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Ruby Vickers March 22, 2023

The Barbarian Paradox: The Contradictory Portrayal of Medea and Dionysus in Euripides

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Abstract

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In this thesis, I explore how Euripides constructs the figure of the paradoxical barbarian through two examples: Medea in the *Medea*, and Dionysus in the *Bacchae*. I aim to expand upon Edith Hall's important analysis of the concept of the barbarian by examining how Euripides engages with it and how his portrayal of barbarian characters changes over time. I argue that Euripides' presentation of Medea and Dionysus is instrumental in their perception as barbarian characters, both for a Classical Greek audience and in modern reception. I explain how Euripides uses binary categories and themes not to show the barbarian as the antithesis of Greek, but rather to expose that the dichotomies which Medea and Dionysus embody are not as clear cut as we may think. Thus, Euripides offers a nuanced view of these characters who interact with barbarity and Greekness to express the barbarian paradox.

I begin in chapter one by examining what makes these characters barbarian, and how the perception of them is impacted by their proximity to Greekness. In chapter two, I explore how the barbarian nature is inseparable from being gendered, and thus how the attempt to fit Medea and Dionysus into the gender binary merely emphasises their existence outside of and between traditional norms and expectations. In chapter three, I analyse Euripides' use of animal imagery in constructing their identities as complex barbarian characters, especially in comparison to other figures in both plays. Finally, in chapter four, I look at how the playwright contrasts mortal and divine nature. I end with a note of my observations on madness and sanity in both texts and how this impacts the perception of Medea and Dionysus.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

My project focuses on the paradox of the barbarian figure in Attic tragedy, comparing Euripides' *Medea* and *Bacchae*. The concept of the barbarian has a long and varied history with multiple meanings emerging over time. In the modern day, some meanings reflect the ancient understanding of the term, that a barbarian is a foreigner who speaks a different language, whereas some meanings are more associated with savagery and a lack of civilisation.[1] In her seminal work *Inventing the Barbarian*, Edith Hall notes that the term barbarian initially came from an adjective highlighting non-Greek language – *barbaros* – and then the category of the barbarian developed to signify more than a distinction of language.[2] In Classical Greece, the concept did not become solidified in consciousness and in literature until the fifth-century BCE, following the Greeks' victory in the Persian wars.[3] In order to be as specific as possible to fifth-century Athens, when I use the term barbarian, I follow Hall's argument that the term barbarian does have a strong connection to language, but language is not the only important distinction between barbarian and Greek at this time in Greece.

It is to Hall I turn when I consider who the barbarian is, and therefore who the Greek is. Hall lays out a framework for understanding the concept of the barbarian and shows it is essential for understanding Greek identity. She argues that Greek writing about barbarians "is usually an exercise in self-definition" because the writers establish the category of the barbarian as the opposite of the Greek.[4] A lot of the scholarly focus on the barbarian has emerged relatively recently, as well as the study of ethnicities developing alongside the

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[1] This is evidenced through the many entries for "barbarian" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In the modern day, it is hard to hear the term barbarian without thinking of its judgemental connotations. The original term may have been somewhat judgemental towards those who did not speak Greek, but as I will say, the stereotypes largely emerged after the Persian wars.
[2] Hall (1989) 9.
[3] Hall (1989) 10, 57.
[4] Hall (1989) 1.

increase in research on theories concerned with race. Much of the analysis centres on viewing barbarians through Greek eyes and through the concept of post-war Greek unity. The Greeks valued their own culture as superior to that of the barbarian, but this attitude is not quite the same as racism as we see it today,[5] so I will follow Hall in her focus on ethnicity rather than race. It is important for scholars to continue to study these topics, especially because as time goes on, we can only gain a deeper understanding of Classical Greek thought and its impact.

Barbarian characters have a strong presence in ancient Greek plays, particularly those by Euripides. Euripides is one of the best-known Classical playwrights, along with Aeschylus and Sophocles. Even compared to other playwrights, Euripides offers a more complex view of barbarian characters, mixing Greek qualities with those elsewhere associated with barbarians. In Aeschylus' *Persians*, however, the Persian characters are the simple antithesis of Greek ones.[6] Euripides' portrayal of barbarian figures heavily influenced the reception of some myths, and his choices in how he represents these characters are what interest me. Of all the playwrights, Euripides is the most interested in stories featuring barbarians,[7] and I intend to explore whether his barbarian characters serve as self-definition for the Greek characters, as previously mentioned, or if they serve a more complex purpose. I argue that to some extent, Medea and Dionysus as barbarians do serve as self-definition for the Greek characters, but not in the way that they completely oppose one another. Medea and Dionysus are paradoxical figures in that so much of their identity is tied to being a barbarian[8] and it has

[5] Snowden (1983) 64. As Snowden further notes, there were also white people "who did not measure up to the Greco-Roman norm image" (76). The existence of xenophobia in the ancient world is a big topic which I will not get into beyond the Greeks' perceptions of barbarians. Nevertheless, it is important to note the work that scholars such as Snowden have done on race in classical antiquity.

[6] Hall (1989) 99. Hall says that "the presentation of the Persians is predicated on the antithesis of Hellene and barbarian" and this definitive divide between Greek and barbarian results in unmistakable Orientalism. She recommends Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) for a deeper dive into Orientalism as a theory and how it relates to Aeschylus' *Persians*.

[7] Saïd (2002) 62.

[8] The level varies for most of them, and I think the importance of foreign heritage matters more for Medea than Dionysus. This could show development on Euripides' part, because the *Bacchae* comes much later and Dionysus is even harder to fit into categories, although this is partly due to his nature as a god.

significance for the plot and the Greek characters in the play, but they also seem to exist outside of the binary of Greek and barbarian, or at least travel between it.

The *Medea* and the *Bacchae* are two of Euripides' best-known works, but there has been little direct and focused comparison between the two main characters. I focus on comparing the character of Medea in Euripides' *Medea* to that of Dionysus in his *Bacchae* directly to highlight the nuances of Euripides' portrayals. There has been scholarly research on barbarians, as well as research on Dionysus and Medea as individuals through different lenses, such as gender theory. I argue, however, that it is beneficial to compare them directly to see Euripides' development and how so many themes are attached to barbarian characters, especially in comparison to Greekness. These characters embody important contradictions; in particular, both are in some sense barbarians but have significant ties and proximity to Greece. Medea is born in Colchis but marries a Greek man and comes to live in the Greek city of Corinth. Dionysus has a Greek mother but is reared outside of Greece and comes to Thebes as an outsider leading a chorus of barbarian women. The purpose of my thesis is to show that a comparison of these two characters can lead to new insights about both of them and to a better understanding of Classical Greek ideas of self-definition and barbarians in the late fifth-century BCE.

The *Medea* was performed in 431 BCE, the year that the Peloponnesian war (a long conflict between the city states of Athens and Sparta) began. Euripides wrote the *Bacchae* during the last years of his life and the tragedy was performed posthumously in 405 BCE, just before the end of the Peloponnesian war in 404 BCE. I wonder what effect living through this war had on Euripides and his writing,[9] and therefore what development there is in

[9] Euripides is living outside of Athens, in Macedonia, at the end of his life. Mastronarde (2002) 3. Indeed, Euripides may have felt like an outsider himself in some ways. He was an Athenian man and an important tragedian, but he did not win as many contests as his contemporary Sophocles. Furthermore, Aristophanes presentation of Euripides in his *Frogs* ridicules him which supports the idea that he may have seen himself as an outsider of sorts. See Hall (2010) 231. This may not be true, and this is not an analysis of Euripides' biography so I will not go into it deeply, but it is worth thinking about.

representing Medea and Dionysus as barbarian figures.[10] The Persian wars had such a great impact on the Greek idea of barbarity, but the Peloponnesian war was different because Athens was primarily fighting Sparta, another Greek city-state. Did this perhaps make some Greeks reconsider the concept of the "other" as the enemy now that they see that other Greeks can also be hostile? In his introduction to *Greeks and Barbarians*, Harrison asks: "How characteristic of his time was the ironic subversion of a simple Greek-barbarian antithesis performed by Euripides? Can we indeed be certain that Euripides did intend to undermine this antithesis?"[11] We cannot know for sure what was deliberate by Euripides, but I believe it is important to consider Euripides' intention when we examine his work. The antithesis between Greek and barbarian comes across much more strongly in Aeschylus' works, who is writing a generation before Euripides.[12] From examining *Medea* and the *Bacchae*, I do believe Euripides' choices in representing his barbarian characters are deliberate and he purposefully pushes against the boundaries of Greek and barbarian.

I intend to build on Hall's work by using the *Medea* and the *Bacchae* to convey that the concept of the barbarian is not always used as the antithesis of Greek. The concept of the barbarian may have evolved in the fifth century to focus on the self-definition of Greek identity, but I argue that in practice, the distinction between Greek and barbarian is not so clear cut. Euripides expresses the ambiguities and dichotomies which exist between the Greek and the barbarian characters, but also within the barbarian characters' own identities. It is important to mention that Hall acknowledges examples that do not fit in with the idea of the barbarian as a form of self-definition, giving Clytemnestra as an example of a barbaric

[10] Kitto notes a difference in themes between *Medea* and the *Bacchae*: "Love and vengeance are the basis of the *Medea*" but "the war brought a new tragic theme to the fore, and the tragedy of rational man preyed on by the irrational, but necessary passions is pushed into the background." Kitto (1939) 381.
[11] Harrison (2002) 8.
[12] Aeschylus' earliest play, the *Persians*, is from 472 BCE. His latest that we have a date for is his trilogy the *Oresteia,* from 458 BCE. These dates are based on his surviving plays and show that Aeschylus was writing in the early to mid fifth-century BCE. Euripides, however, was writing in the second half of the fifth century, with his earliest play *Alcestis* being performed in 438 BCE and the poet himself dying around 406 BCE.

Greek, and Cassandra as an example of a noble barbarian, both from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.[13] Although Hall does discuss Euripides in this section, she does not fully consider either Medea or Dionysus as specific examples, which is where I will extend her analysis. Hall acknowledges that the barbarian character can serve a more complex purpose, but most of her work is understandably concentrated on defining the core concept she proposes. Hall does not compare Dionysus and Medea directly, and I believe this is helpful to do in order to analyse how Euripides' portrayal of his barbarian characters changed over time. Medea and Dionysus are significant figures because they challenge the traditional binary opposition between Greeks and barbarians, and tragedy offers a space to explore these views.

Both Medea and Dionysus are outsiders who challenge the customs, or *nomoi*, of Greek society. Their actions expose the flaws evident in the Greek characters. Medea's foreignness is emphasised by her use of sorcery and her heritage from Colchis. She is, however, connected to Greece through her grandfather Helios and her husband Jason. Medea exposes Jason's hypocrisy and dangerous misogyny, but she ultimately commits multiple murders. Dionysus also challenges the norms of Greek society, and orchestrates madness and murder, although I believe the situation can be read slightly differently.[14] Though he punishes the Theban women, Dionysus also instils a sense of freedom in them and gives women the power in an otherwise patriarchal society. It is also possible to argue that Medea's character arc corresponds to her overcoming Jason, and by extension, the patriarchy in Greece. The *Bacchae* ends with Dionysus' triumph, as the *Medea* ends with Medea's, but these victories may impact the audience very differently. Some audience members may focus Medea escaping from justice for multiple murders, while others might see her victory as a rightful

[13] Hall (1989) 201–223.

[14] It is through the influence of Dionysus that Pentheus meets his horrible fate, so the god certainly assumes blame for his actions. I argue, however, that the play heavily emphasizes Pentheus' disrespect in such a way that makes the audience expect a punishment, even if it is extremely harsh. Medea's children, on the other hand, commit no crime, and they are murdered by a figure who is supposed to protect them, which villainises Medea more.

punishment for Jason's wrongs. Dionysus is the one punishing those who denied his divine parentage, so audience members may see justification there for the god's actions, but some may also view his choices as extreme and unnecessary. It is worth examining the similarities and differences in these plays to see if Euripides' portrayal of barbarian characters is consistent or if it evolves in some way.

With each chapter, I will explore the contradictions in Medea and Dionysus by looking at core binary themes and closely examining the language of the plays. In the first chapter, I consider the relationship between foreign origin and proximity to Greekness, especially in relation to how other sources characterise both Medea and Dionysus' identities. In chapter two, I examine the gender presentations in both plays, which extend outside of the binaries of male and female. In chapter three I focus on the distinction between the human and the animal. In the fourth chapter, I analyse Medea and Dionysus as figures who embody both a mortal and a divine nature. Finally, in an additional note I look at the actions of Medea and Dionysus in the context of madness and sanity. An examination of these various complex dichotomies will alter our perception of the way Greeks at the end of the fifth century viewed barbarians.

I expect that looking at Dionysus will help me considerably with my analysis of Medea for a few reasons. Firstly, when I read the *Bacchae* in Greek, I immediately noticed how paradoxical the nature of Dionysus is, and how he embodies the contradictory states of being. These oppositions are integral to his character and the plot of the play, but they also made me wonder whether Euripides characterised any other barbarians from different plays in such a way. Medea is a particularly compelling figure to look at because she is apparently the opposite of Dionysus in several ways, namely in being a mortal and a woman; yet, Dionysus has a mortal mother and is notoriously effeminate, while Medea has many masculine qualities and has close ties to the divine as a descendent of Helios, whose chariot

she escapes in at the end of the play. I will demonstrate that both characters are complex and embody many contradictions, which will lead to a more nuanced way of considering barbarians in late fifth-century Greek thinking.

The Greeks had complicated attitudes towards barbarian figures and their behaviour, and it is not possible to fit these characters into stereotypes. In particular, Euripides emphasises the paradoxical nature of both Medea and Dionysus to present them as complex and multifaceted characters in his plays. In doing so, the audience has room to form a complicated opinion not only on the barbarian characters and their actions, but also on the Greek characters in close proximity. I believe that Euripides does use the concept of the barbarian as a form of self-definition for the Greeks, but this works both ways. Although there are certainly differences between the Greek and barbarian characters, Euripides does not position them as polar opposites, and this instead forces the audience to consider that the Greek figures in the plays are just as flawed as the barbarian main characters. This realisation raises the question of the legitimacy and validity of barbarian stereotypes which arose, especially during and after the Persian wars, and Euripides challenges earlier conventions of barbarian representation in Greek tragedy.

Chapter One: Foreign Origin and Proximity to Greece

At the centre of any discussion of barbarism is the concept of the barbarian itself and how the barbarian was understood in Classical Athens, both in the context of contemporary events and literature of the time. In deciphering what a barbarian identity is, it is also necessary to have a conception of a Greek identity. In *Inventing the Barbarian,* Hall writes that "the invention of the barbarian marked a new phase in the Greeks' conception both of themselves and of the outside world, but not a complete break with the cultural tradition."[15] Foreign figures certainly existed before the invention of the concept of a barbarian,[16] but their categorisation in relation to the Greeks themselves is what is important to note. It is common to think of the barbarian as a figure completely opposite to a Greek – for example, speaking a non-Greek language, dressing differently, and engaging in dissimilar cultural customs. Greeks, however, do not always portray barbarians as the polar opposites of themselves. There may be differences between representations of actual human foreigners, such as the Persians – with whom the Greeks had recent conflict – and mythical figures. As I focus on Medea and Dionysus, I am concerned with the latter, but it is worth considering how historical encounters with barbarian figures may have influenced how writers chose to portray them.

