VISIONS AND REVISIONS: ISOLATION, MARGINALIZATION AND INFANTICIDE IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA* AND TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

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ABSTRACT

Visions and Revisions: Isolation, Marginalization and Infanticide in

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This dissertation explores infanticide in Euripides' *Medea* and its more modern interpretation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* Both Medea and Sethe, the protagonists, were influenced by circumstances in their formative years that contributed to their murdering of their children, and both were motivated by their isolation and the socio-economic and political systems in which they lived. The discussion explores the resulting imbalances in both protagonists, their suffering under similar abusive patterns, the role of community versus isolation, the responsibility and consequences of agency, the effect of hubris and fear of ridicule, and the questions of what constitutes failure and success.

Dedication

To my darling Glenn, who makes me laugh. You make everything possible

and

To my beautiful daughters, Brigid and Aedan.

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Introduction

The very first story I ever told as a professional storyteller was "The Maiden Czar." It was also my first contact with Baba Yaga, the witch of Russian legend who often eats her own children, who, fortunately, are restored the next morning. In my telling of "The Maiden Czar," the young hero is able to trick his way out of being eaten, and in exchange, he gets help on his quest. I found myself drawn to other Baba Yaga stories, and I developed a fascination with cannibalism and infanticide in myth and folk tales: Kronos eating his children to prevent their rebelling against him; Grimm's "The Juniper Tree" where the father asks for seconds and then thirds of a stew made from the meat of his son; the House of Aetreus and the curses visited upon them generation after generation—they all somehow intrigued me. And it was not simply the cannibalism, but the *consuming*—either through killing or exposing of a child, for whatever reason—that made me wonder what kind of parent could use or discard a child, and what happens to the psyche of the character before, during and after infanticide.

Consumption and infanticide are the principle reasons I turned my attention to Euripides' *Medea*. As a high school teacher of mythology for the past twenty-five years, my appreciation for the insights of the Greeks continues to grow. I tell my students that there is not a conflict on earth that the Greeks had not tackled and resolved by the 5th century B.C. E. The Greeks had an understanding of their world and human nature which leaves other mythologies struggling to catch up, and yet the stories are as fresh, shocking, and absorbing as they must have been originally—maybe even more so, since they have come to stand alone as models for modern readers. Their universal appeal speaks of a

universal need because mythology is as much a way to understand our world as it was for the ancient Greeks. As Luc Ferry states in his *The Wisdom of the Myths*, "Far from being reducible to literary entertainment, mythology is at the core of ancient wisdom . . . the blueprint of a successful life for human kind" (1). Myth is the story of what it means to be human.

My love of mythology evolved and eventuated in my writing the curriculum for Mythology and Allusion, a full-year high school elective. To prepare for this class, I dove into the works of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and Joseph Campbell. Their varying lenses add dimension to my appreciation and understanding of myth and allow my students a fuller experience not only of myth, but also of all literature, and I hope, their world. In my own work, Jung's archetypes, specifically the animus, have application to *Medea*, and Sethe's psyche in *Beloved* . Both works beg for psychological exploration.

Medea, though, is enigmatic to many teachers of the Greek theater. My students and even my colleagues cannot understand how Medea "gets away with it," since the Greek world is well-known for punishing transgressors. The teachers' confusion results in pat responses to students' outrage and the default teaching of *dues ex machine*; because students cannot reconcile the climax, the play leaves many confused and dissatisfied. Often my fellow teachers ask me why *Medea* ends as it does—is there something they are missing? What caused her to behave this way? Why does she get off scot-free? I can understand their questions, and I wanted the opportunity to study this piece more carefully. I believe that a work of literature contains the answers to questions posed of it, and we need only know which questions to ask. If I studied this more closely, I could

turnkey my findings to my colleagues but, more importantly, answer my students' questions from a position of authority. Since Euripides' *Medea* mentions the titular character's back-story, I explored *Argonautica* to understand what brought Medea to a situation where infanticide was a viable choice. I explored also who or what influenced her in her formative years and what patterns of success and failure shaped her behavior later in her life. And most importantly, I wanted to know whether her imbalance is strength, for I always saw her as a sympathetic character trapped by her decisions and her world. She is a victim of herself, and her own worst enemy.

My love of mythology extends to modern interpretations of ancient myth. Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and pairing it with *Medea* was a logical extension of this fascination, since both pieces speak of motherhood, nurturing, feminine strengths, imbalance, and infanticide. As with Euripides' play, I have a strong fondness for this novel, specifically because I received resistance to introducing it into the 12th grade English curriculum. I knew after only one read that this was a novel I wanted to teach and a novel that my seniors needed to read. I compare it to teaching the tragedies of William Shakespeare or the poems of John Donne, which are rich with possibility for analysis. In 1990, this book was considered too controversial, too "racy," too grown up for high school seniors.

Representation from Black Women writers, however, was a deficit in the AP curriculum that needed addressing, and I was limited to selecting between *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and this novel, since Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* was already in the sophomore curriculum. The fallout was unprecedented. The controversy over this book resulted in a review of the Board of Education's

procedures for textbook purchasing and the establishing of a new policy, giving teachers the freedom to select novels without needing Board approval. I have been teaching the novel every year since, and each time I teach it, I learn more about motherhood, pain, suffering, redemption, and healing. Pairing *Beloved* alongside Euripides' *Medea* for a dissertation was a logical extension of my affection for both pieces and my desire to explore the nature of myth.

I placed these two pieces of literature side by side to see how they speak to one another and to determine if one reflects or has as its precedent the former. I wanted to explore, as Lillian Corti writes, how "*Medea* and *Beloved* [depict] the psychological experience of the protagonist as one in which the self is attacked by a part of itself" (62). This dissertation reflects how the women Medea and Sethe are very much alike: the societies both women inhabit marginalize them in various ways. They have no support of law. They are isolated from or lack family for support, and therefore turn inward for strength. Being women, they are perceived as weak or easily dismissible. Medea and Sethe are recognized for their ability to supply the males who control them with offspring, which, to a certain extent, defines them.

The men as representatives of the societies Medea and Sethe are challenging shape the decisions made by the women. The protagonists in both pieces are influenced early in their lives by those around them, so for this reason I turn to Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* to look at an interpretation of Medea and Jason's relationship from its very beginning. Apollonius gives a fascinating insight to Jason, and Medea's conflict against him is the main *agôn* (or 'struggle') in Euripides' work.

Sethe, too, is influenced in her childhood, but for Sethe it is more about an absence of female role models. Whereas Medea changes to become more like the men around her, Sethe becomes fixed, and because of trauma, cannot change or grow. Both women, therefore, demonstrate an imbalance in their psyches, which is the result of—or results in—infanticide.

