always involve the sacrifice of children or young people for the "greater good."

According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, "although tragedy, more than any other genre of literature, [...] appears rooted in social reality, that does not mean that it is a reflection of it. It does not reflect that reality but calls it into question. By depicting it rent and divided against itself, it turns it into a problem."⁴⁵ Thus, the tragic stage functions as a reflection space for the projected questions that are raised to the audience while they spectate the strengths and weaknesses of their own social and civic reality being performed. Devrim Sezer has argued that, with *Medea*, Euripides advocates the civilizing power of Athenian political life and its civic ideals while pointing to its limitations and flaws, thereby calling into question its injustices.⁴⁶ With his *Medea*, McGarry calls into question the injustices of contemporary societies and the paradoxes of a world that advocates for peace and justice by sending young people to battlefields. This *Medea* is performing her punishment on stage, inviting the audience to reflect on their own societal practices, which resemble the intentional murder of her children.

In her discussion of the final scene of Euripides' *Medea*, Laura Swift mentions,

The most striking aspect of Medea's vengeance is the impunity with which she acts, for in the final moments of the play we see her elevated above the stage in the dragon-chariot, confident in her escape to Athens, and facing no retribution for the murders she has committed. This impunity is unusual in tragedy, for while it frequently depicts suffering which is unjust in the sense that it is disproportionate, or affects innocents, the principle that one pays for one's actions is normally a pervasive feature of the genre.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy," in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, trans. Jane Lloyd, 33 (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

⁴⁶ Sezer, "Medea's Wounds," 219.

⁴⁷ Laura Swift, "Euripides: Medea," in *A Companion to Euripides*, ed. Laura K. McClure, 87 (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2017).

McGarry corrects this abnormality by punishing Medea. Yet, we cannot help but wonder whether the punishment he chooses is a just one, at least in the framework of the performance of the crime and Medea's role in Euripides' play.

Sezer contends that for Euripides' Medea justice is only one thing, revenge.⁴⁸ According to Sezer, it is essentially her insistence on the politics of revenge that addles her thinking and does not allow her to critically engage with the conception of justice, thus eventually rendering her indifferent even to the suffering of her children and the personification of cruelty.⁴⁹ McGarry's Medea is essentially confronted with the reality of her evilness, which she has to re-create and re-live every time she is on stage. Euripides' imposing heroine, who commanded the stage in the performance of her vengeance, has become a mere actor of a play she does not want to put forth again because she cannot carry the burden of her former actions. The cruel Medea of Euripides is now the victim of a cruel space—the stage—which is taking its revenge. The stage serves its own justice, demanding a performance. Whether the actions enacted are just or unjust, ethical or unethical, they need to be performed for the theatrical space to fulfil its purpose: to convey a message to the audience and initiate a discussion of their practices.

Having served her sentence in this time and place, Medea is finally allowed to temporarily exit the stage until she moves to the next stage/cell, in a different time and place. McGarry punishes Medea in a way that secures theatrical justice while fostering the emergence of a theatrical space within which contemporary societies can reflect on their own cruel sacrifice and murder of children. McGarry's Medea eventually becomes a trustee of the justice of theater, since she

⁴⁸ Sezer, "Medea's Wounds," 228.

⁴⁹ Sezer, "Medea's Wounds," 228. Although Medea in Euripides' tragedy wavers for almost sixty consecutive lines (1019–80, 1236–50) between killing her children and leaving with them, showing that she is not emotionally detached from them, she eventually decides to follow through with her plan because she cannot become the object of mockery for her enemies. It is her final cold-blooded action that has earned her the title of the most cruel and monstrous mother.

provides “for spectators, opportunities for exercising their point of view under the gaze of other points of view and in all consciousness,” a parameter that, according to Christian Biet and Christophe Triau, is integral to the theatrical experience.⁵⁰

Hall has argued that Greek tragedy has always had an inextricable relationship with crime, law, and punishment, noting the double meaning of the word *hypokrites* used to define both an actor and a person responding to interrogation in court.⁵¹ Euripides’ *Medea* seems to be assuming only the first quality of an *hypokrites*, but McGarry’s *Medea* embodies both. As Hall explains, “similarly to legal trials, tragedies show crimes being committed and ask their audiences to assess the moral issues, attribute blame and authorize punishment.”⁵² In a parallel manner, McGarry’s tragic plot presents a stage-imprisoned *Medea* inviting the spectators not only to authorize her punishment but attribute blame to themselves for committing comparable crimes against those whom they should first and foremost protect, children.

Conclusion

Sezer argues that “Greek tragedy as a form of civic discourse is intended to stimulate critical reflection, encourage its audience to question the ethical status of political conventions, laws and institutions, and hence open public life to rational debate.”⁵³ McGarry’s *Medea* places a spotlight on an enduring facet of human experience and a major issue of Euripides’ *Medea*, namely, the problem of punishment and (in)justice in its various aspects. The justice space that McGarry creates for *Medea* and consequently his audience compels spectators to confront their own role in the unjust murders of children while playing with the justice mechanisms of the theatrical stage.

⁵⁰ Christian Biet and Christophe Triau, *What is the Theatre?* (London: Routledge, 2019), 336.

⁵¹ Hall, “*Medea* and the Mind of the Murderer,” 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Sezer, “*Medea*’s Wounds,” 211.

Medea's internal and external conflicts and contradicting powers along with her eventual escape have always had a disturbing effect on ancient and contemporary audiences.⁵⁴ However, her on-stage punishment provides modern audiences and societies with "a cautionary tale that speaks our language and scrapes away all the barnacles that have attached to this theatrical vessel during its 2,500-year voyage".⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Charles Segal, "Euripides' *Medea*: Vengeance, Reversal, and Closure," *Pallas* 45 (1996): 18.

⁵⁵ Kevin Prokosh, "Medea," *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 21, 2003, 41.

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