When studying the figures of Dionysus and Medea, I believe it is important to consider their proximity to Greekness as well as their foreign origins. Both figures are connected to Greekness through familial relations, although their situations are not the same. I argue that this type of barbarian Euripides portrays is different to those in plays set outside

[15] Hall (1989) 3.
[16] In the *Iliad*, the Trojans are not the complete opposite of the Achaeans and they do not seem excessively foreign, although in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus encounters many different people on his journey with strange customs.

of Greece in a barbarian setting,[17] such as Xerxes and the rest of his kingdom in Aeschylus' *Persians.* The interactions of "Eastern" barbarians in Western settings – and with Greek characters specifically – provides for a fascinating contrast and in fact emphasises the danger that these barbarians pose. It is difficult to pin down Dionysus' origin to one simple place, with many ancient sources providing different answers with a particular focus on his origin in the East.[18] Ultimately, Dionysus is still a Greek god, born of Zeus and Semele, so he has strong familial connections to Thebes. Medea does not have Greek parentage in Euripides' play, but she marries Jason, a Greek hero, and lives in Corinth with him and their children. I argue that this proximity to Greekness makes these figures more dangerous as barbarians because they exist in Greek settings and interact with Greek customs. This nature does manifest differently between the two of them. Euripides highlights Dionysus' dangerous nature when Pentheus rejects Dionysus' status as a Greek god and focuses more on his barbarity. Medea's situation is unusual because she is already known to have committed terrible deeds in aid of Jason. When they are in Greece, however, Medea's behaviour is scrutinised and linked to her nature as a barbarian, particularly as she contrasts the ideal of the Greek woman in the play. I plan to look at both characters to see if and how Euripides frames their barbarity as impacting their behaviour in settings where the proximity to Greekness is high. Furthermore, I consider how this may affect how both the Greek characters and the Greek audience might perceive Dionysus and Medea in the context of barbarism and Greekness.

I. Medea's Mythical Origin

[17] Euripides does of course have plays set outside of Greece which feature barbarians, such as *Helen*, set in Egypt, but for the purpose of this thesis the Greek setting is important.
[18] This also leads to the association of Dionysus with Eastern divinities who have similar attributes, but the exact relationship between Dionysus as a Greek god and similar divinities in other religions is not clear.

It is important to consider just how much Euripides emphasised Medea's foreign nature and how that impacted the reception of her character. Medea not only leaves behind all her family in Colchis, including her father, the king, but she also kills her brother on the journey back to prevent Jason and his company being followed.[19] Medea cannot return to her homeland because she married a Greek man and committed murder and sorcery multiple times. Although Medea greatly aided Jason in his quest, when they are married and living in Corinth, she threatens the *oikos* (family) and the *polis* (city) from the Greek perspective. Medea's position is extremely restricted given that she is "ἄπολις" – stateless, or without a *polis*.[20] The city state provided protection, protection that Medea would lose when Jason married the princess of Corinth, because Medea would no longer be tied to Greece through her Greek husband. She threatens the *polis*, particularly in the eyes of King Creon, who recognises the threat Medea poses to his daughter as well as his city. The danger Medea opposes is not just because as a woman she is a rival of the princess, but because she is a foreign woman with an already dangerous reputation. Medea appeals to the Chorus as a woman, yet also contrasts herself with the Corinthian women because of her status as a foreigner:

> ἀλλ᾽ οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κἄμ᾽ ἥκει λόγος·
> σοὶ μὲν πόλις θ᾽ ἥδ᾽ ἐστὶ καὶ πατρὸς δόμοι
> βίου τ᾽ ὄνησις καὶ φίλων συνουσία,
> ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἔρημος ἄπολις οὖσ᾽ ὑβρίζομαι
> πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελῃσμένη,
> οὐ μητέρ᾽, οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐχὶ συγγενῆ
> μεθορμίσασθαι τῆσδ᾽ ἔχουσα συμφορᾶς.[21]
>
> But the story for you and me is not the same: for you there is this city and a father's house and the delight from life and being with friends, but I, being alone and stateless, am insulted by my husband, having been carried off from a barbarous land, having no

[19] *Medea* 166–167. Medea herself first mentions her brother, whom she killed, and Jason brings up the murder later.
[20] *Medea* 255.
[21] All Greek text taken from the Loeb Classical Library. Both the *Medea* and the *Bacchae* are edited by David Kovacs.

> mother, no brother, no relative to provide refuge from this misfortune. (*Medea* 252-258)[22]

This section of Medea's speech is an important passage to consider because of the intersectionality of Medea's gender and nationality. Not only is she no longer in her native land, but as a woman, she can only depend on her husband. As I will discuss in the next chapter, women had to pay a high price to buy their husbands with dowries, and then they were entirely dependent on them. Medea has been "ὑβρίζομαι πρὸς ἀνδρός" "insulted by her husband" yet she cannot return home to seek protection from her family either. With the first line of this passage, Medea clearly contrasts herself with the Chorus made up of Corinthian women. It is important to examine that Medea says "ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελῃσμένη," meaning that she was carried off from a barbarian land. Medea's use of the passive "λελῃσμένη" here is significant because the verb implies a sense of force, as if Jason abducted her. Medea supposedly chose to leave with Jason – he did not physically abduct her – but there is also the possibility that she was compelled by lust given to her by a god.[23] However much agency Medea may have had when she made that journey, she still suffers the consequences of being abandoned by Jason in a land that is foreign to her.

Medea's foreign identity is an important factor in her relationship with Jason. In the play they are no longer in Medea's homeland of Colchis, but instead back in Greece. Jason emphasises to Medea that she benefited more from aiding him, even though he would not have obtained the golden fleece without her:

> μείζω γε μέντοι τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας
> εἴληφας ἢ δέδωκας, ὡς ἐγὼ φράσω.
> πρῶτον μὲν Ἑλλάδ᾽ ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονὸς
> γαῖαν κατοικεῖς καὶ δίκην ἐπίστασαι

[22] Translations are my own unless indicated otherwise. I referred to both the Loeb and Liddell-Scott's lexicon while translating.
[23] The Chorus says Medea left Colchis with a μαινομένᾳ κραδίᾳ, "mad heart" (*Medea* 434). A similar conflict exists when considering the agency of Helen of Troy and whether she chose to leave with Paris, or if the blame should be placed on Aphrodite.

> νόμοις τε χρῆσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριν·
> πάντες δέ σ᾽ ᾔσθοντ᾽ οὖσαν Ἕλληνες σοφὴν
> καὶ δόξαν ἔσχες· εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτοις
> ὅροισιν ᾤκεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν.
>
> Indeed, regarding my saving you have taken more than you have given, as I will show. First, you now live in a Greek land rather than a barbarous land, and you understand justice and the use of laws, with no favour towards force; and all the Greeks perceived that you are clever, and you have acquired a reputation; but if you lived at the furthest boundary of the earth, there would be no talk about you. (*Medea* 534–541)

In this *agon*[24] between them, Jason claims Greek superiority and maintains that Medea should be grateful because she gained civilisation and fame from coming to Greece. This narrative not only ignores that Jason likely would not have completed his quest if not for Medea's help, but also positions Greek customs and favour as inherently superior to that of a barbarous country. Is it only possible for a foreigner to be respected if they are talked about in Greece? It is particularly notable that Jason says this, because in other Greek texts from a similar time, women being talked about was something negative.[25] Jason, however, may mean this in a positive sense if he is idealising the heroic value of *kleos*, glory, and the emphasis on notoriety.[26] He may think that having Greeks recognise your reputation is much preferable to being unknown in a foreign land, but this does not take into account how Medea's gender impacts the perception of her reputation in Greek society. Because she is talked about, and she is not a typical moderate and obedient woman, this sets her apart.

The passage further highlights the importance of Medea's proximity to Greekness in Euripides' play. Jason directly contrasts Medea's former home in a barbarian land and her current one in Greece, and therefore Medea is judged by Greek standards, especially concerning laws and justice. It is then easier for the characters in the play to condemn Medea

[24] Meaning argument.
[25] This is notable in Thucydides: in Pericles' speech, he says that it is best for women to have the least talk amongst men, whether positive or negative (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.45.2).
[26] Λόγος does not exactly equal κλέος here, but the λόγος may be the means through which people hear of Medea's deeds in aiding Jason and the argonauts.

when she does not conform to the ideals, because the comparison is more direct.[27] This proximity to Greekness therefore makes Medea's dangerous nature more chilling for a Greek audience because the foreigner is not some far away threat, but she is right there in a Greek setting. Euripides makes a thought-provoking choice in having Jason mention the laws and justice system of Greece because a core theme of the play – and Medea's argument against him – is that he broke their marriage oaths. Here Euripides gives Medea's view more credibility because Jason has clearly violated the Greek values he espouses, which weakens his argument.

At the end of the play, when Jason is reacting to Medea's murder of their children, he references her foreign origin one last time. Jason also adds in the idea that she betrayed her barbarian land by coming to Greece, even though Greekness is characterised as civilising and desirable in comparison to where Medea came from. This idea shows that it is impossible for a barbarian character, especially a woman, to do the right thing. If Medea had stayed in Colchis, she would not be famous and would not have experienced the civilised ways of Greece. But in coming to Corinth, Medea abandoned her family and native country:

> ἐγὼ δὲ νῦν φρονῶ, τότ᾽ οὐ φρονῶν,
> ὅτ᾽ ἐκ δόμων σε βαρβάρου τ᾽ ἀπὸ χθονὸς
> Ἕλλην᾽ ἐς οἶκον ἠγόμην, κακὸν μέγα,
> πατρός τε καὶ γῆς προδότιν ἥ σ᾽ ἐθρέψατο.
>
> Now I am sane, despite being insane at the time when I brought you from your home in a barbarian land to a Greek house, a great evil (you are), betrayer of your father and the land where you grew up. (*Medea* 1329–1332)

Medea's murder of her children is the ultimate display of her threatening nature.[28] She not only transgresses against the laws and customs of Greece by committing these acts, but also transgresses against womanhood. Furthermore, it is Medea's proximity to Greece which

[27] See Medea's comparison to a traditional Greek woman in my next chapter. In particular, the Nurse promoting moderation starkly contrasts Medea's *thumos*.
[28] Medea's infanticide can be compared to Agave's, which I will discuss in the third section of this chapter.

affects the way Jason perceives her. When they are in Colchis, he accepts her help and admits that he brought her to Greece. Jason uses the present tense to express how he is now in the right mind, in contrast to before. It is as if Jason, upon returning to Greece and seeing how different Medea was to not only Greek women but to the Greeks in general, realised he could not stay with her, even though he had already seen how dangerous she could be both to her enemies and to her family members. As Jason's arguments against Medea form a large part of the case against her in the play, his view of her must not be overlooked, especially because he subscribes to the notion of barbarian inferiority. Neither Jason nor Medea are "right" in the play, which provides for an interesting analysis when considering what an audience – modern or classical – might take away regarding perceptions of Greeks versus barbarians.

II. The Duality of Dionysus

When looking at the *Bacchae,* one of the most significant contradictions in Dionysus' nature is Dionysus as an Eastern and Western god, and this links to his overall paradoxical portrayal. As a god who becomes one of the Olympians, he is firmly established in the Greek pantheon and is known to all. The main conflict of the *Bacchae* is that the Thebans do not recognise Dionysus as the son of Zeus and Semele, but Dionysus and the Chorus both recount the story of his birth, showing that he is the product of these two Greek figures. In this way, Dionysus is unquestionably Greek, which makes it more significant to consider how Euripides characterises Dionysus as a barbarian figure too. As is stated in the *Homeric Hymn To Dionysus*, many people maintained that Thebes was the god's native land, focusing on the ancestry of his mother Semele.[29] This hymn, similar to other ancient sources, offers a different view and maintains that Zeus delivered Dionysus in a faraway part of Phoenicia.[30] It

[29] *Homeric Hymn* I, 6.
[30] "τηλοῦ Φοινίκης" *Homeric Hymn* I, 10.

is important to consider how Dionysus's origin myth is explained in other sources because this shows that Euripides was not the first author to suggest an origin outside of Thebes. None of the other sources which offer a foreign origin for Dionysus seem to agree on one place, and in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus explains his own origin as an Eastern god from Lydia:

> λιπὼν δὲ Λυδῶν τοὺς πολυχρύσους γύας
> Φρυγῶν τε, Περσῶν ἡλιοβλήτους πλάκας
> Βάκτριά τε τείχη τήν τε δύσχιμον χθόνα
> Μήδων ἐπελθὼν Ἀραβίαν τ᾽ εὐδαίμονα
> Ἀσίαν τε πᾶσαν ἣ παρ᾽ ἁλμυρὰν ἅλα
> κεῖται μιγάσιν Ἕλλησι βαρβάροις θ᾽ ὁμοῦ
> πλήρεις ἔχουσα καλλιπυργώτους πόλεις,
> ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων χθόνα,
> τἀκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς
> τελετάς, ἵν᾽ εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς.
>
> And leaving the gold rich lands of both the Lydians and the Phrygians, I came to the sun scorched plains of the Persians, the walls of Bactria, the dangerous country of the Medes, fortunate Arabia and all of Asia, (the part) which lies upon the briny sea having beautiful towered cities full of Greeks and barbarians mixed all together, for the first time I came to this city of Greeks, and with respect to the things there I established dancing and my rites, in order that my divine power may be visible to mortals. (*Bacchae* 13–22)

This explanation comes at the very beginning of the play, signifying its importance for the rest of the story. Euripides does not just mention Dionysus' origin once but continues with references to the East throughout the play. There are frequent references to Eastern things, such as the sound of Phrygian drums, and the smell of Syrian frankincense. Later in the play, in the dialogue where Pentheus is interrogating Dionysus, the god says "Λυδία δέ μοι πατρίς," "Lydia is my fatherland."[31] Dionysus seems proud of his origin and openly acknowledges his Eastern identity alongside his Greek parentage.[32] As he recounts his own narrative, Dionysus lists many places in the East that the Greeks would have considered barbarian, such as Persia, Baktria, and Arabia. After discussing the places he journeyed from,

[31] *Bacchae* 464.
[32] This can be seen as a contrast between nature (φύσις) and culture/customs (νόμος).

Dionysus says that he came to a city of the Greeks for the first time.[33] This firmly establishes Dionysus' origin as an Eastern god who came to Greece later, bringing rites which he had already established elsewhere. Dionysus' very presence in Thebes highlights the complexity of his origin: it is the first Greek city he comes to, but his parents are Zeus and Semele, a Greek god and a Theban woman. Therefore, Dionysus' arrival in Greece does not only highlight the time he has spent elsewhere as a foreign deity, but it also emphasises that his arrival in Thebes is a kind of unusual homecoming.