Carl Jung's archetype of the animus—the "male" within the female—is a lens for exploring Medea and the imbalance which results from her circumstances. This animus, as well as the conventions of the 5th century theater, are the reasons she assumes the male heroic code at the end of the play. Sethe, like Medea, succeeds over her male counterparts and eclipses their power with her inner strength derived from her motherhood and femininity. Marianne Hirsch's analytical exploration of Sethe speaks of an imbalance in Morrison's work.

This is the story of two stories and an investigation of what Denys Page calls the "something eternal and unchangeable in human nature . . . what in great drama we must always seek, the universal in this particular" (xv). *Medea* and *Beloved* speak of great fears and great triumphs, of finding inner strength based on maternal love, of reaching a place of no return, and of learning to say no. Most importantly, these two stories show how myth has the power to illuminate real life, which is simply a playing out of myth.

Chapter 1—Mythic Visions

Origins and Background

Why do we love to hate Medea? She has done the unspeakable—the ultimate—the worst action possible when she kills her children—her babies, her sons. Our fascination and horror makes us question what kind of mother would do such a thing. What drove her to such extremes, what pushed her so far into a corner that infanticide was her only choice, one she made under duress and with full cognition that she was damning herself? It is ironic that throughout the play and *Argonautica* she is worried about what people will say, one of the play's major themes and a basis for her decisions. After three thousand years, she is still being condemned for her deeds and winds up infamous in the end. A complete understanding of Medea requires looking at the whole character and her full story through the narrow scope of the play, which presents the nature of catharsis and heroic idealism, the struggle between the sexes, and the ultimate decisions of the gods. The character of Medea, this vast and complicated woman, has much to teach us about ourselves and about the nature of tragedy and responsibility, abusive relationships, social pressure and censure, suffering, and "tragic figures in the grips of something greater than themselves" (Kitto 251).

The story of this woman, however, has various accounts. Both Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and Euripides' *Medea* build a greater understanding of the motivations and machinations of this most troubling character. The difficulty in looking

at the whole picture stems from the *Argonautica*: although the chronologically earlier section of the myth, it was written some 200 years *after* the play. For this reason, *Medea* refers to "the play," *Argonautica* "the epic," and the myth as either the "myth" or "the story." All translations of *Argonautica* are from E. V. Rieu unless otherwise noted. The translations of Euripides are from Rex Warner, again, unless otherwise noted.

The Golden Fleece

The myth of the Golden Fleece centers around the story of a hero, Jason, Aeson's son. Aeson's kingdom, Iolcus, was usurped by Aeson's half-brother Pelias; some versions say that Aeson entrusted the kingdom to Pelias until Jason came of age. Jason was raised by Chiron, the Centaur, and when he reached maturity, he returned to Iolcus to claim his kingdom. Pelias had been warned by an oracle about a man who would arrive wearing only one sandal, and Jason, losing a sandal as he helped a disguised Hera cross a river, arrives so garbed. Pelias pretends to agree to give the kingdom back, but on the condition that Jason retrieve the golden fleece from the Colchians, claiming the fleece belongs to Iolcus. Jason takes on the quest, builds the Argo and gathers a crew of fifty men, most of them the sons of gods and fathers of the great heroes in Greek mythology.

They sail to Colchis, having adventures along the way, and spend some time living with the Lemnian women who have no men among them, which, as we shall see, is a key influence in Jason's development. The Argonauts pick up four stranded young men, sons of Chalciope (daughter of Aeëtes) and Phrixus; Phrixus, years earlier, arrived in Colchis on the flying ram, sacrificed the ram to Zeus, and gave the fleece to Aeëtes. When they arrive at Colchis, Athena and Hera, who have been watching the journey,

appeal to Aphrodite for assistance, knowing that Aeëtes, the king of the Colchians and possessor of the fleece, is intractable and suspicious; when he sees his grandsons arrived safely home but with an escort of fifty armed men, he accuses them of treason. Argos, one of the rescued grandsons of Aeëtes, explains the reason for Jason's voyage to Colchis. Aeëtes pretends to agree to relinquish the fleece on the condition that Jason perform a terrifying task—one Aeëtes himself has already accomplished—of yoking fire-breathing bulls, plowing a field, and sowing it with dragon's teeth, which will result in armed warriors springing from the earth in the manner of Cadmus. Eros shoots Medea, Aeëtes' daughter, with an arrow, and she falls in love with the handsome Jason; after a time of indecision, she decides to betray her father and assist Jason in his quest for the fleece, using as her excuse her desire to protect Chalciope's sons from Aeëtes' wrath. She meets with Jason secretly and gives him a potion and clues for fulfilling the task set by Aeëtes; in exchange, he promises her marriage and escape with him to Greece. The task is fulfilled, and afterwards Medea puts the huge serpent which guards the fleece to sleep, allowing Jason to acquire it. The Argonauts and Medea flee.

Aeëtes' pursuit, which Medea anticipates, is thwarted when Medea's brother Apsyrtus is killed, and in some versions of the story, she scatters his severed limbs upon the water to frustrate the Colchian ships. The Argonauts kill his crew. Zeus, angered over the murder, plans hardships for them unless they expiate the crime. The *Argo* herself cries out that Medea and Jason must visit Circe, Medea's paternal aunt. Circe cleanses the pair, and they sail on to the land of the Phaeacians, where, to avoid recapture by the Colchians, Medea and Jason are married. Alcinous, king of Phaeacians, reasons that Medea should

not be parted from her husband. Medea later saves the Argonauts from the giant Talos with her magic, and they return to Iolcus.

Once home, Medea starts her revenge against Pelias by convincing the king's daughters that she can restore his youth with her magic; they agree to help after she demonstrates this skill using an old ram which turns into a lamb. When the sisters kill their father—Medea assuring them the spell will work better if they kill him rather than her—she places the severed parts in a cauldron; as she planned, nothing happens. Pelias does not rise from the cauldron as a young man, and thus her plan for revenge against Pelias for usurping Aeson's kingdom—and therefore Jason's—succeeds. She escapes the scene in a flying chariot sent by her grandfather, the sun god. Pelias' son Acastus banishes Jason and Medea from Iolcus.

Still having no kingdom, Jason returns to Corinth, Aeëtes' native city, where, according to some stories, Medea stops a famine through her magic (Easterling 189), and Creon convinces Jason to marry Glauce (or Creusa), his daughter. This requires putting Medea aside, and Euripides' play takes place on the very day of the wedding. Medea also learns that she has been banished, but Creon gives her this one day to make plans for herself. She enacts her revenge on Creon and Glauce by killing them after receiving an oath from Aegeus, king of Athens, that he will protect her if she can get herself to his city. Her children by Jason are killed; she takes the bodies to the temple of Hera Akraia where she establishes rituals in her children's memory (or to expiate their killing), and then journeys to Athens where she marries Aegeus. Years later, Aegeus is bewitched into thinking his own son Theseus is a threat to him, and just before Medea contrives to poison Theseus, Aegeus recognizes him by the tokens he left with Theseus' mother.