As a non-Greek divinity, Dionysus is striving in the *Bacchae* to be accepted as a god by the Greeks – in this case, Pentheus and the Thebans. It is imperative that they recognise his divinity, and from this stems the conflict of the play. Eastern origin is associated with barbarity, because the Greeks considered anyone who did not speak Greek to be a barbarian, as noted in the introduction. On the one hand, Dionysus uses language to describe barbarians in ways Greeks would, even though he is a "barbarian" himself. For example, at the beginning of the play, he describes the dangerous country of the Medes[34] – which aligns with Greek thought towards barbarian lands following the Persian wars. On the other hand, Dionysus speaks of the barbarian rites to Pentheus while simply highlighting that their ways are different:

> ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
> πᾶς ἀναχορεύει βαρβάρων τάδ᾽ ὄργια.
>
> ΠΕΝΘΕΥΣ
> φρονοῦσι γὰρ κάκιον Ἑλλήνων πολύ.
>
> ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ
> τάδ᾽ εὖ γε μᾶλλον· οἱ νόμοι δὲ διάφοροι.
>
> Dionysus:
> All barbarians celebrate these rites in dance.

[33] "ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν" (*Bacchae* 20) quoted above.
[34] "δύσχιμον χθόνα Μήδων" (*Bacchae* 15–16).

Pentheus:
For they are much worse minded than the Greeks.

Dionysus:
At least more well minded in respect to these things; but their customs are different. (*Bacchae* 482–484)

Dionysus is not ashamed of his origin, and he seems to use the term barbarian to simply mean non-Greek, rather than in a negative way. Dionysus does not discredit Greek or barbarian ways entirely but describes their differences and takes issue with Pentheus' generalisation of barbarian inferiority. Dionysus' use of the positive adverb "εὖ" directly contrasts Pentheus' use of the negative "κάκιον" in this dialogue. In contrast to Pentheus' views of the barbarians being bad minded, Dionysus says they are better minded with respect to celebrating his rites. This view is more inclusive of barbarian practices which may have been viewed as unfavourable in Greece. Pentheus directly compares Greeks and barbarians, with the former being superior in his view, yet for Dionysus the barbarian customs are much more important concerning his rites of celebration.

Dionysus has two different types of bacchants in the play: those who came with him from Asia, and the Theban women he drove mad for their disrespect towards him. It is not the Asian women who commit the murders, but the Thebans stung with madness by the god. The Asian bacchants form the Chorus, and after the messenger brings news of the death of Pentheus, they rejoice:[35]

εὐάζω ξένα μέλεσι βαρβάροις·
οὐκέτι γὰρ δεσμῶν ὑπὸ φόβῳ πτήσσω.

I, a foreign woman, cry out with barbarian songs;
For I no longer cower in fear of prison. (*Bacchae* 1034–1035)

[35] Perris notes that Medea rejoices to the messenger's news in a similarly triumphant way. Perris (2011) 43.

This passage emphasises the foreign nature of the women, and the barbarian aspect to their songs as they call out in celebration of Dionysus. The Chorus provide a commentary in the play and are undoubtedly fully in support of the god. In many plays, the Chorus is composed of members of the city-state where it takes place – in the case of *Medea*, they are Corinthian women, and in support of Medea, at least at first. In the *Bacchae*, however, the Chorus is made up of bacchants who follow Dionysus and are firmly on his side.[36] They are able to escape the wrath of Dionysus which is visited upon all the Thebans, even Cadmus, firmly establishing that it is all of the Greek characters who did wrong in not recognising Dionysus' divine parentage.[37] Although Pentheus does treat him as an inferior barbarian, the main offence caused is not believing Dionysus as a god deserving of worship. This is especially evident because the play takes place in Thebes, and Dionysus is not being honoured as a god by the Greeks specifically, whereas it is clear he is worshipped in Asia. The issue of divinity and his foreign origin are tangled up together by Euripides and it is hard to separate the different attributes of Dionysus. Therefore, Dionysus' identity as a god from the East is incredibly important to the play as a whole and it shapes how his characterisation as a whole is difficult to understand and pin down, both for the audience themselves and the characters in the *Bacchae*.

III. East and West

Dionysus and Medea both embody the idea of East meeting West in a few different ways that are significant to consider. It is important that both *Medea* and the *Bacchae* are set in Greek cities, but the titles of the plays centre the non-Greek characters. In *Greeks and Barbarians*, Suzanne Saïd notes that half of Euripides' plays involved "barbarians installed in

[36] Euripides does portray the Theban women in the play, but they are the ones turned mad by Dionysus.
[37] The motivation behind Dionysus' actions – punishing those who blasphemed him – shows why the Thebans do not form the Chorus, as they are the ones he is punishing.

the heart of Greece"[38] so *Medea* and the *Bacchae* are not unique for focusing on barbarian characters in Greek settings. Medea is the granddaughter of Helios, the titan of the sun, a deity who is recognised in Greece which makes her dramatic exit at the end of the play more impactful. Medea aided Jason, a Greek hero, and therefore becomes tied to Greece when she marries him. With his abandonment of her, however, Medea loses this connection. Regarding the *Bacchae,* Saïd mentions the Asian Bacchants in the play rather than Dionysus as the barbarian character, which I examine.

Hall notes that based on representations of Medea before Euripides' play, Medea was not originally categorised as foreign – in fact, in a footnote, Hall brings up the possibility that Euripides turned her into or popularised her as a barbarian, because it was after his play when artists began to depict her visually as a barbarian, such as in oriental dress.[39] As Pausanias describes, Eumelus said that Medea's father Aeëtes was actually from Corinth, and then moved to Colchis.[40] Although this is not my primary view because I am focusing just on these plays, it is still engaging to consider how Euripides' portrayals of these mythical figures may have therefore influenced the canon as well as artistic representations. For example, in the modern day, many people would recognise Euripides' version of *Medea* where she kills her children, even though this is not the only version of the myth.

Dionysus' heritage is unclear, just like Medea's. Even though he has clear ties to Greece through Zeus and Semele, many authors represent Dionysus as an established god in the East, and Euripides portrays him this way as well. In his book *Dionysus, Myth and Cult,* Otto writes that "Dionysus must have made his way into the Greek mainland from Thrace as well as from Phrygia, once in his old-Thracian form, the other time in a form modified by the influence of neighbouring religions in Asia Minor."[41] He also acknowledges the idea that

[38] Saïd (2002) 62.
[39] Hall (1989) 35.
[40] Pausanias 2.3.10.
[41] Otto (1965) 52.

Dionysus came to Greece later, and this often comes with Dionysus being associated with Eastern gods in other religions. Due to the breadth of origins for Dionysus in many different sources, I do not believe it is possible to tie him to one place, but it is worth noting that Dionysus as a foreign god was not a new concept, and this combines with his Greek identity to make him a more multi-dimensional figure.[42]

Medea's positioning as a barbarian woman in Euripides' play is a significant choice by the playwright because it is an incredibly important part of her character. I also think it is significant to note that not only did Euripides popularise Medea as barbarian, but he also popularised a version of her myth including her infanticide. Had Euripides not done this, Medea would certainly have been a more sympathetic character, especially if the Corinthians killed her children, as in some alternate versions of the myth. Does this mean that Euripides included the terrible acts to reinforce Medea's barbarian nature? Or was he trying to focus on what acts a wronged woman might commit?

On the other hand, with Euripides' later play comes a slightly different approach to the barbarian. Pentheus still holds stereotypical and derogatory views towards foreigners, but he is clearly in the wrong in the play, whereas in *Medea* both Medea and Jason at times gain the sympathy of the other characters and the audience. Dionysus speaks often and openly of barbarian lands and peoples and orchestrates the horrible moment of Agave killing her own son, yet this is not the same act of barbarism as Medea killing her own children.[43] Medea's

[42] Concerning the existence of myths of Dionysus from many places, Hall says: "Such myths, however, do not narrate the historical spread of his worship, but articulate his role as the epiphany god—the god who arrives, often from the sea, and meets resistance." Hall (1989) 152. Whether he was firmly established in the East or not, it is most important in this play that he arrives in Thebes from elsewhere and experiences rejection, so he must overcome this resistance.

[43] That being said, the sparagmos is very disturbing, and the scene where Agave is holding Pentheus' head and realises it is him really emphasises the horrible consequences of Dionysus' divine influence. I believe, however, that a lot of the horror in this moment comes from the detail that Agave did not know what she was doing when she killed Pentheus because she was in a Bacchic frenzy. While this was caused by Dionysus, I still believe that in comparison Medea's actions are more reprehensible for the audience because she knew what she was doing when she committed murder, unlike Agave. The worst of Medea's actions come from careful planning rather than passion.

decision to commit infanticide is a violation of this maternal role and relationship she has with her children, especially as they are still young, so she is supposed to protect them as a parent. Even though Dionysus is related to Agave and Pentheus, he does not have the same relationship with them as Medea does with her children. Instead, Dionysus is a god taking his revenge on a blasphemous city, and his power is divine, yet also violent and destructive.[44] Even though he is Greek himself, Dionysus is still a force who disrupts Greek society and order in Thebes.

Therefore, the status of Dionysus as a divinity compared to Medea as a mortal woman is important to consider when examining the impact of barbarian status on both figures and how this may have affected Euripides' portrayal of them. Although Euripides does not erase Dionysus' barbarian qualities, the point and conflict in the play stems from his identity as a Greek god. Does this show some evolution in Euripides' thinking and how he portrays barbarians? Medea's character is nuanced, but I believe that the way Euripides portrays his barbarian characters develops noticeably between the *Medea* and the *Bacchae*.

[44] As a god, Dionysus may also be somewhat removed from judgement compared to Medea as a mortal woman married to a Greek man and a mother who killed her children.

Chapter Two: Male, Female, and Ambiguous Gender

This category of the barbarian in the Greek consciousness expanded from language to also include a broader sense of non-Greekness which encompassed other aspects of identity. In this chapter, I discuss a major source of tension in both *Medea* and the *Bacchae,* which is gender, and more specifically how the characters do or do not conform to traditional gender roles. I argue that barbarity is inseparable from being gendered in a distinct way which contrasts the gendering of Greekness. With the barbarian characters, their gender is often ambiguous, and in fact when the audience try to understand the nuances of the gender of Medea and Dionysus as presented by Euripides, the effect is paradoxical. There are also more blurred lines between the typical attributes of men and women, as well as less confinement to the gender norms that are more apparent in the Greek characters.

It is very striking to compare Dionysus and Medea because while they both do push against stereotypes, Medea is a human woman and Dionysus is a male god, so there are certainly differences in their circumstances which in turn affects their gender presentation and perception. For example, Greeks have historically feminised male barbarians, such as the Persians and their king Xerxes. Since Medea is already a woman, however, she pushes against traditional gender ideals by displaying masculine attributes.[45] On the other hand, Dionysus is a refreshing case because he embodies a duality of gender which is representative of his transformative nature. Through the process of writing *Medea*, did Euripides develop a more nuanced way of looking at barbarian gender that later influenced his portrayal of Dionysus? By comparing these characters directly, I aim to examine the similarities and differences in how Euripides genders the barbarian identity in a contradictory way, and what effect that has on how the audience views the figures of Medea and Dionysus respectively.

[45] As I will note later in this chapter, Medea's masculinity may call to mind the Amazons.

I. Medea the Hero

In Greek tragedy, the ideas of being either a female hero or a barbarian hero appear to be contradictory terms. The Greeks greatly associated heroism with masculinity, and heroes also often represented Greekness in a struggle against foreign enemies.[46] Euripides, however, characterises Medea to highlight traditional masculine heroic qualities. In her comparison of three representations of Medea in literature, scholar Carolyn A. Durham writes that "it may be a contradiction in terms to speak of a tragic heroine… women characters who achieve heroic stature in tragedy necessarily reject their femaleness or participate in its devaluation."[47] I think it is possible to link Durham's gender analysis to Medea's ethnicity: Medea is able to achieve this association with heroism because as a barbarian woman she already rejects traditional Greek femininity. It is necessary to link Medea's gender and foreign origin in this way because these two aspects of her identity are inseparable, and a barbarian woman is different from a character who is only a barbarian or only a woman.

Medea's barbarian nature inverts her perception by the Greeks as a woman, so instead of being feminised, she is masculinised. In the beginning of the play, Medea makes a notable and compelling speech about the difficulties in the lives of women which men so often disregard, and the fact that she is even voicing these concerns is not something the ideal Greek woman would do.[48] The Nurse even mentions that this side of Medea contrasts her

[46] For example, it was common for Greek heroes to prove themselves by overcoming the Amazons. Theseus defeats Antiope; Heracles gains Hippolyte's girdle; and Achilles beats Penthesilea. Foreman (2014).
[47] Durham (1984) 55.
[48] William J. O'Neal offers Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey* as an example of the ideal Greek woman: someone who is chaste and loyal to her husband. He displays Medea and Clytemnestra as contrasting women who rebel against this standard. O'Neal gives a summary of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, in which he explains the ideal traits for an Athenian bride, and "she was expected to be a person who knew and saw and said as little as possible." It is worth noting that this text is from the fourth century, after Euripides' time. I do think that Penelope does not fully fit this description because she certainly uses her agency against the suitors, but she is still a contrast to Medea, who fully exercises her capacity for speech throughout the entire play. O'Neal (1993) 117–119.

behaviour when she first arrived in Corinth because she did not argue with Jason then.[49] Medea begins her speech by asserting the unfortunate nature of women:

> πάντων δ᾽ ὅσ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει
> γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν·
> ἃς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῇ
> πόσιν πρίασθαι δεσπότην τε σώματος
> λαβεῖν·
>
> Of all the things that have life and thought, we women are the most unfortunate in nature; first it is necessary at an extravagant price to buy a husband and take a master for the body. (*Medea* 230–234)

This first thought is a broad claim, general to all Greek women with dowries, yet Medea has plenty of evidence to support her point of view. Even the women of Corinth, who make up the Chorus, do not disagree with her, yet Jason reduces the concerns of women to only caring about the marriage bed.[50] Medea also rightfully asserts that women's lives hang upon whether they have a good or bad husband,[51] and this dependency is especially pronounced for Medea, who is now living in a foreign land with no other family. Euripides' use of the superlative "ἀθλιώτατον" highlights that women face many struggles, yet it would be more accurate if Medea referred to barbarian women being the most unfortunate, which is more specific to her situation. Medea faces unique challenges as a foreign woman, and much of what she describes women facing Medea herself does not experience. For example, Medea was not given to Jason to marry – instead, she pursued him herself and chose to leave with him. Therefore, she did not have to pay the "χρημάτων ὑπερβολῇ" "extravagant price" for her husband with a dowry. This assessment, however, certainly reflects the experience of the women of Corinth in the Chorus.

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[49] "ξὺν ἀνδρὶ καὶ τέκνοισιν, ἀνδάνουσα μὲν / φυγὰς πολίταις ὧν ἀφίκετο χθόνα / αὐτῷ τε πάντα ξυμφέρουσ᾽ Ἰάσονι" (*Medea* 11–13).

[50] *Medea* 569–574. Jason says that women are happy if the state of the marriage bed is good, and hateful towards what they need if all is not well in the marriage bed. Medea is explaining what women must do out of necessity, but Jason reduces the scope of her argument to just the marriage bed.