Medea flees, taking Medus, her son by Aegeus, to Colchis, where Perses had dethroned Aeëtes. She has Perses killed and reinstates her own father. Eventually, she is married to Achilles in Elysium.

In his essay on *The Medea*, Bernard Knox (1977) discusses the variations of the myth's pedigree and suggests that Euripides added the twist on the story that she killed her own children. Euripides would have had numerous versions of the myth at his disposal: Medea's children are killed by the people of Corinth as revenge for Creon's and Creon's daughter's deaths; Medea kills Jason but not the children; she was trying to make them immortal, and they were killed accidentally; Hera promised her that the children would be made immortal but they died in the process (296). William Allan offers additional variations; he suggests that the Corinthian poet Eumelus has Medea summoned by the Corinthians from Iolcus to be their queen, possibly because Aeëtes had ruled in Corinth. According to Parimenscus, the Corinthians resent being ruled by a foreigner, so they kill her seven sons and seven daughters who sought sanctuary in the temple of Hera. In Creophylus' version, Creon's relatives kill the children in retaliation for the murder of Creon and then spread the rumor that Medea killed them herself (Allan 22-3). Allan summarizes: "Thus, there were two different accounts of the children's death in pre-Euripidean myth: (1) Medea kills the children unintentionally; and (2) others kill the children intentionally" (22). Certainly Euripides' addition makes her actions horrifying and memorable: this becomes the version of the myth in perpetuity because it is the most sensational. Euripides' variation, we can then assume, influenced Apollonius Rhodius' character in his epic. Apollonius' knowledge of Euripides' interpretation might have made Apollonius' task of creating Medea easier, for she appears as a *femme fatale*.

Significantly, he uses a sympathetic and gentle hand with Medea. He gives the reason, albeit a weak one, for her actions and removes any blame, since she is manipulated by Hera and Aphrodite to wreak Hera's revenge on Pelias. Hera fears Pelias might boast about omitting her when he makes offerings to the gods. Additionally, Jason carried a disguised Hera across a river, and for that deed she "will never cease to honor him" (III. 74).

Medea and the Goddesses

The problems of Medea are not of her own making, and circumstances such as her status as a woman and the society she lives in leaves her at the mercy of others. Because of their role in the myth, the goddesses, specifically Aphrodite, either create Medea, thereby making her their pawn, or recognize what is already in her and so cause her fate. Either way, she is used by the goddesses for their own ends. In the third book of *Argonautica*, unsure of how to proceed in assisting Jason and his quest, Hera takes council with Athena about manipulating Jason's actions in Colchis. Hera wants to address the matter of Pelias' lack of respect when Pelias rescued his mother Tyro from her stepmother Sidero. Pelias had killed Sidero in Hera's temple, where Sidero had taken refuge. As a result of this insult, Hera is determined to punish Pelias; some versions of the story suggest that Hera needs Jason in Iolcos for just that reason. In her counsel with Athena and Cyprus (Aphrodite), Hera explains that she is concerned for Aeson's son and is motivated "so that Pelias may not mock at having escaped an evil doom—Pelias who left me unhonoured with sacrifice" (III. 55-57). This concern motivated many of the gods, and stories abound about insults made to the gods or their temples violated by

humans, resulting in lasting punishment. In the opening lines of the epic we hear that Pelias' slighting of Hera is indeed true. Jason arrives at a banquet "that Pelias was giving in honor of his father Poseidon and all the other gods, except Pelasgian Hera to whom he paid no homage" (I. 15-17). Athena and Hera cannot come up with a plausible way for Jason to steal the fleece, which forces them to Cyprus (Aphrodite) at Hera's suggestion. Athena, who has "never felt the arrows of the Boy" and of love knows nothing, asks Hera to do all the talking (III. 30). The failure of Athena, goddess of war, reinforces the pattern of "love" over "strength of arms," which is a characteristic of Jason's disappointing heroism.

When they present their request to Aphrodite, who is flattered by their visit and their supplication, they explain that they need her intervention with her son Eros. Their plan is to have Medea, Aeëtes' daughter, fall in love with Jason, and they need Aphrodite's assistance in making this come about. Hera uses the word "wizardry" for Eros's actions in the Rieu translation. This connects Eros and Medea in the next line, for, as Hera finishes her comment about Medea, she says, "She is something of a witch herself" (III. 89). At the same point, R. C. Seaton's translation tells us that Medea "is full of wiles," while Richard Hunter tells us she is "full of guile."

How much Apollonius was influenced by Euripides is hard to say, but this is, in the chronology of the story, the earliest reference to Medea's character. Does Hera call out something that she knows to be true, or has a prophecy been made by her words? Medea has been labeled a witch, a seductive trickster, a deceitful manipulator, yet we have nothing to base that on except Hera's prophetic understanding of Medea's character.

This casual statement establishes a pattern of ascribing a label that is to come, and to come true. Later, she will be blamed for being a witch, foreigner, woman.

The ensuing exchange between Aphrodite and Eros will be paralleled between Jason and Medea. These parallels create great unity in *Argonautica,* not only between Jason and Medea, but with Jason and Hypsipyle. Charles Rowan Beye explores what he calls the "allegorized psychology" of love through the conversation between Aphrodite and her son after the goddesses have departed (125). Aphrodite must convince Eros to shoot one of his arrows into Medea; to "bribe" him, she offers him a golden ball which had been a childhood plaything of Zeus. The power of love and desire, personified through Aphrodite and Eros respectively, shows love at the mercy of desire. The offer of the golden ball—something desired for possession—contrasts with the selfless offer of Aphrodite to help Athena and Hera without knowing exactly what is involved (Beye 127). As Aphrodite negotiates with her son, she knows she must spark a desire in him, for he is selfish. The same spark of desire is needed in Medea. Aphrodite understands her "greedy boy" (III. 115) and loves her son despite his unrepentant selfishness, as Medea will perhaps still love Jason despite his; yet both Aphrodite and Medea understand the need to manipulate, as well as to love. Eros's covetousness is seen the moment he enters, for he is willing to cheat Ganymede for his own pleasure of obtaining the gaming pieces and then, like a miser, count them piece by piece as he tosses them into his mother's lap. Medea, too, will cheat to get what she desires, but what she desires is Jason's life, not to possess, but for his own self: she would be happy just knowing that he lives somewhere, even if he lives far away from her. Rather than childish possession, this desire reflects the mature form of love shown by Aphrodite to the goddesses—self-sacrificing and

generous. Medea would be happy in the knowledge that Jason *is*—that he exists somewhere—even if that somewhere is away from her. What Medea cannot know is that a love that is completely selfless cannot work, for one cannot sacrifice everything to the love object and still maintain balance.

Aphrodite dispatches her son and, after he shoots Medea, he laughs as he flies away, the golden ball—the object of his desire—within reach. We get our first look at Medea as Jason enters the court of the Colchians. Apollonius is neutral in his physical descriptions of her at this point, but the arrow itself, described in negative language, further explains the difference between love and desire. Seaton's translation uses the terms "anguish"; "messenger of pain"; "sweet pain"; and "love the destroyer" to describe Eros' success (III. 295-98). It is no wonder the Greeks attributed to the gods so overpowering a feeling as first love. Apollonius describes how her "heart stood still"; "throbbed within her and overflowed with the sweetness of pain" (III. 284, 287). The poet then describes a fire, at first "smouldering" and then a "mighty blaze . . . stealthy but all consuming that swept through Medea's heart" (III. 298). Seaton translates the same moment, "and the bolt burnt down in the maiden's heart like a flame . . . coiling round her heart, burnt secretly Love the destroyer." Two things are important here: Medea's passion consumes her as Hera and Athena wish, and, since this is probably Medea's first "crush," she is initially incapable of rational thinking. Also, the poet describes the emotion in terms of fire. The association with her grandfather Helios is clear: what starts in fire ends in fire.

Is Medea, therefore, responsible for her actions? We can interpret the words of Hera as prophecy, knowing where Medea's actions will take her in the future. Indeed, she

is full of wiles, but because Eros shoots her? Because she was like this before Eros' arrow, or because the goddesses have determined to use her so? Apollonius leaves the motivation ambiguous. Clearly, through their actions to save Jason the goddesses have manipulated Medea, and the two do not care what becomes of her. By making her a pawn in their game of revenge against Pelias, Hera and Athena create the circumstances for the character to evolve into the tragic figure she becomes. Had the goddesses the prescience to know that she would punish Jason the way she does, would they have proceeded, since their main concern is for Jason and his success? Arthur Heiserman comments on the goddesses' role in Medea's powerful love:

> Since, unlike Jason, she is the victim of a compulsion caused by deities not her own (Hecate and Artemis) but those of her beloved, she is pitiable; and since unlike Jason, she nobly struggles against her destiny, she is admirable. She must suddenly transfer her dutiful but strong love for her father to a stranger, and this means that Eros causes her to idealize Jason. Jason seems as unworthy of such love as her father; but the result is inevitably the love described as a mild psychosis derived from overvaluation of an object. (28)

Her idealization of Jason is a pattern repeated throughout the play, as is Medea's struggle against her fate. At the moment she is struck by the arrow, however, her love is pure, unsullied by political intrigue or self-preservation. Once she learns why Jason has come to Colchis, she understands her father's threat to Jason, for she knows Aeëtes will never relinquish the fleece. Her struggle between duty to her father and desire to help Jason splits her in two.

Argos announces Jason's purpose in coming to Colchis since Jason does not even speak for himself. He creates a pattern of silence and passivity by allowing others to deliver bad news, which repeats over and over in the play. Apollonius focuses his narrative on Medea, giving her voice where Jason has none. She is confused, as anyone might be when falling in love, but her love is coupled with anxiety, since her father remains the threat to Jason. Crying, she says to herself,

> What is the meaning of this grief? Hero or villain (and why should I care which?), the man is going to his death. Well, let him go! And yet I wish he had been spared. Yes, Sovran [sic] Lady Hecate, this is my prayer. Let him live to reach his home. But if he must be conquered by the bulls, may he first learn that I for one do not rejoice in his cruel fate. (III. 464-470)

We can forgive her vanity for wanting to been seen as separate from the faces in the Colchian crowd; this is probably her first encounter with the raging emotions of love. Later in the story, when he has rejected her, she will want him again to see her and recognize her as an individual. Significantly, the moment her desire becomes selfless love is also the moment she isolates herself from those around her; both this passion and isolation are irrevocable and lead to tragedy.

In a masterful counterpoint to Medea's isolation, strength, decisiveness and independence, Apollonius has Argos approach Jason with a plan to petition Medea for help. Argos says,

> You will not approve, son of Aison, of the plan which I will now propose, but we can hardly refuse to attempt it in our wretched plight. There is a young girl—you have already heard me tell you how Hekate,

> daughter of Perses, inspires her powers with magic drugs; if we can win her over, I do believe that we need no longer worry about defeat in the contest. I am however very much afraid that my mother may not support me in this. Nevertheless, I will go back again and ask her, since all of us together have the same destruction hanging over us. (Hunter III. 464-470)

The stakes are raised here because Argos and his three brothers are also in danger from Aeëtes. Chalciope is terrified for her sons, since Aeëtes blames them for bringing the Argonauts to his land; he assumes such a band of warriors wishes to seize his kingdom. Chalciope wants to protect her sons by soliciting Medea's help; Medea wants to protect Jason, but cannot muster the courage to say so. After repeated attempts, Medea finally speaks to her sister, having had a symbolic dream, which shows all her naïve wishes. In the dream, Jason has come not to take the fleece, but to marry her, and after *she* yokes the bulls, she is given the choice to join Jason and does so readily, much to her father's anger. Medea twists the dream into a lie for her sister's sake, fabricating a version that echoes Chalciope's fears. She claims she is motivated for the sons of her sister and agrees to assist the strangers in their quest for the fleece. Does her wily, guile-filled nature make her lie to her sister, or does the desire for respect—fear of being seen as weak and foolish because she is in love—cause her to act? Based on Eros's actions earlier in Book III, love—Aphrodite—understands and even forgives the cheating of her son to achieve his ends; Medea enacts the same selfishness and manipulation as she promises the one thing her sister so desires—the safety of her sons.

Medea Alone

The sleepless night which follows is extremely important in understanding Medea's nature and what she goes on to do, since she has to betray her father if she is to assist Jason. The cost will be ridicule from her own people. She is not heartless; her guile does not come without suffering and pain. Torn between fear for Jason, recognition of the anticipated defiance against her father and her city, agony over the idea of Jason's returning to Hellas and marrying "some Achean girl far away in his own country" (III. 639), leaving her a spinster, she decides to help the strangers. Then, the full import of her actions wrack her emotionally as she spends hours agonizing over her choice: "At one moment she thought she would give him the magic drug for the bulls; at the next she thought no, she would rather die herself; and then that she would do neither, but patiently endure her fate" (III. 766-767). Her indecision is a painful testimony to her intelligence; she fully embraces the magnitude of her actions. Wishing she had died before having seen Jason, she debates with herself about how to succeed with the plan, how to keep it a secret, and how to meet him. She admits,

> Indeed I am ill-starred, for even if he dies I have no hope of happiness;
> with Jason dead I should taste real misery. Away with modesty, farewell
> to my good name! Saved from all harm by me, let him go where he
> pleases, and let me die. On the very day of his success I could hang myself
> from a rafter or take a deadly poison. (III.773-781)