[51] "κἀν τῷδ᾽ ἀγὼν μέγιστος, ἢ κακὸν λαβεῖν ἢ χρηστόν" (*Medea* 235–236).

Not only is Medea a woman, but she is also a woman from a foreign land who does not fit the stereotypical standards of a Greek woman, so there is even less reason for powerful Greek men such as Jason and Creon to listen to what she has to say. Following on from her speech about the plight of women, Medea directly compares the difficulties of men to those of women, and boldly asserts her own masculinity, saying: "ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ᾽ ἀσπίδα στῆναι θέλοιμ᾽ ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ" "I would rather stand in battle with a shield three times than give birth once."[52] Medea's opinion on this matter would have been very shocking to the male Athenian audience because women did not fight, and they were expected to stay confined to the domestic sphere. In contrast to her expected domestic role, this view aligns Medea with the perspective of a warrior and suggests an affinity with a god such as Ares. Her view shows that she is not privileging or prioritising the family, which would have been acceptable if it was a man going to war for his city state, but unacceptable for a woman. For a Greek audience, Medea's statement may even call to mind the mythical Amazons, a race of warrior women who were constantly depicted in artwork and sculpture fighting Greeks in the Amazonomachy. They, like Medea, are foreign, and their female gender only adds to their barbaric nature.[53] In fact, Aeschylus describes the Amazons as inhabitants of Colchis, Medea's homeland, which is an example of an even more direct connection between them.[54] Medea's expression challenges the assumption that the lives of men are more challenging, and even if Greek women such as the Chorus do agree with Medea's sentiment, this bold statement preferring war over childbirth sets Medea even further apart from Greek women.

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[52] *Medea* 250–251.
[53] Hardwick examines the Amazons as heroes, outsiders, and women in Greek presentations. She says that Herodotus "presents their separateness as a form of dissent from the conventions of life for Greek women." Interestingly, she also quotes a passage from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* in which he uses the Amazons to signify "cultural distance and strangeness." Hardwick (1990) 17–18.
[54] The Amazons are described as "Κολχίδος τε γᾶς ἔνοικοι" "those who inhabit the land of Colchis" (*Prometheus Bound* 415).

Shaw provides examples of how Medea does in fact correspond to the "image of woman" as imagined by Greek men – she values domestic bonds and aids Jason, especially in their journey to Corinth.[55] Despite these examples, Medea continues to be contrasted with a traditional Greek woman throughout the play. She goes against the *nomoi* (customs) of the Greeks and threatens both the *oikos* (home) and the *polis* (city state).[56] Medea's desire for revenge challenges the expectations of her gender. Medea uses poison to kill the princess, and through this act also kills Creon indirectly. She uses the stereotypical female weapon of poison, but the ultimate betrayal of her womanhood comes from the fact that she kills her children. The original Athenian audience of *Medea* would know the figure from myth, but Euripides' version is key in establishing a different ending – one where she murders her children and escapes on a divine chariot. This detail is key because the horrific act reduces the sympathy Medea may have gathered from her earlier speeches.[57] As Shaw says, "it is only now, with the horrible murder accomplished, that Medea has become fully barbarian. She has gradually lost her Greek character in the course of the play."[58] Jason says at the very end of the play that no Greek woman would have killed the children, and this is the assessment the audience is left with as Medea flies away in her chariot:

> ἤρξω μὲν ἐκ τοιῶνδε· νυμφευθεῖσα δὲ
> παρ᾽ ἀνδρὶ τῷδε καὶ τεκοῦσά μοι τέκνα,
> εὐνῆς ἕκατι καὶ λέχους σφ᾽ ἀπώλεσας.
> οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ᾽ ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ
> ἔτλη ποθ᾽, ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ
> γῆμαι σέ, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριόν τ᾽ ἐμοί,
> λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος
> Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.
>
> You began with acts such as this. But having married this man and borne children to me, you killed them for the sake of sex and the marriage bed. There is not a Greek woman who would have dared to do this, but I married you holding you above them,

[55] Shaw (1975) 258–259.
[56] Jason's rejection of Medea for the princess not only breaks the oaths he made, but also threatens the *oikos*.
[57] For some audience members, Medea's infanticide may destroy any existing sympathy. For others, the act might highlight her desperate situation.
[58] Shaw (1975) 263.

> and a hateful and destructive marriage for me, you lioness, not a woman, having a more savage nature than Tyrrhenian Scylla. (*Medea* 1336–1343)

Jason does not say that no good mother would have done this, or that no proper woman would have: he specifically says that no Greek woman would murder her own children. This specification highlights Medea's otherness as a female barbarian, and how she is completely set apart from the traditional Greek woman. Jason's statement is not completely true, as earlier in the play the Chorus alludes to Ino, a Greek queen of Thebes who tried to kill her stepchildren.[59] It feels intentional on Euripides' part to call attention to Ino earlier so that the audience would have that myth in mind.[60] It suits Jason's narrative to fully focus on Medea's barbarian nature as an explanation for her actions, and to explicitly position her as something "other". Jason also asserts in this speech that Medea killed their children "εὐνῆς ἕκατι καὶ λέχους" "for the sake of sex and the marriage bed."[61] Jason sounds as if he is disparaging Medea in a misogynistic way by implying that she only cares about the marriage bed, when actually Medea is greatly concerned with justice and oaths:

> γυνὴ γὰρ τἄλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα
> κακή τ᾽ ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾶν·
> ὅταν δ᾽ ἐς εὐνὴν ἠδικημένη κυρῇ,
> οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρὴν μιαιφονωτέρα.
>
> For in other things a woman is full of fear and suffers to look upon battle and weapons; but when she is wronged in the marriage bed, there is no other mind more bloodthirsty than hers. (*Medea* 263–266)

In this passage Medea does admit that she is enraged because Jason has mocked her marriage, but this is not just to do with the marriage bed, but also security. Medea is a foreign

[59] Hall (1989) 188. The story of Ino is a slightly different situation because she tries to kill her stepchildren, and not her own children. This act, however, would still disrupt the Greek *oikos* so it is worth mentioning here.
[60] Crimes associated with barbarians, such as murder within families, occur frequently in Greek myth. Hall (1989) 211.
[61] *Medea* 1338. Both εὐνῆς and λέχους can mean marriage or marriage bed, so because Euripides included both of these, I take it as placing emphasis on what is associated with marriage and the marriage bed, such as sex.

woman living far from home with no family to speak of except Jason and her children, so his abandonment of her is a real threat to her safety and security in Greece,[62] and makes her concerned for the fate of her children, exiled and without support.[63] It is noteworthy that Medea characterises women as passive and fearful, when she herself said she would rather fight with weapons than give birth. Does this mean Medea does not think of herself as a woman in the traditional sense, or is this an example of Euripides not thinking of Medea as typical? Even before Jason mocks her marriage in Corinth, Medea is not characterised as timid or shy at all in myth and indeed commits bloodthirsty acts before the murders in the *Medea*.[64] Perhaps because she is a barbarian woman, Medea does not fit into these categories of generalisation.

It is also possible to view Medea's gender as a struggle between the masculine and the feminine, rather than a complete separation of the two. This is particularly evident when she debates with herself over the killing of her children. Helene Foley writes that "the masculine heroic self requires the killing of the children and the maternal self defends them. The masculine self wins."[65] In the heroic sense, Medea's killing of her children seems more like a sacrifice as occurs in other Greek myths,[66] rather than simply murder. Does the maternal self completely lose the argument here? Medea herself knows the troubles of a life in exile, and she is also aware that if she murders Glauce and Creon, her children would be left motherless

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[62] Zyl Smit offers one possible feminist view of Medea's actions: "In that regard a feminist view could be that she is driven to the unnatural act - the reversal of her role as nurturing mother - of killing her own children, by the harsh treatment she has received from the men who have some power over her, namely Creon and Jason. It could be argued that the men bear the moral responsibility for her act." Zyl Smit (2002) 105. Her position in Greece as a barbarian was made uncertain after Jason's abandonment of her. Like Zyl Smit, I hesitate to say that this means the men bear moral responsibility, but their actions are certainly deeply connected to Medea's response.

[63] Creon plans to exile both Medea and her children (*Medea* 70–72). Jason says he will provide the children with whatever they need, but as he has broken oaths to Medea before, she evidently does not trust him (*Medea* 610–613).

[64] At the beginning of the *Medea*, the Nurse mentions Medea's trickery of Pelias' daughters which resulted in his death (*Medea* 9–10). In the *Argonautica*, a later representation from the 3rd century BCE, Medea and Jason both plan and enact the murder of her brother Apsyrtus (*Argonautica* 421–422). Medea's murder of her brother is only briefly mentioned a few times in Euripides, but it is clearly established that the murder happened.

[65] Foley (1989) 62–63.

[66] For example, Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia on the way to Troy.

and exposed to Medea's enemies.[67] I do not think that Medea's murder of her children is a strictly maternal act, but perhaps in her own twisted logic, the maternal self does not lose, but instead aligns with the heroic in this act.

Medea's displays of passion are more akin to those of a Greek warrior,[68] in direct contrast to the moderation that the Nurse cautions Medea to embody. Durham writes that "the play's plea for moderation, constantly reiterated by the female Chorus, discloses its real message: be moderate, be human, be normal; that is, be female —according to the rules laid down by men."[69] As Medea rejects the advice of the Chorus, she therefore is not only rejecting the ideal of moderation but also her feminine gender. I do not think the struggle in her monologue needs to be mutually exclusive from Medea's gender. Foley writes that "those who read the monologue as a struggle between reason and passion view Medea's story as a tragedy of sexual jealousy."[70] I do not necessarily think this statement has to be so exclusive, and this struggle is complex because Medea does manage to be reasonable in her passion, and I think within this struggle there is some contrast between passion and moderation.[71] Euripides only uses a form of sophrosyne (σωφροσύνη) for moderation once in the play,[72] when the Chorus praises this virtue, and otherwise uses different Greek terms. However, passion and moderation seem to overlap in Greek heroes as well, so they are not mutually

[67] After she has engineered the deaths of Glauce and Creon, Medea determines that she must murder her children to keep them from her enemies (*Medea* 1060–1062).
[68] Barbara Koziak says that in Homer "thumos is key to the psychology of the heroic warrior" although it is not yet tied to manliness. Koziak (1999) 1069.
[69] Durham (1984) 56.
[70] Foley (1989) 63. I do not think this struggle necessarily symbolises sexual jealousy, but it is a significant part of the story. Kitto offers the viewpoint that the point of the tragedy is that θυμός can be stronger than βουλεύματα, passion than reason, and so can be a most destructive agent" – this is destructive not just to the characters in the play who suffer, but society itself. Kitto (1939) 193–194.
[71] Sophrosyne (σωφροσύνη) is a Greek virtue often described as containing moderation or self-control. This is important for men to embody, too – notably in philosophical texts such as Plato's *Phaedrus* – so this emphasis on moderation is not exclusive to the female gender. In the context of this play, though, the emphasis on moderation is very much directed towards Medea and by extension, women in general.
[72] "στέργοι δέ με σωφροσύνα, δώρημα κάλλιστονθεῶν" "may moderation accept me, fairest gift of the gods" (*Medea* 636). Textual search done through the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae.

exclusive qualities.[73] As moderation was important for men too, it is not just a female quality either, but I do agree with Durham in that in the context of this play, Medea's lack of moderation seems to be a transgression of gender. As discussed previously, Medea does not embody the typical presentation of the ideal Greek, and she especially contrasts the Greek women of the Chorus. Thus, this conflict does somewhat represent a gender struggle between the heroic self and the traditional woman, but it is difficult to see Medea's character fully fitting in with the frameworks of Greek virtues and emotions.[74] Medea puts on the facade of a traditional Greek woman, and she is successful in convincing Jason that she has had a change of heart, which shows the control she has over her gender presentation. Medea's very nature as a barbarian woman is contradictory, and her gender is no different.

II. Dionysus the Transformer

While I view Medea's gender as contradictory, Dionysus exists between and outside of the binaries of male and female, and his gender presentation is therefore harder to pin down than Medea's. He is a male god, but in the *Bacchae,* he is exclusively surrounded by and associated with the women who are his maenads. In the play, Pentheus is overcome by Dionysus and the maenads, the feminine ones. Although in the case of the *Bacchae* Dionysus stings the women out of their homes with madness and they do not choose to join him, women defying the traditional expectations set for them are seen as dangerous and barbaric in society. Charles Segal says that there is an "affinity that exists in Greek culture between the threatening aspects of Dionysus and the threatening aspect of women."[75] Segal links this affinity to the idea of both Dionysus and women being between civility and chaos, and

[73] I hesitate to definitively say that Medea's passion makes her a hero without doing more research into *thumos* as a heroic quality as it is a very complicated term and has a large history, especially in Homer.
[74] I think there is some connection between passion and moderation as well, but this comparison would require more research into the specific use of these qualities in Greek literature and philosophy, so I will not go into it any more here.
[75] Segal (1978) 186.

human and animal. This does not necessarily position Dionysus as female himself, but it does align him with femininity. This affinity could also point to the fact that when women are threatening, they are defying their traditional gender roles (as Medea does) and this aligns them with barbarity. As for Dionysus himself, he threatens the mindset of characters before they even meet him in the play. For example, Pentheus pays a lot of attention to Dionysus' physical appearance and its association with femininity. This following quote is the first mention that Pentheus makes of Dionysus, whom he refers to as some stranger from a foreign land:

> λέγουσι δ᾽ ὥς τις εἰσελήλυθε ξένος,
> γόης ἐπῳδὸς Λυδίας ἀπὸ χθονός,
> ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὖοσμος κόμην,
> οἰνωπός, ὄσσοις χάριτας Ἀφροδίτης ἔχων,
> ὃς ἡμέρας τε κεὐφρόνας συγγίγνεται
> τελετὰς προτείνων εὐίους νεάνισιν.
>
> They say that some stranger has invaded, a sorcerer and an enchanter from the Lydian land, with blond curls, fragrant in his hair, having the dark graces of Aphrodite in his eyes, he who keeps company with young maidens day and night, offering them euois[76] rites. (*Bacchae* 233–238)

Here, Dionysus' foreign origin is inextricably tied to his gender presentation. The idea that he is "fragrant in his hair" suggests he places attention on his appearance, which is a behaviour typically more associated with women, as well as men from Eastern lands. This introduction of Dionysus establishes how those who do not respect him view him, particularly Pentheus.[77] Before Dionysus even appears in front of Pentheus in the play, Pentheus orders the attendants to find "τὸν θηλύμορφον ξένον" "the effeminate stranger."[78] Literally, the Greek word "θηλύμορφον" means female form. Pentheus does describe Dionysus's appearance later, focusing particularly on his feminine attributes, but at this point

[76] This is an exclamation within Dionysus' cult which can be translated as something like "joyous" or "ecstatic" but as it is very specific to the cult, I transliterated it.
[77] This is Pentheus' view of Dionysus, so we should take this with a grain of salt.
[78] *Bacchae* 353.

in the play his use of "θηλύμορφον" relates only to Dionysus' reputation as a foreign stranger with a following of mad women. Therefore, his effeminate nature (in the eyes of Pentheus) is inextricably tied to both his barbarian nature and his association with women:

> ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σῶμ᾽ οὐκ ἄμορφος εἶ, ξένε,
> ὡς ἐς γυναῖκας, ἐφ᾽ ὅπερ ἐς Θήβας πάρει·
> πλόκαμός τε γάρ σου ταναὸς οὐ πάλης ὕπο,
> γένυν παρ᾽ αὐτὴν κεχυμένος, πόθου πλέως·
> λευκὴν δὲ χροιὰν ἐκ παρασκευῆς ἔχεις,
> οὐχ ἡλίου βολαῖσιν ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ σκιᾶς
> τὴν Ἀφροδίτην καλλονῇ θηρώμενος.
>
> But your body is not misshapen, stranger, as for women, which is why you are in Thebes; for your hair is long, not because of wrestling, flowing along your cheeks, full of desire; and you have white skin from preparation, hunting after Aphrodite with your beauty not in the radiance of the sun but beneath the shadows. (*Bacchae* 453–459)

Addressing Dionysus, Pentheus says that his body is not misshapen "ὡς ἐς γυναῖκας" "as for women". He makes this distinction clear by commenting on Dionysus's appearance. Dionysus has long hair, but this is "οὐ πάλης ὕπο" – not because of wrestling – which would have been acceptable for a man. Instead, his hair is full of desire, and Dionysus also has "λευκὴν δὲ χροιὰν ἐκ παρασκευῆς" "white skin from preparation." This is an important comment because white skin was idealised in ancient Greece for upper class women because it signified that they spent their time indoors domestically, rather than working outdoors. Furthermore, the word "παρασκευῆς" implies agency on the part of Dionysus in purposely looking feminine, which would have made him seem even more barbaric in the eyes of Pentheus. Aside from his form appearing feminine, Dionysus is also only compared to female gods in the play – Demeter[79] and Aphrodite.[80] The previous passage shows how Dionysus' feminised appearance links him to Aphrodite, but his divine attributes link him to Demeter.