Medea establishes a double pattern here: on the one hand, she states she has no choice—her motivation is, and ever will be, Jason's life. Even if her name is ruined or maligned, nothing matters except his success. Her very being is tied to his, and she sees no options,

no other future for herself; in this decision, she has lost herself and has moved from desire to love, from selfishness to selflessness, and ironically, from balance to imbalance, since she must ignore reason to achieve her ends. Apollonius makes Medea a sympathetic character; her struggle to help Jason means betraying her father and her people—to give up everything she knows for everything she is feeling. In describing her anguished night in the next few sentences, however, Apollonius establishes another very important and equally powerful motivation, which guides Medea later in life: fear of ridicule. She states,

> Yet even so my death would not save me from the wicked tongues. My fate would be the talk of every city in the world: and here the Colchian women would bandy my name about and drag it in mud—the girl who fancied a foreigner enough to die for him, disgrace her parents and her home, went off her head for love. What infamy would not be mine? (III. 776-780)

This fear of ridicule, coupled with her feelings of having no other choice, defines Medea's actions throughout both the epic and Euripides' play. The only way to avoid ridicule is not to act, since to help Jason or kill herself would target her for criticism from the Colchians, but Eros precludes that option. Extreme and uncompromising with her own feelings, she becomes fixed. This rigidity is the flaw that leaves her always in flight from her enemies, always dissatisfied with her lot, always unbalanced. The irony is that she becomes what she fears when her name becomes known in every city as the woman who killed her sons to punish her husband. Yet she feels that killing her sons is fate and that there is no other option.

In order to assist Jason, she takes an oath—the first oath we see in the story—to do anything she can to help Chalciope and Chalciope's sons who, Aeëtes believes, have betrayed him. Medea swears "by mighty Heaven and by Earth below, the Mother of the Gods, that provided your demands are not impossible I will help you as you wish, with all the power that in me lies" (III. 717-19). The importance of oaths to Medea's actions drives Euripides' play and will be explored later, but it is important to note that she takes this initial oath seriously and fulfills it by protecting her nephews: if only she had taken an oath to protect her own brother! Still, even after making her pledge, her irrational love and excessive emotions cause her to toss and turn all night.

Apollonius creates tremendous compassion for his heroine when Medea—confused, conflicted, tormented—debates the situation: "Evil on this side, evil on that; and must I choose between them? In either case my plight is desperate and there is no escape; this torture will go on" (III. 800-801). Finally, she decides that suicide is the answer. Early in the passage she wishes an arrow from Artemis had struck her before she laid eyes on Jason, and later, she decides that poisoning or hanging herself from the rafters is a better option. This extreme thinking appears throughout her story because Medea never does things by half measures. Such desperation appears in both *Argonautica* and *Medea.*

Medea's pride and her anxiety about being the victim of gossip connects her clearly to Hera, whose motivation in seeking revenge on Pelias is her fear of what he will tell people or what he will boast. Medea's action later in the story reflects this dread of what people might say and becomes the deciding factor in her decision to kill her sons. In the epic, Medea is so afraid of the Colchian women's gossiping that she goes so far as

to get out her box containing drugs and poison to kill herself, but Hera intervenes and Medea changes her mind. Her oath to Chalciope, her loyalty to her father, and her pride and reputation war inside her until the "love object" of the idealized Jason (Heiserman 28) decides the point, and she prepares to meet him and assist in his task of winning the golden fleece.

After her miserable night, "She thought of the pleasures that the living can enjoy. . . It seemed to her a sweeter thing to see the sun than it had ever been before" (III. 813, 815). She is reborn, grown to womanhood through the act of breaking from her father's will. All the indecision that wracked her through the night is replaced with a seriousness of purpose and action. Tears, sighing, questioning, second-guessing are all behind her and her feminine passivity gives way to a more masculine behavior; she is firm in purpose, decisive, and assured, as she will be later in the play.

The patterns characters establish in the epic are set early on and repeat themselves throughout the tale; thus, Medea's active, more assertive self becomes fixed before she is a woman in the fullest sense, and her first brush with love is also fraught with danger. Passivity in women and action in men, the standard archetypal expectations, are inverted. Medea becomes a person of action, albeit deceitful actions, and finds success through her masculine behavior before she finds success in love. This is the first instance of Medea's split between her masculine and feminine selves, and she knows she has to become assertive to help Jason. She decides to follow her passion for Jason rather than her duty or any other "reasonable" behavior. She can rationalize that she is fulfilling the oath to her sister, not simply following the dictates of her heart. Reason, then,

becomes slave to her passion, but her awareness of both is important, as she never loses sight of either throughout the story.

The Lemnian Women

As a parallel to Medea's struggle with passion and reason, *Argonautica* presents the Lemnian women interlude, during which a similar role reversal occurs as women take the lead and men follow. Like Medea, the Lemnian women are successful when assuming masculine behaviors. The history of the Lemnian women provide reinforcement of the pattern where passion forces action and the feminine dominates the masculine, in this case, literally. The story of the inhabitants of Lemnos is suspiciously akin to Medea's action in Euripides' play, and the rejection of the men by the women mirrors Jason's later rejection of Medea:

> Here, in the previous year, the women had run riot and slaughtered every male inhabitant. The married men, seized with loathing for their lawful wives, had cast them off, conceiving an unruly passion for the captured girls they brought across the sea from raids in Thrace. The Lemnian wives had for long neglected the homage due Aphrodite, and this was the angry Cyprian's punishment. Unhappy women! Their soul-destroying and insensate jealousy drove them to kill not only their husbands and the girls who had usurped their beds, but every male as well in order that they might not have to pay the price for this atrocious massacre. (I. 609-17)

When the Lemnian women see a ship of Argonaut heroes on their shore, they are determined to have them re-populate their land and to protect them from avenging Thracians.

Apollonius takes a conservative stand on women in men's positions, since the women will return to "normal" after contact with the Argonauts. He disparages women in male roles when the Lemnian women, afraid of retribution for the slaughtered Thracian girls, are described after seeing the *Argo* approaching: ". . . they at once equipped themselves for war and poured out in wild haste from the gates of Myrine, like ravening Thyiads. . . It was a panic-stricken rabble, speechless and impotent with fear, that streamed down to the beach" (I. 636-9). It had only been a year, and the women have become "warriors." J. J. Clauss, in his *The Best of the Argonauts*, writes of Apollonius' using the Lemnian women to turn the expected female role on its head; Hypsipyle becomes the ruler, but with no compunction offers that position to the first male who comes her way. These women are completely willing to return from a "panic stricken rabble" to their former roles once the Argonauts arrive. In contrast, once Medea has made up her mind to help Jason in Colchis, she becomes organized, logical, calculating, and purposeful. The Lemnian women have a greater measure of success acting as women with the Argonauts than they do acting as men and eventually assume their procreative and acquiescent role; Medea, despite submitting herself to Jason and procreating with him, is unwilling to take the same acquiescent role, and she balks when Jason repeats his own pattern of "love 'em and leave 'em."

Jason's character in *Argonautica*, according to Clauss, explores a new heroic model, one who is not a man of strength in arms—though he certainly can use them if

needed—but one who is skilled in the art of diplomacy. This model will influence Medea and her actions. J. F. Carspecker suggests that it is the *collective* crew who are meant to be heroic in this epic (Beye 78), perhaps excusing Jason's flaws. Jason's strengths lie not in arms, but in words, and unlike Achilles and Odysseus, who have the personal friendship and company of the gods, Jason is not visited by them. He rarely fights, and in his first armed conflict, accidently kills an ally, King Kyzikos, when the Argonauts fail to realize the wind has blown them back to the land of the Doliones they had left the day before. Jason's strengths seem to be negotiation and wooing women. Clauss argues that Jason's attributes are the reason Herakles is shown as such a brute and was removed from *Argonautica*, since his kind of hero does not succeed, while the sweet-talking, well-dressed, good looking lover does. G. S. Kirk states that Jason "is clearly not on a level with younger legendary heroes like Agamemnon or Achilles . . ." (137).

This new kind of hero sports a mantle, the double cloak of purple woven by Pallas Athena, which rivals the shield of Achilles for its depictions that encompass the whole world (Clauss 91). Apollonius writes, "You could cast your eyes more easily toward the rising sun than gaze upon the brilliant redness of the cloak. Its center was bright red, the border all the way round purple, and along the full length of the edge had been woven many cunning designs in sequence" (Hunter I. 724-29). The description of this cloak resembles the later description of Jason wrapping himself in the golden fleece. To the Lemnian women, Jason comes "looking like that bright star whose beautiful red beams, piercing the darkness as he rises over the roof-tops, delight a girl shut up in her new bridal-bower." The women of Lemnos "[flock] after him, charmed by their visitor's appearance" (I. 774, 779). When Hypsipyle sees him and just about falls at his feet,

"Jason is on the verge of discovering his great weapon, love, which will prove more powerful than brute force" (Clauss 128). Medea, too, is helpless when she first sees him.

If a character's pattern for action is set early, then Jason's actions are set by his relationship with Hypsipyle as she offers him her kingdom and her body. Through the negotiations and diplomacy of Aethalides, son of Hermes, the Argonauts spend the night on Lemnos. Yet they stay while "day followed day" (I. 860) until Herakles, who chose not to participate in "diplomacy" with the Lemnian women and remained onboard the *Argo* with his young companion Hylas, reminds the Argonauts of their task. In essence, Hypsipyle performs the same actions that Medea will later: she negotiates her own relationship with a man of her choice because there is no male authority to do it for her. Clauss makes an interesting argument that this episode "threatened to unman those Argonauts who left the shore" (144). The Lemnian women had assumed the dominant roles of warriors in addition to taking on man's work, thereby leaving more passive roles to the Argonauts. After the Lemnian women are "feminized" again, balance is restored by the time the Argonauts leave. The women are left in peace to resume their traditional feminine roles, symbolically demonstrated through procreation and celebratory feasts: "in their hymns and sacrifices they paid honour above all other immortals to the glorious son of Hera and to Kypris herself" (I. 861-63).

Additionally, this episode introduces the importance of children and the problems of childlessness seen throughout the story. Aphrodite stirs desire in the hearts of the Lemnian women to welcome the Argonauts, and they are advised by Hypsipyle's old nurse to welcome these men specifically to repopulate the island. As Jason departs, Hypsipyle offers him the scepter again and passively asks what she should do should she

find herself with child. He responds that if she gives birth to a son and he—Jason—not make it home alive, she should send the child "when he is old enough to Pelasgian Iolcus" (I. 908); the possibility of Hypsipyle giving birth to a daughter is not mentioned. So Jason's success with Hypsipyle and his later success with Medea and Glauce spring not from being strong or clever, but from cutting a dashing figure.

Although our modern sensibilities balk at Jason's treatment of Hypsipyle, Beye informs us that "the misogynist streak in ancient Greek culture made love of a woman undignified because (presumably) it meant getting serious about something dangerous." An "expression of love is almost a violation of the [epic] genre" (89). For this reason, Herakles' behavior over the loss of Hylas is un-manly and comic; Clauss argues that in the epic, Herakles and Jason show the triumph of heterosexual over homosexual love. Jason's cool ability to leave Hypsipyle enforces a model of diplomatic behavior (89), while not exceeding the conventions of relationships; his parting from her is painless, and she is completely passive about it. For this reason, he later decides to put Medea aside: he thinks all women are alike, and he can leave with impunity. Once they decide it is time to depart from Lemnos, Jason is the first one on the boat.

Jason and Aeëtes

This mediating diplomacy of Jason's is less successful when it comes to dealing with men; however, Medea will use this behavior as a model for herself in her future. Jason does not have the heroic strength to deal with Aeëtes on Aeëtes' terms and will look to Medea for subterfuge and deceit. The success of deceitful measures reinforces the behavior pattern in both Jason and Medea.

Aeëtes rages when he hears the request Argos makes on behalf of Jason to take the fleece from Colchis. Allowing Argos to speak for him shows Jason's diplomacy at work and his hesitancy to be the one to deliver bad news. The offer of the Argonauts to subdue Colchis' enemies, the Sauromatae, on Aeëtes' behalf results in Aeëtes' plan to rid himself of Jason and his crew, for the offer only reinforces Aeëtes' belief that the Argonauts are there on a warrior-like venture .

As a hero, Jason disappoints. After the challenge laid down by Aeëtes to yoke the oxen and plow and sow the field, Jason "listened to this with his eyes fixed on the floor; and when the king had finished, he sat there just as he was, without a word, "resourceless" and terrified in the face of dilemma (Heiserman 13). "For a long time he turned the matter over in his mind, unable boldly to accept a task so clearly fraught with peril" (III. 423-5). Aeëtes then tells him that if, in his cowardice, he refuses the task, Aeëtes will "see that every precaution is taken to make anyone else shrink from attacking his betters" (Hunter III. 438), killing Jason to set an example. Jason accepts the task and explains that he has no choice, just as he had no other choice than to come to Colchis at his king's request to obtain the fleece. Here, he is more acted upon than acting.