[79] *Bacchae* 275–280.
[80] *Bacchae* 457–459.

His contribution to mankind, the invention of wine, is placed alongside nourishing food as the two most important things for mortals. Wine is not a necessary factor for living, unlike Demeter's agriculture, yet wine clearly has an important place in life for people. This is significant because it shows Dionysus assuming a prominent role in spaces associated with female gods – in this case, nourishment and femininity – and so this further destabilises his identity as a male god.

Greeks also typically viewed non-Greek barbarians as effeminate, and the concept of the barbarian itself became perpetuated more concretely by poets.[81] One example of this is how the Classical Greeks thought of the Persians and how they were depicted following the Persian Wars, particularly in literature and artwork. This applies not only to writers such as Herodotus, presenting a historical narrative (however inaccurate), but also to other tragedians, such as Aeschylus, who came before Euripides. I believe that Euripides developed Aeschylus' more simplistic view of the barbarian, especially when considering appearance. Aeschylus heavily emphasises the emasculated nature of Xerxes and the Persian men.[82] Even though in the *Bacchae* Dionysus' disguised form has feminine qualities, this is not meant to emasculate him. Dionysus is not an object of ridicule in the play, and he holds the power and controls the narrative. His disguise as a mortal is still part of his identity, and he chooses to present himself in this way, as I will discuss further in this chapter. Pentheus certainly sees Dionysus as effeminate, however, and his views could more broadly represent those of Classical Athenian male citizens, so this is intriguing because Euripides clearly positions Pentheus in the wrong in the play. Does this mean that Euripides is pushing back against the

[81] Hall (1989) 2.

[82] Aeschylus deprives the Persians of their masculinity by emphasizing the importance of luxury and excessive emotion in Persia and Atossa's feminine authority overtaking that of Xerxes. Furthermore, the Persian youth are no match militarily for the masculine, self-dependent Greeks. Edith Hall examines the complex term "habrosune" and explains that it was often applied to women and female goddesses, but towards the Persians these connotations of softness and delicacy were not desirable. Hall (1989) 81–82.

rigid stereotypes towards barbarians that especially followed the Persian wars? These feelings towards real barbarians certainly also applied to depictions of characters.

It is difficult to understand gender in the play because the impact provided also depends on the character we consider. Dionysus himself has no problems with his appearance – as a god so associated with transformation, he could simply appear in a different disguise as he wished. He greatly values his curls, even though Pentheus considers them womanly.[83] In the *Companion to Greek Religion*, Susan Guettel Cole says that "Dionysus freely crosses gender boundaries, and often appears on vases in the same garments as his female worshipers."[84] This is significant because the physical evidence from vases provides visual support for how artists portrayed Dionysus, and therefore it is not just Pentheus who sees Dionysus as feminine. Both Dionysus and the artists who portray him embrace his femininity as part of his character, yet crucially he is not actually a woman. Pentheus disguises himself at the suggestion of Dionysus in order to infiltrate the maenads:

> τίνα στολήν; ἦ θῆλυν; ἀλλ᾽ αἰδώς μ᾽ ἔχει.
>
> "What clothing? Female? But shame holds me." (*Bacchae* 828)
>
> …
>
> ὡς φρονῶν μὲν εὖ
> οὐ μὴ θελήσῃ θῆλυν ἐνδῦναι στολήν,
> ἔξω δ᾽ ἐλαύνων τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐνδύσεται.
>
> Since if he was well in mind, he would not be willing to put on female clothing, but driven out of his mind he will put them on. (*Bacchae* 851–853)

Euripides makes no mockery of Dionysus looking feminine; only Pentheus does. When Dionysus convinces Pentheus to dress as a woman, is this meant to be a ridiculing moment? Male actors played all roles in Greek plays, even the female characters, so the act of

[83] *Bacchae* 494.
[84] Guettel Cole (2007) 328.

a man dressing as a woman in itself is not ridiculing. It seems as if Dionysus is directing this gender performance, and this is partly comedic because of how Pentheus previously disparaged Dionysus for his feminine appearance, but it is only a reminder that men portray all of the maenads. In this scene, Pentheus feels shame and he is not sound of mind, which is why he is convinced to put on this female costume, and this reluctance on his part is what makes his death even more significant. Dionysus as a god – and therefore the festivals associated with him[85] – are inseparable from transformation and disguise. Is it Dionysus' divine nature that distances him from this gender criticism? Or does the audience hold him to different standards because of the fact that his very nature is already contradictory, so it is not as much of a spectacle to see Dionysus embrace female clothing? I do not think Dionysus is performing gender as much as it is completely in his nature to have an ambiguous or fluid gender identity specifically. This fluid nature is true of other gods, most notably to Zeus, who is always changing forms to seduce women.[86] Dionysus represents something different because while he does transform between human and animal and mortal and divine as other gods do, he is the god most prominently associated with a duality of gender.

III. Gender Boundaries

In my introduction, I raised the question of how events such as the Persian wars and the Peloponnesian war impacted not only Euripides in his writing, but the broader perception of barbarians by Classical Athenians. To relate this to the barbarians portrayed by Euripides, at first glance Medea is a more stereotypical barbarian as someone who does not conform to the ideals of a Greek woman. Instead, she is masculinised and commits barbaric acts, and some scholars see a complete shift from female to male when Medea chooses to take revenge

[85] The most relevant here is the City Dionysia, held in Athens. Most tragedies were performed at the Theatre of Dionysus on the slopes of the Acropolis.
[86] For example: a swan, to seduce Leda; a bull, to seduce Europa. However, Zeus always seems to embody masculinity and sexual aggression in his transformations.

on Jason.[87] I do not think we should not dismiss her identity as a woman entirely, because her maternal and feminine attributes are just as important to her character in providing a contrast within her character but also to Jason. Hall explains how barbarian women were often used as a form of self-definition for the Greek male, rather than the stereotypes being grounded in reality.[88] With Dionysus, however, the boundaries are a little less clear cut. Dionysus is the barbarian in the play, yet he is also a Greek god; he is male, yet he looks feminine. Furthermore, unlike Medea, he is not the antagonist. He does oversee violence, such as the *sparagmos* when the maenads tear Pentheus apart, but this is a display of his divine control so his identity as a barbarian is not necessarily negative.

Writing for *Greeks and Barbarians*, Suzanne Saïd focuses on Euripides' use of costume in his tragedies and uses this theme to analyse the *Bacchae* as being "the logical conclusion of this development."[89] She does mention both the *Bacchae* and *Medea*, but they are not at the centre of her analysis, and I believe this direct comparison is important. Euripides is challenging the stereotypical Greek versus barbarian binary in both plays with slight differences. The boundaries between Greek and barbarian have become blurred as is evident in the *Bacchae*, but I argue this was already present in Medea and Euripides just expanded more upon this notion later when writing the *Bacchae*. Indeed, Saïd notes briefly in a footnote that the boundary "can easily be crossed" and that this is often said in reference to *Medea*, but this is not explored in her chapter.

It is very valuable, then, to compare Medea and Dionysus through the lens of gender. One aspect of comparison of the characters is that Euripides does not mention Medea's physical appearance often, yet through the character of Pentheus Euripides really fixates on

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[87] Shaw (1975) 261–262. Shaw even says that this behaviour towards Jason causes "the extinction of the woman within her" and so Medea becomes fully male. I do not think her gender changes so completely, but it is still important to acknowledge the shift in her actions and words.
[88] Hall (1989) 202.
[89] Saïd (2002) 66.

Dionysus' outward gender presentation and how this links to him being a barbarian. In contrast, Medea's barbarity is highlighted through her actions and her manner which greatly contradicts that of a stereotypical Greek woman. Medea embodies the struggle between masculine and feminine, and this links to her barbarian nature because she defies the rigid gender roles of Classical Greece. Dionysus, however, does not struggle between masculine and feminine as much as he exists outside of these categories. The concern for conforming to gender roles is not the same because Dionysus is a god, in particular a god who is known for transformation. Therefore, the barbarian nature of Medea and Dionysus allows them to challenge the traditional gender roles of Greek society and exercise power in ways that are not always available to Greeks. This analysis, however, must acknowledge the divinity of Dionysus and the magical capabilities of Medea, because these traits are key to their expressions of power against the Greek characters.

Chapter Three: The Human and the Animal

In this chapter, I discuss Euripides' use of animal imagery in *Medea* and the *Bacchae.* The way Euripides frames both Dionysus and Medea in relation to animals is significant in understanding the humanity – or lack thereof – of these figures, and how this may relate to their characterisation as barbarians. The most significant images I concentrate on are the bull and the lioness. Comparing someone to an animal can also have connotations of savagery and a lack of civilisation, because the animal directly contrasts the human. Suzanne Saïd says that "in general, the Greeks often contrasted a Barbarian universe, one that was still close to a state of animality, with a truly civilised Greek world."[90] In this statement, then, the Greek world is a state of humanity rather than animality. Through this lens it is possible to examine the close connections between animals and barbarians in literature, and I argue that this is most relevant in the *Bacchae* and the *Medea* when compared to other characters in the plays, particularly the Greeks.

In many classical works of literature, authors compare characters to animals to convey aspects of their personality and highlight significant moments in the stories they are telling. The animal metaphors and similes do not only apply to barbarian figures, so this provides a compelling contrast in some situations. For example, Homer often uses lion imagery to signify royalty and a predatory nature, but also protectiveness and parental figures, and these connotations are significant to consider compared to how Euripides portrays Medea as a lioness. Euripides uses animal imagery in a similar way to other authors because it allows the audience to recognise the character's most important traits, as the author decides. Homeric similes can create the sense that you as a reader are on the outside looking in, but you still can closely observe the character. Many of the animalistic comparisons focused on Dionysus and

[90] Saïd (2002) 84.

Medea come from the other characters in the plays, and this gives insight into their personalities as well as those of Dionysus and Medea. This is important because in order to consider how Euripides uses animal imagery differently for his barbarian characters, it is necessary to recognise what he does similarly or differently when portraying the Greek characters.

Euripides does not employ much animal imagery in *Medea*, especially in contrast to the *Bacchae*. In the former, Medea is the only character in the play who is compared to an animal: a lioness multiple times, and a bull a couple of times.[91] As Medea is also the only barbarian character in the play, it is worth examining how her depiction as a lioness may be tied to her identity as a barbarian woman. On the other hand, Euripides references animals many more times in the *Bacchae* to apply to a range of characters and not just Dionysus himself. There is a clear difference in the animal imagery used for Dionysus and his followers, the predators, and that used for Pentheus, the prey. Dionysus has control over his animal nature, whereas Medea does not, which is inherently part of the difference between them as a god and a mortal. Medea does not claim the image of the lioness for herself until after other characters have already ascribed this to her,[92] whereas Dionysus chooses to manifest as a bull. Therefore, Euripides is certainly not the only author to use animal imagery to contrast with human nature, but I argue that the way Euripides depicts the human and the animal has direct ties to Medea and Dionysus as barbarian figures because of the contrast with the Greek characters in the respective plays. The barbarian characters embody strength and in a way that establishes their power, but also signifies their dangerous nature.

I. Medea the Lioness

[91] Medea is also compared to the monster Scylla, who is certainly animalistic, but I discuss these examples later in this chapter. *Medea* 1343, 1359.
[92] When Medea does claim the image of the lioness – and Scylla – she takes control of her dynamic with Jason and her image becomes more dominant.

Before looking straight at the text, I want to note the significance of Medea as a lioness, the female form of a lion. As mentioned previously, Euripides is not unique in using lion imagery, especially when compared to the characterisation of heroes in Homeric epic. There are some key differences which are important for this analysis. Significantly, Homer only uses the noun λέων (lion), which is masculine, and the use of the feminine λέαινα (lioness) does not appear in the time of Homer, but instead only in the 5th century BCE.[93] Euripides specifies that Medea is a lioness. Ariadne Konstantinou has examined the image of the lioness in scholarship, and she notes that women are often compared to animals in Greek tragedy, although the study of the lioness has attracted less attention from scholars compared to other animals.[94] I believe that this use of imagery does not just emphasise Medea's 'otherness' because she is a woman, but also relates to her barbarian nature. She is the only barbarian character in the play and the only character at all to be compared to an animal, which stands out as a choice from Euripides, especially because he associates a lot more characters with animals in the *Bacchae*, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

The image of Medea as a lioness appears multiple times in the play, from the introduction of Medea's character to her exit at the end. This repetition of imagery by Euripides is significant because the imagery firmly establishes Medea as a lioness with no doubt in the audience's mind. This consistent image is important because it draws the audience in so that they consider how they feel about Medea's character, and they can decide for themselves whether the lioness comparison is a positive or a negative, or a complicated mix of both. The first instance of this comparison positions Medea as a lioness guarding her cubs:

> μόχθου δὲ χάριν τήνδ᾽ ἐπιδώσω.
> καίτοι τοκάδος δέργμα λεαίνης
> ἀποταυροῦται δμωσίν, ὅταν τις

[93] Konstantinou (2012) 127.
[94] Konstantinou (2012) 125.