His passivity, too, is an early pattern seen when Herakles elects him captain of the ship. After getting everyone onboard, Jason states, ". . . now, without other thoughts choose the very best man as your leader—the man who will be concerned with every detail in conducting both our quarrels and our agreements with men of foreign lands" (I . 338-340). Though the Argonauts feel that Herakles, as the greatest warrior, should take this role, Herakles refuses—possibly after hearing the job description and knowing he was not himself skilled in that kind of diplomacy. Herakles insists that they elect Jason

and refuses to allow anyone else to put himself forward for the role. Later, when they sail away abandoning Herakles in Kios, Jason does not make an effort to go back for him, even after Telamon insults Jason, accusing him of having planned to abandon Herakles to avoid being overshadowed by a greater hero. With Herakles onboard, there is no way the other man can achieve any measure of heroism. When an immortal, a spokesman for Nereus, tells them that Herakles was destined to leave the *Argo* and its journey, Jason escapes repercussions.

Coupled with Jason's passivity is a confusing melancholy of unclear origins. Jason himself explains his woe to Tiphys after *successfully* passing through the clashing rocks:

> Tiphys, why do you offer me these consolations in my grief? I have erred; my wretched folly offers no remedy. When Pelias gave his instruction, I should have immediately refused this expedition outright, even if it meant a cruel death, torn apart limb from limb. As it is I am in constant terror and my burdens are unendurable; I loathe sailing in our ship over the chill paths of the sea, and I loathe our stops on dry land, for all around are enemies. Ever since you all first assembled for my sake, I have endured a ceaseless round of painful nights and days . . . . (II 625-633)

The reason Jason feels such remorse and restlessness when he has the personal sanction of the gods is unclear and makes him a difficult character to sympathize with. The epic is so riddled with positive bird omens and signs, hospitality and opportune meetings among

characters that Jason's malaise is perplexing. Still, his discomfort is consistent in both the epic and the play, though we can say that Euripides has consolidated his discomfort to a more specific complaint. In the epic, Jason falls into funks many times, and his insecurity is in stark contrast to his crew. The sons of the gods and men of action who are neither developed as players nor grow as characters throughout the journey serve as a stylistic contrast to the character of Jason. Heiserman writes, "Jason's most common epithet is *amēchanos*—'resourceless.' He is morose, uncertain and unable to handle the love which he—or the goddess who supports his enterprise—evokes in the passionate Medea" (13). Jason's character and his anguished moments are not as crystalline as Medea's. He broods, sulks, loses his confidence, but there does not seem to be a trigger or catalyst for his behavior; Jason suddenly gets quiet and moody—often in the middle of a feast—with no clear cause. Apollonius presents a hero whom we cannot relate to on an emotional level, yet anyone who has had a crush or has been torn between two bad choices can understand Medea's conflict instantly. Heiserman maintains: "Medea's suffering is more immediately accessible to us, more noble and therefore more affecting, than Jason's" (20). Jason often throws up his hands in indecision and takes the expedient exit; he claims that Aeëtes "leaves him no escape whatever" (III. 428), and to Argos' suggestion that they ask assistance of Medea, he says, "If you are satisfied, then I have no objections" (III. 482). When Medea charms the serpent, Jason "from behind [Medea] looked on in terror" (III. 489). Such craven behavior only strengthens our ill opinion of the wishy-washy Jason and highlights Medea's power.

Inconsistency and indecisiveness come into play again when, pursued by the Colchian fleet, Jason and Medea's brother Apsyrtus plan to abandon Medea at a temple

of Artemis. They decide to let the Colchians have her, taking the fleece with them, which they somehow feel they had fairly won. Learning of the plan, Medea reminds Jason of his promises to her, of the oaths he swore to Zeus, of her disgrace to her people, her family, and her sex. She threatens him, longing to set the ship afire and throw herself into the flames. She frightens Jason with her passion and anger. As usual, the first idea she offers is the one Jason takes, since he has no clear ideas for himself. She suggests that he kill her brother, and Jason does so in the temple of Artemis—a place where Apsyrtus would expect no attack. Her brother's murder "seal[s] forever" the relationship and unites the couple in a bond that "grows more dreadful" (Beye 160). When the Argonauts fall on Apsyrtus' crew and Jason hurries to assist, he comes too late, because the masculine battle involving hand-to-hand fighting is already over.

As a traditional hero, Jason falls short. He lacks any of the characteristics needed for success and lasting fame, and his actions, when he does take them, are cowardly and motivated by self-preservation and expediency. I hold with Gilbert Lawall, especially when he writes of the debate aboard the Argo about Aeëtes' challenge and eliciting the help of Medea:

> He here resolutely rejects the heroic approach of resort to arms, and he rejects it not out of cowardice, but because such a course is obviously foolish in that it would be necessarily disastrous. The educational voyage has molded Jason into an actor who . . . reveals himself as anti-heroic, circumventive, pious, and reliant on the aid of others, both human (Medea) and gods (especially Aphrodite). (166)

Lawall reasons that Jason's moment of heroism comes by fulfilling the tasks laid down by Aeëtes, "But this heroic stature is temporary. When the magic wears off, Jason becomes again the all-too-human actor who must rely on treachery rather than strength to achieve his ends" (167). Clauss tells us that the patterns of behavior established in Book I of *Argonautica* help us with the rest of the epic:

> Throughout the rest of the poem Jason will maintain this passive style. He does not make things happen but waits for the dust to settle before taking advantage of the opportunities that others—mortal and divine—have provided. Jason's talents include the ability to attract women, to take care of quotidian details of running an expedition, and to make the best of a bad situation through skillful crisis management. (210)

The Ancient Greeks had model heroes showing strength of arms in battle or through ridding their world of trouble; at the time of Apollonius' writing, they needed one who was closer to how real success in their world was measured—through litigation and rhetoric.[1]

Jason and Medea

This re-definition of heroism is very important to Medea's development. Lacking models of behavior for herself, Medea has to use what is familiar to her. Until she meets and becomes connected to Jason, she knows only her father and has surely inherited his temper. Aeëtes plans to betray the Argonauts regardless of the outcome of Jason's task; this same kind of betrayal underlies Medea's order to kill her brother. We see little of

[1] I enjoy the irony that Heracles, booted from *Argonautica* because he was too great a contrast to Jason, eventually achieves immortality, whereas Jason dies ignobly when a piece of the *Argo* lands on his head.

Chalciope's influence here; the feminine desire to protect children is, as yet, foreign to Medea, and she lacks a mother's influence. She is not, however, without subterfuge. She uses the excuse of protecting Chalciope's children to get what she wants. This expediency and deceit, something Jason is comfortable with already, makes both Jason and Medea types, and the more she succeeds in this guise, the stronger the impulse becomes; having Jason's sanction only exacerbates this tendency in her. Medea's asserting herself parallels Beye's remark: "What does Apollonius show us? A strong woman who must struggle against being victimized and submerged by the dependent man upon whom she finally must become dependent" (160).