> μῦθον προφέρων πέλας ὁρμηθῇ.
>
> Still, I will give you this offering of my toil. And yet she casts the bull-glance of a lioness with cubs at the slaves, whenever any one of them comes near her bringing words. (*Medea* 186–189)

This introduction of Medea at the beginning of the play is significant because not only does the comparison evoke the fierce nature that we will see as the play continues, but the description also specifies that Medea is like a lioness with cubs. The Nurse is the one who provides this observation of Medea, and her sympathy towards Medea at the beginning of the play elicits a sense of sympathy from the audience. This image of the lioness is more sympathetic because it is maternal and protective, although the comparison is certainly used as an insult later in the play, as I will show. Interestingly, Homer does provide a similar image to this description of Medea, most notably in the *Iliad* when Ajax defends Patroclus' corpse like a lion over its cubs.[95] Homer, however, still uses the masculine term to refer to Ajax, which makes the change during the 5th century more significant. Euripides' use of τοκάδος immediately establishes Medea as a mother, a core part of her identity which will remain significant as the play goes on. Of all the other times Medea is called a lioness, none mention the cubs again. Female animals are often seen as more protective over their children, and indeed in this comparison, and the Homeric example, the lion/lioness is defending the cubs.[96] As Allessandra Abbattista notes, Medea's characterisation as a lioness takes a different turn, however, because she is the one who is a danger to her children.[97] Instead of the lioness protecting her children, the children need protection from her. But in Medea's mind, is she protecting them from Jason, whom she sees as dangerous?

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[95] Hom. *Iliad.* XVII. 132–133.
[96] Homer also compares Achilles to a mother bird (Hom. *Iliad*. IX. 323–324) and Menelaus to a mother cow (Hom. *Iliad*. XVII 4–5). Using maternal animals is therefore an established way for an author to display a fierce protectiveness, even for male heroic figures. In these examples, however, the Greek heroes are not protecting their actual children, but their comrades, whereas Euripides uses the image of Medea as a lioness defending cubs when she is with her children.
[97] Abbattista (2018) 213.

Furthermore, this passage also aligns Medea's stare with that of a bull's, which is the only other animal comparison Euripides uses for Medea. Some translations choose not to mention the bull-aspect of Medea's look, but it is important to note especially when considering that the bull is a prominent image in the *Bacchae*. Before this section, the Nurse describes Medea as having this bull glance during the prologue.[98] Konstantinou argues that the double use of animal imagery expresses the duality in Medea's character, especially because lions often attacked bulls.[99] These two animal representations therefore embody Medea as both prey and predator in the situation. As the lioness image is more frequent throughout the play, Medea establishes herself as more the hunter than the hunted, but her status remains ambiguous. These small details show that even at the beginning of the play, before Medea reveals her intentions, the other characters recognise her capacity for violence. Jason, a character who is less sympathetic towards Medea compared to the Nurse, compares her to the monster Scylla:

> οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ᾽ ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ
> ἔτλη ποθ᾽, ὧν γε πρόσθεν ἠξίουν ἐγὼ
> γῆμαι σέ, κῆδος ἐχθρὸν ὀλέθριόν τ᾽ ἐμοί,
> λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος
> Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.
>
> There is not a Greek woman who would have dared to do this, but I married you holding you above them, and a hateful and destructive marriage for me, you lioness, not a woman, having a more savage nature than Tyrrhenian Scylla. (*Medea* 1339–1343)

This passage is also an important example of how Medea is gendered in the play, particularly in comparison to the Greek woman. It is necessary, however, to examine this speech from Jason again because it not only reaffirms Medea as a lioness, but also unfavourably compares her to the monster Scylla. As Homer describes, Scylla is a sea

[98] "Ὄμμα… ταυρουμένην" (*Medea* 92).
[99] Konstantinou (2012) 131.

monster, with animal components including a snake tail and dog heads attached to her body. This is an even more monstrous comparison than simply calling Medea a lioness, and Euripides especially emphasises this notion by having Jason deny Medea's womanhood. In this speech Jason denies Medea's womanhood, Greekness, and humanity, which shows that all these aspects of her identity are linked in Jason's mind. The discussion of Medea's savage nature also has a strong link to her barbarian origin because nature implies something inherent and unchangeable in a person.

Medea first is called a lioness by other characters in the play, and later claims this as part of her identity when she throws Jason's own words back at him. She does not seem to be upset about being called a lioness or likened to Scylla – in fact, she seems triumphant just because she has wounded Jason:

> πρὸς ταῦτα καὶ λέαιναν, εἰ βούλῃ, κάλει
> καὶ Σκύλλαν ἢ Τυρσηνὸν ᾤκησεν πέτραν·
> τῆς σῆς γὰρ ὡς χρῆν καρδίας ἀνθηψάμην
>
> For these reasons, call me a lioness if you wish, and Scylla who lives on the Tyrrhenian cliff; for I have seized your heart in necessity. (*Medea* 1358–1360)

Medea focuses here first on Jason and his view, and then on her own actions. She knows she has hurt Jason irrevocably, and this positions her as the winner or the predator in this situation because she is so fixated on Jason paying for his wrongs against her. Abbattista suggests that the comparison to Scylla is not supposed to be negative towards Medea in terms of monstrousness, but instead to highlight the powerlessness of Jason in the situation.[100] I agree that positioning Medea as Scylla does convey her power in contrast to his vulnerability, but I also think that it is impossible for an audience to think about Scylla without associating her with the heroes who must escape from her, such as Odysseus in the *Odyssey* or indeed

[100] Abbattista (2018) 214.

Jason in the story of the Argonauts. In these famous stories, Scylla is a worthy and dangerous opponent for the Greek hero to overcome to prove his worth. If this comparison sets Medea up as a worthy adversary for Jason, his heroic status becomes diminished because the does not beat her or successfully avoid her wrath.[101] For the audience, then, Scylla connotes a monstrous nature one must avoid or overcome, which in addition emphasises Jason's vulnerability, so the idea that the comparison to Scylla is either positive or negative does not need to be mutually exclusive. The way Medea claims these comparisons suggests that she does not feel dehumanised, because she ultimately holds the power over Jason, especially at this point in the final moments of the play. As animal comparisons are common in Ancient Greek literature, its use does not automatically signal dehumanisation. Instead of being a wife and mother, Medea becomes a monstrous and evil figure. In contrast to Scylla, though, Medea is physically a woman, and she is human enough to reason her way through her crimes. Therefore, the audience might not see Medea as less than human, but instead as a human who is capable of doing terrible things. On the other hand, Euripides highlighting Medea's monstrous and animal nature from Jason's point of view serves to dehumanise her from his perspective, but also convey the strength she has over him.

Euripides' final description of Medea as a lioness again comes from Jason, though this time he addresses Zeus. Medea's escape on Helios' chariot in the final moments of the *Bacchae* suggests that she does get away with her crime and she does not receive any divine punishment for the murder of her children. Not only does Medea escape, but she escapes in a divine manner. The ending is unclear, and this is unusual compared to other tragedies, which often ended in prophecy.[102] Even though the audience does not know Medea's fate for sure,

[101] Medea's "appropriation of heroic values" raises questions about Jason's own heroism. Hopman (2008) 167.
[102] At the end of the *Bacchae*, for example, Dionysus tells Cadmus that he is fated to become a serpent, and even though he is punished for blasphemy, Ares will rescue him. (*Bacchae* 1330–1339)

they might expect some glimpse to the future, but they do not get it. Jason calls directly upon Zeus to see what injustices he is suffering:

> Ζεῦ, τάδ᾽ ἀκούεις ὡς ἀπελαυνόμεθ᾽
> οἷά τε πάσχομεν ἐκ τῆς μυσαρᾶς
> καὶ παιδοφόνου τῆσδε λεαίνης;
>
> Zeus, do you hear this, how I am driven away and what I suffer from this foul and child-killing lioness? (*Medea* 1405–1407)

This imagery links back to the beginning of the play, when Medea has the look of a lioness with cubs, but instead in this moment Jason calls Medea child-murdering. Medea is no longer a lioness with cubs, nor is she simply a lioness: she is a child-murdering lioness, and this is how she is portrayed at the very end of *Medea*. This encapsulates the culmination of the tragic irony from the beginning because Medea is no longer protecting her cubs, but she has killed them instead. Euripides creates this contrast between a protective mother and a vicious killer which is especially noticeable for the audience to track when you specifically pay attention to the focus on lioness imagery. The use of animal imagery in the play serves to emphasise Medea's otherness as a barbarian woman, as well as how dangerous she is, especially because a lioness is a predatory animal. At the beginning, there are more positive connotations associated with the lioness, namely the protective nature over her cubs. As the play goes on, however, it becomes clear that the lioness metaphor is more of a warning sign for what is to come, reminding the audience not only that Medea is not a typical Greek woman, but also that she is not human at all. She cannot conform to the civilised ways of Greece, but acts in a barbaric way, which further reinforces her portrayal as a barbarian by Euripides.

II. The Bull of Misfortune

While the most prominent animal image in *Medea* is the lioness, in the *Bacchae* I argue that it is the bull. The different forms of animal comparisons in this play have a lot of different layers because the imagery is a much bigger part of the *Bacchae* than *Medea*. Dionysus as a god is closely associated with many animals, and there are important connections between animals and Greek cult and ritual practices. Euripides does not create this connection, but it is important to examine the presence of animal imagery in the context of the play and how it relates to Dionysus as a barbarian character. By examining the multiple different ways that Euripides represents animals in relation to Dionysus – as well as other characters in the play – it is possible to see the association between Dionysus as a god, his barbarian nature, and his strength in the play over the Greek characters. Dionysus' categorisation as a strange foreigner is a large part of his characterisation, and this is supplemented by the fact that Dionysus is viewed as a beast by the other characters, especially when he is in his mortal disguise. The messenger refers to Dionysus as prey and the beast:

> Πενθεῦ, πάρεσμεν τήνδ' ἄγραν ἠγρευκότες
> ἐφ' ἣν ἔπεμψας, οὐδ' ἄκρανθ' ὡρμήσαμεν.
> ὁ θὴρ δ' ὅδ' ἡμῖν πρᾶος οὐδ' ὑπέσπασεν
> φυγῇ πόδ', ἀλλ' ἔδωκεν οὐκ ἄκων χέρας,
>
> Pentheus, we are present having caught this prey which you sent us upon, our motion was not in vain. This beast was tame and did not withdraw in flight on foot, but offered his hands not unwillingly. (*Bacchae* 434–437).

The opposing categorisations of beast and prey portray Dionysus' duality as a god who can change between states, and one who changes according to who is viewing him. This description of Dionysus is significant because he is a beast, yet he is also tame and submitted to capture. The audience would know that this does not mean that Dionysus is weak, but that he has a plan, and he is using how others perceive him to make him seem less dangerous. Dionysus is not frequently physically transforming from man to animal and back, but he

alters perception. He could have just appeared as a bull or other predatory animal from the beginning and evaded capture, but that would not have played into his game of punishing Pentheus. Later, the Chorus calls upon Dionysus to take advantage of this power of his in order to best Pentheus:

> φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν
> δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων
> ὁρᾶσθαι λέων.
> ἴθ᾽, ὦ Βάκχε, θηρἀγρευτᾷ βακχᾶν
> προσώπῳ γελῶντι περίβαλε βρόχον
> θανάσιμον ὑπ᾽ ἀγέλαν πεσόν-
> τι τὰν μαινάδων.
>
> Appear as a bull or a many-headed serpent or a fire-blazing lion to see. Go, O Bacchus, and with a laughing face, throw the deadly noose upon the hunter of the Bacchae as he falls under the herd of these maenads. (*Bacchae* 1017–1023)

The verb "φάνηθι" displays the complete control Dionysus has over his appearance – he can appear as a mortal if he wishes, or as an animal, all while retaining his divine nature. The bull, the serpent, and the lion are all animals with the potential to fatally harm others, and the Chorus therefore positions Dionysus as the hunter of Pentheus in a reversal of roles. How Dionysus is perceived is an integral part of his characterisation in the play, as he is both prey and predator, depending on who is viewing him. Furthermore, Euripides highlights Dionysus' dual nature in Pentheus's hallucination when he sees Dionysus as a bull, and Dionysus also tricks Pentheus into tying up a bull instead of himself.[103] The image of the bull comes back again later when Pentheus hallucinates and sees Dionysus as this animal:

> καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
> δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ᾽ ἑπτάστομον·
> καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγεῖσθαι δοκεῖς
> καὶ σῷ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἦ ποτ᾽ ἦσθα θήρ; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.

[103] *Bacchae* 618–619.

> And I seem to see two suns, and double Thebes the seven-mouthed city; and you seem to be going before us as a bull and horns seem to have grown upon your head. But were you ever a beast before? For certainly you have taken the form of a bull. (*Bacchae* 918–922)

Along with Pentheus hallucinating two suns and two Thebes, he also sees Dionysus as the bull.[104] This description from Pentheus implies that he is seeing Dionysus transform and can somewhat reconcile the animal and the man as he can see the connection, but he also cannot think clearly. The chorus describes Pentheus as "ταῦρον προηγητῆρα συμφορᾶς ἔχων" "having the bull as a guide to his misfortune."[105] This is an apt description of the way Dionysus manipulates Pentheus and the Theban women, eventually resulting in Pentheus' death, and it is also notable that the Chorus just mentions the bull as the cause, rather than naming Dionysus or calling him a god. Considering that much of the conflict in the play stems from the disrespect towards Dionysus and the Thebans not believing he is the divine son of Zeus; I would expect the Chorus to constantly emphasise Dionysus' godly nature. Here they emphasise his animal nature: the contrast between man and animal mirrors the conflict of Eastern and Western origin for Dionysus as a god. He is ultimately a god with Greek parents, yet you cannot deny the importance of his animal side and his strong connections to the East. Dionysus is the bull, and so this statement emphasises his agency and his power over Pentheus and the rest of the Thebans. Dionysus' control over the binaries of human and animal extends from controlling his own image to making others seem beastly.

Dionysus embodies the duality of human and animal more literally than Medea as it is part of his transformative nature to appear as or become animals.[106] As a god, Dionysus is firmly associated with beasts such as panthers, bulls, and snakes – in Euripides, Dionysus

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[104] Here he is already under Dionysus' power, and you can see the effect on his mind.
[105] *Bacchae* 1159.
[106] Even though Medea is mortal, and she does not have the same innate ability to transform as Dionysus does, it is worth noting that she is still a sorceress. In *The Golden Ass*, the witch Meroe is directly compared to Medea because she transforms men into animals and escapes punishment through spells. Apuleius, Ruden (2011) 7.

was crowned with serpents when he was born, as well as being born with the horns of a bull.[107] Aside from these literal representations of animal nature, the Bacchic rites themselves are animalistic, and Euripides blends the literal and metaphorical animal representations.[108] Charles Segal describes Bacchic frenzy as an uncontrollable release of emotion, chaos, between humans and beasts.[109] Dionysus allows people to explore and embrace their beastly natures through practising his rites, which allow for a free expression of revelry. This element of transformation is intrinsic to the nature of Dionysus' cult.[110]

The strong connection with animals does not only apply to Dionysus, but also extends to his followers, and the previous statement from Segal links back to the idea of Dionysus as an Eastern god because the aspects of the frenzy are inherent to his rites, which are barbarian. Similarly, the maenads also adorn themselves with serpents and this sets them apart from mortals who do not engage with deadly creatures, and this difference extends to physical appearance because the maenads are also clothed in fawnskins.[111] The maenads act vastly different to most mortals, and the people of Thebes have preconceptions of how barbarians must be engaging in the rites. This often means that his followers are strongly associated with beasts as Dionysus is, which also positions them as barbarians wherever they may come from. For example, the maenads in the *Bacchae* are seen as wild, even though they are Theban women. One example of Dionysus' connection to animals influencing the Theban women is when they suckle gazelles and wolves,[112] which is certainly a behaviour that

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[107] *Bacchae* 99–103.
[108] Thumiger says: "in addition to the overwhelming accumulation of verbal references to the animal world and to the activity of hunting per se (content), the play blurs the literal and metaphorical levels when it comes to these references (presentation)." Thumiger (2006) 191.
[109] Segal (1978) 186.
[110] In addition to this, Hall also says that "the cult of Dionysus was regarded by the Greeks as an import from barbarian lands" which linked the animal back to the barbarian. Hall (2010) 262.
[111] *Bacchae* 24. This is in contrast to the modest clothing which traditional Greek women wore, and we see this in the play when Pentheus dresses in women's clothing. His clothes include a linen *peplos* and a robe down to his feet, which Pentheus categorises as women's clothing. Dionysus, however, modifies the clothing Pentheus wears to include a fawnskin, which is the costume of the maenads (*Bacchae* 821–836).
[112] *Bacchae* 699.

women would not have engaged in outside of a Bacchic frenzy, because it perverts the acts of motherhood. Therefore, the transformative nature of Dionysus affects not only himself but also his followers, who are then seen as barbarian when they are associated with beasts and practising his rites.

In *Medea*, the title character is the only one compared to an animal, but this is not the case with the *Bacchae*, so the significance of animal imagery differs between the plays. Instead of being the main figure Euripides compares to an animal, as with Medea, the animalistic way that Euripides portrays Dionysus is made more significant when comparing him to the other characters in the play – not just his Asian followers, but also the Theban characters. Dionysus will punish the Thebans for their blasphemy, and even Cadmus and his wife Harmonia will be turned into serpents.[113] The Chorus cry that a lioness must have given birth to Pentheus, or a Libyan Gorgon.[114] Because of Dionysus' influence over the maenads, Agave views her son Pentheus as a lion and thus thinks killing him is just hunting a beast, and she also refers to his severed head as that of a young bull:

> νέος ὁ μόσχος ἄρτι
> γένυν ὑπὸ κόρυθ' ἁπαλότριχα
> κατάκομον θάλλει.
>
> The calf is young, his cheek just growing hair under his soft-haired crest. (*Bacchae* 1185–1187)

Pentheus is now positioned as the beast who has been caught, in opposition to Dionysus earlier. Dionysus therefore exerts great control over the act of transformation between human and animal for himself, and he also has this power over others. This description emphasises Pentheus' youth and vulnerability, which is particularly poignant as he is ripped apart by his mother and the other Theban women. In some translations he is a

[113] *Bacchae* 1330–1332.
[114] *Bacchae* 989–991.

calf, and in some he is a cub. The noun μόσχος is usually translated as calf or young bull, and this imagery explicitly links to Dionysus as the bull. Now Pentheus is the prey, in contrast to Dionysus appearing as if he is prey, but then revealing himself to be the bull. Euripides uses animal imagery for both the Greek and barbarian characters in the *Bacchae*, but not in the same ways. The types of animals the characters are compared to differ based on context, and this signifies that Euripides considered whether the character was Greek or barbarian and how that might affect how he wanted to represent the characters. In this case, Pentheus is the vulnerable calf, which directly calls back to the thread of Dionysus as the bull throughout the whole play, and this contrast between them serves as a perversion of the maternal/parental relationship.

III. Lioness Versus Bull

The barbarian inhabits a space between human and animal.[115] The barbarian also moves between the spaces of predator and prey depending on who is perceiving them,[116] and this fluidity of nature does not seem to be present in the Greek characters. As Medea and Dionysus do not stick to one category – predator or prey – the Greek characters cannot simply exist to be the opposite of the barbarian. This is especially evident for Dionysus, who can transform because of his godly nature. His influence over the maenads, and then Pentheus, causes them to also be associated with animals in the play. In contrast, Medea's influence is over her children, who are the only characters besides her aligned with animals, and this is still only in conjunction with an image of her as a lioness and them as her cubs.

[115] Gods and heroes can also inhabit this space, but in a different way. As I have discussed, Zeus often transforms into animals, yet he retains his predatory nature. It is also possible for heroes to exist between the binaries of human and animal, such as the examples I have talked about in the *Iliad*, but it does not seem as constant for me as it does in these plays, although this is a larger area of research that I would need to examine.
[116] For example, the Nurse's description of Medea as a lioness shows her protective nature, which contrasts the way Jason insults her. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is characterised as prey when he is caught by Pentheus, but he also orchestrates Pentheus' downfall as the bull.

Jason cannot see Medea as Greek or as a woman, which enables her characterisation as a lioness and Scylla, dehumanising her because of her actions. Most of the insults towards Medea are directed at her being a barbarian woman. There is no physical element of transformation in Medea as she is only a metaphorical lioness, but there is transformation in the Bacchae, whether physically or in someone's mind because of the influence of Dionysus and his inflicted madness.

Is this imagery positive or negative? Abbattista argues against Konstantinou's view that the tragic lioness represents a negative power. Instead, she argues that this metaphor expresses the "tragic humanity" in characters such as Medea and Clytemnestra when they commit their acts of vengeance.[117] This is an interesting take because both Medea and Clytemnestra have historically been villainised as murderous women. She notes that the lioness in tragedy combines male and female traits rather than putting them in opposition to one another, and the tragic humanity results from the inversion of the lioness figure who harms her own cubs.[118] Abbattista could have offered some more evidence here for what actually establishes the tragic humanity, especially considering the severity of Medea's actions. Nevertheless, this analysis is helpful when considering the function of the lioness metaphor in the *Medea* and how this impacts the reception of Medea's character. Some people may think that Euripides is highlighting Medea's lack of humanity and dehumanising her by comparing her to a lioness; some, like Abbattista, may see complexity and a twisted sense of humanity in this representation. Abbattista also says that "By giving expression to her tragic humanity, the lioness captures Medea from her first intentions to kill her sons to their final burial."[119] The comparison at the beginning of Medea of a lioness with cubs is very

[117] Abbattista (2018) 206.
[118] Abbattista (2018) 213.
[119] Abbattista (2018) 212.

important because it can then be compared to other instances of the imagery which change as Medea commits her crimes.

Abbattista's analysis causes me to wonder: if Medea as a lioness emphasises her humanity, does Dionysus as a bull emphasise his lack of humanity? His transformation is more literal, made possible by his lack of humanity and his possession of divinity. Abbattista's notion of tragic humanity can also be compared to the other characters in the play who are animalised. Euripides' use of animal imagery with characters such as Pentheus and the Theban women does emphasise their tragic fates, but I think it also erodes away at their humanity because this imagery is a signifier that Dionysus and his barbarian influence has overtaken them. I do not think either of these images can be fully categorised as either positive or negative, much as neither Medea nor Dionysus fully fit the binary of the barbarian stereotype.

Chapter Four: The Mortal and the Divine

One of the biggest differences between Medea and Dionysus is Medea's mortal nature, and Dionysus' status as a Greek god. This is not a strict binary, however – both Medea and Dionysus exist between the binaries of mortal and divine. Medea is a mortal woman, yet she is the granddaughter of the sun god Helios,[120] and she escapes at the end of the play in his divine chariot after committing her revenge on Jason. Dionysus, on the other hand, is a god, yet he uses humanity as a disguise and alters the way he is perceived by the Thebans to exact their punishments. The aspects of mortality and divinity combine in both of these figures to make their very natures contradictory. It is therefore not so simple to judge the actions of the characters because gods and mortals live by very different ethical standards. This contradiction in their fundamental natures goes hand in hand with the paradoxical state of their origins. Medea, for example, is a barbarian woman, yet her divine nature comes from a Greek god, and not just any god, but the Sun. In the *Bacchae,* Pentheus sees Dionysus as a strange human foreigner when he is in his disguised mortal form, but he is a Greek god and asserts his true form throughout the play. Medea and Dionysus are the only characters in their respective plays who exists outside of the binary of mortal and divine,[121] which is yet another way they differ from the Greek characters present.

The contrast between mortal and divine in the *Bacchae* is inseparable from the conflict of Dionysus' origin. Dionysus is both a Greek god and a foreign stranger, and he presents himself as both identities through showing his true divine power or masquerading as

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[120] Mastronarde says that the only Classical Greek cult for Helios was in Rhodes, but Euripides does not seem to distinguish Helios as a foreign god from whom Medea's barbarian origin is emphasised. Mastronarde (2002) 24. As mentioned earlier, Medea is not barbarian in earlier sources, but she is still the granddaughter of Helios. Therefore, if Helios is a god the Greeks recognise, is it actually Medea's divine heritage which gives her a closer proximity to Greekness?

[121] It is possible to argue that the maenads also exist outside this binary, which is a valid viewpoint, especially when considering the power that comes with their bacchic frenzy. However, I think that their nature is ultimately affected by Dionysus, so they serve as an additional example of how he exists outside the binary and how his attributes can affect his followers. Because the maenads are so closely related to Dionysus, their nature is all tied up with his, but I believe this says more about him than them.

a mortal to trick Pentheus. Furthermore, Dionysus' dual identity may link to his double birth, as he was born again from Zeus' thigh after Semele's death.[122] Dionysus has a mortal mother, but he is not a mortal hero like other children of gods from the heroic age, as he is a god in his own right. Dionysus punishes the Thebans because they do not respect his authority as the son of Zeus. Medea, on the other hand, punishes Jason because he violates their marriage oaths and disrespects her. Dionysus uses his divine power against Pentheus through the maenads to achieve his goals. In contrast, Medea must rely on herself, yet she also invokes many divinities and Euripides associates her with Hecate. As a sorceress, I argue that Medea does possess a sort of divine power even before her apotheosis at the end of the play. Both Dionysus and Medea are therefore set apart from the Greek characters in their respective plays, who are mortal. Paradoxically, Euripides highlights Medea and Dionysus' connections to Greece through their divine families.

I. Medea's Apotheosis[123]

Medea's apotheosis manifests at the end of the play when she rises up in the chariot of her grandfather, Helios, in order to escape from Corinth. The ending of *Medea* involves use of the *mechane*, part of the structure of a theatre which allows for the illusion of a flying chariot. The term *deus ex machina*[124] comes after the production of *Medea* in 431 BCE, but the concept is often related to Medea's escape. This is her apotheosis because not only does Medea physically escape with the bodies of her children in this divine way, she also escapes from justice. Euripides makes an intriguing choice in having Medea get away because there is

[122] *Bacchae* 94–101, 286–297.
[123] Meaning that she becomes a divinity.
[124] Meaning 'god from the machine.'

a lack of divine retribution for her actions,[125] which is in stark contrast to Pentheus' punishment in the *Bacchae*.

Scholarly opinions concerning the end of the play differ. Carrie E. Cowherd, for example, argues that "she has not ceased to be human, she has ceased to be a mother."[126] This is an important distinction because it positions the loss of motherhood as much more profound than the loss of humanity, if that is the focus. She still remains a human barbarian woman in this case. Furthermore, Medea's apotheosis does not necessarily mean that she literally becomes divine, but her divine qualities from Helios certainly become manifest in her escape. If Medea does not literally become a god, and instead remains a mortal, does this make her crime worse because it means that she is still the human woman who killed her children?[127] I think it is the same Medea we see earlier in the play, but at the end she is no longer deliberating with herself about what to do: the deed is done.

Although Euripides does characterise Medea as a sorceress, he does not choose to overly emphasise her identity as a witch, and I think her status as a woman and as a barbarian is at the forefront. A more stereotypical portrayal of Medea as a barbarian sorceress might have put more emphasis on her unnatural methods. Medea kills her sons off-stage, but it seems that, in contrast to the murders of Glauce and Creon, Medea does not use sorcery. This means that Medea's infanticide is firmly linked to her as a human and a mother because it was not an act of sorcery. There are moments in the play, however, which remind the audience of this part of her identity. The most obvious is that Medea uses poisoned garments to kill the princess, but there are some other moments which raise some questions. Does

[125] Medea came third when it was performed – out of three possible places – and this result could be because of the displeasure of an audience who do not see the murderous barbarian woman punished.
[126] Cowherd (1983) 135.
[127] Hall says that the play must have been "ethically shocking" for Athenians. Hall (2010) 242.

Medea's divine heritage enable her to have glimpses of the future? She curses Jason's future multiple times, and eventually prophesies his death:

> σὺ δ', ὥσπερ εἰκός, κατθανῇ κακὸς κακῶς,
> Ἀργοῦς κάρα σὸν λειψάνῳ πεπληγμένος,
> πικρὰς τελευτὰς τῶν ἐμῶν γάμων ἰδών.
>
> But you, as is appropriate, shall die the horrible death of a coward, having been struck with terror by a piece of the Argo, having seen the bitter end result of my marriage. (*Medea* 1386–1388)

It is unclear how Medea is able to predict Jason's death. It may be because of her divine grandfather, or because she curses Jason to suffer not just in the present moment of the play but also in his future which the audience does not see. *Medea* does end with a form of prophecy, then, but Euripides subverts the expectations of the audience. The prophecy is not about Medea's future, which makes the question of punishment for her actions unclear, and this leads to the assumption that she escapes with no consequences. Dionysus similarly ends the *Bacchae* with a prophecy about the fate of the Greek characters and how they will suffer as a consequence for their actions.

II. Divine Dionysus

Euripides sets up an important conflict between mortal and divine in the *Bacchae*. The conflict in the play stems from the fact that the Thebans do not recognise Dionysus as a god, and thus they do not honour him appropriately. From the very first lines of the play, Dionysus asserts his divine parentage and tells the audience that he has taken on a mortal form:

> Ἥκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίαν χθόνα
> Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη
> Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί·
> μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν
> πάρειμι Δίρκης νάμαθ' Ἰσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ.

> I have come to this land of Thebes, son of Zeus, I Dionysus, whom Cadmus' daughter Semele bore, midwifed by the lightning fire; I have exchanged my divine form for a mortal one and have come to the waters of Dirce and Ismenus. (*Bacchae* 1–5)

It is important to examine the beginning lines of the *Bacchae* because Euripides chose these to give the audience an expectation as to what will happen. Euripides establishes that Dionysus is the son of Zeus and Semele, and that he has changed his form from divine to mortal. For Dionysus, this transformation from mortal to divine (and vice versa) parallels the connection he has between human and animal. Dionysus uses his power to appear mortal, as he uses his power to appear as animals, and this is integral in his tricking of Pentheus. This is also not the only instance in which Dionysus discusses his birth as a god or his disguise as a man, because both points are integral to the conflict in and the progression of the play.

Dionysus assumes the form of a mortal – a follower of Dionysus – as part of his plan for vengeance on Pentheus and the other Thebans. Dionysus describes his own transformation at the beginning of the play: "Ὧν οὕνεκ' εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω μορφήν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν" "on account of which I have a mortal form and I changed my appearance, changing into the nature of a man."[128] I find the choice of words here thought-provoking because Dionysus does not say that he will appear as a man, nor that Pentheus will see him as a man, but that he will change into the nature of the man. This does not mean that he completely transforms into a mortal man and loses his divine powers, because Euripides still provides glimpses of Dionysus' godly side. Like being simultaneously Eastern and Western, as well as an old and new god, Dionysus is both mortal and divine at once because his disguise does not erase his true identity, yet he assumes another form. Furthermore, a disguised Dionysus tells Pentheus that the god assumes any form that he wishes, and the mortal has no say in the matter. Dionysus has the power because he is a god,

[128] *Bacchae* 53–54.

but he also chooses to direct this against the Greek characters as a punishment, whereas his Asian followers stay loyal to him.

Dionysus does things that no mortal can do. For example, he creates a phantom for Pentheus to fight as yet another form of deception.[129] Dionysus' divine nature is most clearly used to contrast mortal Pentheus who is susceptible to these deceptions: "πρὸς θεὸν γὰρ ὢν ἀνὴρ ἐς μάχην ἐλθεῖν ἐτόλμησ'" "He was a man and dared to fight against the god."[130] This situation occurs throughout the play as Euripides uses dramatic irony. For example, when Pentheus insults Dionysus to his face, and wonders how he escaped from imprisonment, this only serves to emphasise Dionysus' unique nature. Pentheus and Dionysus cannot even compare in this situation, and there is no way Pentheus would win. In *Medea*, this is a bit more complicated, because Creon seems to have power at the beginning of the play in his role of king, because he decides on exile. As soon as Medea decides on her course of action though, she is in a similar position to Dionysus: the Greek characters do not stand a chance.

Dionysus is heavily associated with many forms of transformation, and Euripides further explores this with the use of the plural. While Dionysus is disguised as a mortal, he frequently uses the plural pronouns "we" and "us", as well as the 1st plural ending for verbs – for example, he says Pentheus will suffer for "ἡμᾶς γὰρ ἀδικῶν" "wronging us."[131] This signifies to the audience the dual nature of Dionysus being both mortal and a god, while Pentheus is unaware. I find this a very compelling choice on the part of Euripides, but many translations choose to just translate the plural pronouns as singular.[132] I think this is important, though, because it signals yet another way that Dionysus stands out as complex compared to the Greek figures in the play. Does this mean that we can separate mortal and divine Dionysus as two separate characters? Richard Schechner offers a character analysis of

[129] *Bacchae* 630–631.
[130] *Bacchae* 635–636.
[131] *Bacchae* 518.
[132] For example, the Loeb edition translated by David Kovacs.

Dionysus and suggests that Euripides deals with two forms of Dionysus, the Dionysus on the stage and the Dionysus as represented in the mind of the Chorus.[133] I agree that we see two forms of Dionysus with different manners and attributes, and it feels intentional on the part of Euripides. Dionysus could just be referring to himself and his maenads, but I do not think this needs to be a completely alternate viewpoint because the maenads as his followers act as an extension of his own power. If it is the case that Euripides refers to the maenads, it is not clear, because the plural is changed in some English translations. We ultimately cannot know Euripides' intention, but considering how he presents the duality of Dionysus, I would not be surprised if his mortal and divine natures were treated as somewhat separate characters.

Likewise, does this mean that Medea before and after her apotheosis are separate characters, because there is something fundamentally different between mortal and divine? I do not believe they are entirely separate, but I believe that Euripides uses this contrast between mortal and divine to emphasise yet another way that Dionysus and Medea embody the barbarian character. It is most significant in this case because it is elements of their divine nature which allow for them to assume a role of power and enact punishments on those who have wronged them. Similarly, because they possess this power, they are seemingly untouchable. Creon tries to exile Medea, and Jason is not able to stop her leaving once she is in the chariot. The Thebans disrespect Dionysus, and Pentheus tries to imprison him, but he is unable to hold the god. Therefore, Euripides uses the contrast of mortal and divine to show how these barbarian characters create their own justice systems and exist outside of the system in which the Greek characters operate.

[133] Schecher (1961) 125–126. I do not agree, however, that the point of the play is sacrificing the Thebans to a jealous god.

A Note on Madness and Sanity

One final contrast in the characters of Medea and Dionysus that I wanted to note is the presence of madness and sanity, which is integral to the psychological aspect of both plays. Medea and Dionysus are both treated with suspicion, and the Greek characters fall for their deceptions. The fact that they plan out what they do show that they did not orchestrate the punishments in a fit of madness, but they were premeditated. Euripides emphasises the anger of both Dionysus and Medea, although it comes across very differently.

The calculation behind the murders is especially striking when we consider the resulting reception of Medea's character. There were multiple different versions of Medea's story before Euripides in which her children are killed by others, such as the Corinthian women.[134] There may have been other sources before Euripides who depicted Medea as the killer of her children, but this is unknown, so we cannot say for certain that Euripides invented this aspect of Medea's story, although he certainly popularised it. I argue that whether Medea kills the princess and Creon does not really matter in the context of her reception, at least not when compared to her infanticide. Euripides establishes Medea's history of violence in the play and stresses the importance of the oaths which Jason violated, so it is not all too surprising that Medea acts to punish Jason, especially if you view *Medea* as a revenge play. What is incredibly shocking, however, is the murder of her children.

Medea's mix of grief and anger makes her more sympathetic. She is certainly angry, but especially at the beginning of the play, the audience also sees how much Jason's actions hurt her. This results in the struggle between Medea's *thumos,* her passion, and her logic, which I discussed in my second chapter. Medea's internal struggle is more than just passion

[134] Mastronarde (2002) 50–52.

overcoming reason, however.[135] Emotion still factors into her deliberation on both the sides of passion and reason: emotion for her children. She feels intense emotion both when she thinks about killing her children and when she thinks about them staying alive. Medea goes against the Platonic virtue of *sophrosyne*, the restraint of passions.[136] Even though the audience does sympathise with her, she goes too far outside the boundaries of proper emotions in Greek society, especially when she spells out her deliberation:

> καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά,
> θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,
> ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.
>
> And I know what evil I will dare to undertake, but my thumos is strong compared to my calculation, thumos that is the cause of greatest hurt for mortal men. (*Medea* 1078–1080).

Does sanity make the crime more reprehensible because the action was considered? Or is it a stronger outward feeling, such as madness or passion, that spurs the characters on? As an audience member, I think you are more inclined to explain away acts of passion as happening in the moment, or they could be a temporary lapse in judgement.[137] It does cause more concern that Medea hesitates yet still decides on the course of killing her children. Furthermore, the construction of the barbarian in drama often results in characters who are deficient in intelligence or excessively cunning.[138] Medea is intelligent, which Creon recognises, and he is afraid of her *sophistry*.[139] He ultimately agrees to let Medea stay one more day, however, so he acts against his own instincts. In the case of both Medea and

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[135] Mastronarde says that "it is not a simple defeat of reason by emotion, but a display of the insufficiency of intellectual qualities to ensure a good outcome in the complex moral crises of human life." Mastronarde (2002) 22.
[136] Hall (1989) 125.
[137] Vergil's *Aeneid* comes later, but the idea of temporarily giving into passion makes me think of Aeneas' killing of Turnus at the end of XII. This is in war, and it is not a reprehensible crime like Medea's, but the idea of being taken over by anger is important. The act does not fully discredit Aeneas' character, but it does make the reader consider him differently. I think this would be very different, though, if Aeneas calculated the murder of Turnus in a similar way that Medea does, which is why I bring this up.
[138] Hall (1989) 123.
[139] A clever, deceptive way of speaking.

Dionysus, they easily outsmart everyone else in the narratives, which is not just a comment on their cunning, but on the ignorance of the Greek characters they deceive.

Dionysus' godly attributes also mirror his inherently contradictory nature, allowing for the transformation of the cult members.[140] Through his celebrations, Dionysus disrupts the order of society, but encourages free expression and a lack of repression.[141] The distinction between revelry and madness is highly dependent on the situation and whether Dionysus is being worshipped as a god. The *sparagmos* is a pertinent example of this – the maenads believe they are hunting and engaging in revelry, but in reality, their horrific acts are inspired by the sting of madness from Dionysus. There are also distinctions within the maenads themselves. When Dionysus describes the women who came with him from Asia, as well as his general rites and traditions, he talks of revelry and celebrations. However, the maenads in the *Bacchae* are different, because they are the women of Thebes being punished for not recognising Dionysus as a god. Instead of choosing to follow Dionysus willingly, they are forced out of their domestic lives to live as beast-like in the mountains.

Dionysus' rites are associated with prophecy: "τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει" "for Bacchic revelry and madness have much prophecy in them."[142] There is a fine line between prophecy and madness, and it depends on if you are believed or not.[143] Dionysus is simultaneously "δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἠπιώτατος" "most fearful and most gentle to men."[144] These opposing attributes are mentioned in the same sentence, which highlights that this duality is a key part of Dionysus' nature. The idea that he can be the most fearful and the most gentle at the same time is unsettling because it highlights the unpredictability of Dionysus' nature, which also influences whether the cult transformations

[140] The nature of the Bacchic frenzy is contagious and spreads uncontrollably. Dodds (1940) 157–158.
[141] "To resist Dionysus is to repress the elemental in one's own nature." Dodds (1940) 159.
[142] *Bacchae* 298–299.
[143] Would Medea's prophecy of Jason's death have been seen as just prophecy, or as part of madness too?
[144] *Bacchae* 861.

will be celebratory or harmful. Furthermore, the distinction between revelry and madness depends on the point of view of the observer. In addition to this, someone who does not acknowledge Dionysus as a god, like Pentheus, would see all revelry as madness. And Dionysus, controller of emotions, may see madness as a form of revelry in itself.

Dionysus inspires this madness in the Greek characters in a harmful way,[145] yet it is celebratory in his barbarian rites. He expresses his ultimate control over the psychology of other characters, and at no point does he seem crazed himself.[146] Medea, on the other hand, is not stung with madness by a god, but her potential sanity makes her crimes more disturbing.[147] She rebels against the ideals of a traditional Greek woman, as well as more general virtues of restraint which was prized for everyone to uphold. Madness is therefore integral to Dionysus' cult in ritual and as a form of punishment depending on the situation. Medea, however, cannot have her actions explained away by being a crazy barbarian woman. In contrast, she deliberates with herself in a very structured manner which emphasises her intelligence. This shows them both to fit the idea of the cunning barbarian which Hall discusses, but in both cases their cunning is also dependent on the lack of cunning in the Greek characters, so the theme of madness and sanity applies to more than just Dionysus and Medea as individuals.

[145] Segal says that "the question-and-answer technique of line-by-line exchange (stichomythy) has the function of bringing the questioner under the spell of the god's madness, of confusing subjective and objective vision, and thereby of blurring the division between reality and delusion." Segal (1986) 298. Dionysus is skilful in the way that he manipulates Pentheus into thinking he is in charge of the situation and in control, rather than being influenced by Dionysus' madness.
[146] He speaks with "sane moderation." Grube (1935) 43.
[147] Agave's killing of Pentheus is certainly disturbing as well, but it is clear that she does not realise what she is doing due to the influence of Dionysus.

Concluding Thoughts

When I look back at this thesis, I am once again struck by how much analysis and speculation can come from reading Ancient Greek tragedy. When I first read the *Bacchae* in Greek, while studying abroad, Dionysus stood out to me as a paradoxical figure, but I could not quite grasp what I wanted to say about why that was important. This led me to turn to other representations of barbarians in literature of this time, and so I revisited *Medea*, which I studied in school before I had learned Ancient Greek. Looking at the play for the first time in the original language really made me focus on the choices Euripides made in his writing. What about Euripides' treatment of barbarian characters in his other plays? I have offered some brief points of comparison to other authors, but this is a bigger question extending beyond the scope of this project.

Medea and Dionysus embody complexities that challenge the binary, opposing relationship of the Greek and the barbarian. Euripides uses the barbarian like the Greeks' concept of self-definition, but the barbarian is not the antithesis of Greek. There is development between the *Medea* and the *Bacchae* in that Medea does embody some more barbarian stereotypes. Even though the audience does share some sympathy with her, and it is implied that she escapes at the end, she still commits horrific crimes which are hard to forgive. Why would Euripides choose to have Medea kill her own children, if not to destroy the sympathy she may have gained from the Greek audience? Medea's infanticide certainly serves as a punishment for Jason and highlights his own bad conduct, but the very nature of the act affects the sympathy from the audience. Why does he choose to portray her as a barbarian, when Medea is Greek in earlier sources? This could have been Euripides' attempt to do a deep dive into the story and psychology of a barbarian woman in a Greek setting. It is difficult to ascribe any intentions to Euripides, but what I can say is that his treatment of

Medea results in a highly complex character who exists outside many of the binary boundaries which occur in literature.

With Dionysus, Euripides also makes the choice to have the god constantly bring up his foreign nature, but he also shares the story of his birth, which actually proves that he is fully Greek. Euripides did not need to put so much emphasis on Dionysus' connection to Asia, but it is clearly important in how he chooses to portray the god. Whereas Medea seems to defy expectations, I think Dionysus exists outside them. This is partly because he is a god, but I still think that Euripides developed the nuance of the barbarian character between *Medea* and the *Bacchae*. Furthermore, Dionysus is in the right, so his triumph at the end mirrors Medea's but has a completely different effect.

For the Greeks to use barbarians as self-definition, there must be clear differences between Greeks and barbarians as binary categories. Euripides intentionally crafts his characters outside of these boundaries,[148] which establishes the barbarian paradox. Hall notes how scholars have offered a range of opinions as to whether Euripides firmly believed in Hellenic supremacy, or if he views barbarians as equal to Greeks.[149] For me, the point is that Euripides is so contradictory that passages from his plays can support both arguments, so we should instead look at his work as intentionally paradoxical rather than trying to find a clear-cut answer. Instead of Greek ideas of self-definition being the opposite of barbarian stereotypes, and therefore establishing Greek superiority, Euripides establishes complex and paradoxical barbarian characters who are connected to Greekness, and this in turn allows the audience to observe both the Greek and the barbarian characters in a more nuanced way. I

[148] When I discuss Euripides' intentions, I do not claim to know definitively what he was intentional about in his plays, because it is not possible for me to have that knowledge. I think that Euripides makes enough detailed choices in his portrayals that the audience can infer some intentionality, however.

[149] Hall (1989) 221. Hall herself believes that Euripides' "inversion in a few plays of the moral statuses normally attributed to Greeks and barbarians shows not that he or his contemporaries had disowned the usual belief in Hellenic superiority over other peoples (indeed, the assertions of it in the fourth century and beyond were to increase in vehemence and acerbity), but that it was so fundamental a dogma as to produce striking rhetorical effects on being inverted." Hall (1989) 222.

have found it really valuable to compare Dionysus and Medea because they have a lot of similarities, but a lot of small differences. Euripides therefore highlights the fluidity and hybridity of the identities of the barbarian characters and does not reduce them to stereotypes, creating the barbarian paradox.

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