Ironically, this dependency is Medea's weakness. Her desperate actions and situations stem from her love of this man, as well as her fear of death at the hand of Aeëtes for betraying him. As seen earlier with the sons of Chalciope, the stakes have been raised. Her male authority figure has been replaced, and Medea is in a limbo of belonging to—but not legally bound—to Jason. He promises to marry her when he secretly meets her before Aeëtes' challenge; he reiterates to his men his plan to marry when she is placed aboard the *Argo*. In Jason's defense, he does offer the only thing that can make a difference to her, and the only thing she will need. Asylum would not be enough as an innocent woman among strangers. She most likely would rather face her father's wrath than climb aboard the *Argo* with ambivalent status. I disagree with Lawall when he argues about their first meeting: "Medea desperately tries to lead him to a commitment, but Jason speaks of marriage only as a hazy future possibility. Before being led into deeper involvement, Jason breaks off the interview" (166). There is nothing

ambiguous in his speech, except perhaps his tactless mentioning of Ariadne[2]. The interview ends because Medea has the unasked promise of safety that she needs to continue with the plan. Although they both expected to marry in his father's home, they marry in the land of the Phaeacians under duress, secreted away from Alcinous and through the scheming of Arête to prevent Medea's being returned to the Colchians. Her dowry—the fleece itself—becomes her marriage bed in the cave of Macris. It is instructive to look at Jason's reaction to the fleece once he actually obtains it:

> Lord Jason held up the great fleece in his arms. The shimmering wool threw a fiery glow on his fair cheeks and forehead; and he rejoiced in it, glad as a girl who catches on her silken gown the lovely light of the full moon as it climbs the sky and looks into her attic room. . . When he slung it on his left shoulder, as he did at times, it reached his feet. But now and again he made a bundle of it in his arms. He was mortally afraid that some god or man might rob him on the way. (IV. 165-176)

His reaction is best described by Beye: "Apollonius makes Jason react to the fleece with a pleasure and desire stronger and more obvious than that which anything else in the poem has been able to excite in him. . . . Apollonius . . . conveys Jason's sexual excitement at finally possessing Medea through the conquest of the fleece" (156). This, Beye argues, is the epic tradition's way of dealing with erotic material, but I suggest that the fleece, more than the woman, will further him politically. The inheritance from

[2] This mentioning of Aridane and her assistance to Theseus is, of course, impossible, as we know chronologically in the Medea tale that Medea marries Aegeus after her adventures with Jason, and that Theseus' activities with Ariadne are in the future distant to this moment. Obviously, the reference was selected by Apollonius because Theseus will abandon Ariadne on Naxos. Jason's mention of her is doubly tactless, since Ariadne is first cousin to Medea, and Medea has never heard of her.

Aeëtes is more important to him than the wife he gains in the fleece's conquest, since that was the purpose of the journey in the first place.

Jason's reaction appears extreme, though, especially given the fact that he did nothing to actually obtain it and simply stood by while Medea stroked the phallic serpent and sang it to sleep. Once he possesses it, however, he guards it jealously from the Argonauts. When they wanted to touch it, he "kept them off and threw a mantle over the fleece" (187) before introducing Medea to the crew onboard the *Argo* and declaring that he wanted to wed her. Marriage will unite them and ensure Jason's ownership of the fleece, for he knows that if she is returned to Aeëtes, she will surely take the fleece with her.

Apollonius has established a number of useful patterns which will play themselves out later in Euripides' play. Medea is a clever woman of action who is concerned over her loss of reputation but is powerless because of her love for Jason. Jason, a diplomatic rather than traditionally heroic leader, takes a passive role in decision-making and finds help from women; he expeditiously allows others to make plans for him. Because they have to act without much time for contemplation, both Medea and Jason's decision-making involves deceit and betrayal. Aeëtes is tyrannical and forceful, which Medea will later model. Finally, Medea makes an oath to her sister, which demonstrates her belief in the power of the gods and the power of commitment.

Chapter 2—Foreign Bride

Background

Because Euripides was writing in Athens in the 5th century B.C.E., his application on conventions and social mores, as well as the historical perspective on women and marriage rites of his time, bear exploration. The role of the male guardian in the marriage process, as well as prejudice against children from non-Greek women, influence Medea's decisions. Given that Euripides was writing of the epic period, he does so within a context his audience would understand, and the tradition of reinterpreting the myth for the stage is consistent with 5th century theatre, where no new stories were presented. The ancient stories were re-worked to fit contemporary familial, political and social concerns. I disagree with W.K. Lacey, as quoted in Roger Just's *Women in Athenian Tragedy* ". . . what the characters say [in tragedy] . . . has no independent value for telling us about society, though often it will support what we know from other sources to be true (1968: 10)" (11). And I hold with Edith Hall when she writes of the Athenian theater's perspective on feminine protagonists:

> . . . [O]ne generic pattern relating to male-female relations does draw together a large number of the plays and can be taken as an aesthetic expression of a defining feature of the Athenian's world-view. This plot pattern can be formulated as follows: women in Athenian tragedy only become disruptive (that is, break one of the 'unwritten laws,' act on an

> inappropriate erotic urge, or flout male authority) in the physical absence of a legitimate husband or *kurios.* (106)

If themes of the plays are based on a violation of the laws, how have Medea and Jason violated those expectations and in what way has Medea become disruptive? In order to understand how she violates that society's rules, we need to understand the expectations for marriage and the traditional role of women.

In 5th century Greece, young women were always under the guardianship of a male relative, usually her father and then her husband upon marriage, which was arranged by the father and who retained the right to dissolve the union. A dowry was required, and, upon divorce, was returned to the wife's guardian to allow him to arrange another marriage. The woman never had access to or control of the dowry, though she did retain ownership of the clothing, jewelry and small items she brought to the marriage. Marriage was intended to beget children who were the "property" of the father and remained in his house if the marriage was dissolved or upon the husband's death (Pomeroy 62-5). In direct defiance of tradition, Medea chooses her own husband without her father's knowledge and brings nothing to the marriage in the form of a dowry besides the fleece.[3] These are easily grounds enough for her father to dissolve her bond, and potentially the first instance where she violates societal expectations. We know that she is more afraid Aeëtes is going to kill her for her betrayal than punish her for marrying a foreigner without permission.

[3] There is the question of the source of the dress and diadem used later in the play; does she have them with her aboard the *Argo*, or are they "sent" by Helios at a later time? Some critics argue (Mueller, 2001) that the dress and diadem are part of her dowry.

Additionally, there is the Athenian concern about the legality of foreign children, which is reflected in the play:

> A law proposed by Perikles in 451/0 and reinstituted in the archonship of Euklides in 403/2 ordained that a citizen had to be of Athenian parentage on both sides, his mother's as well as his father's. Furthermore, in the course of the fourth century, it became illegal for a non-Athenian to marry an Athenian, and the penalties for transgression were severe: slavery and confiscation of property. (Just 17)

Aubrey Diller tells us that the children from such a union were "*nothoi*, and in addition to being excluded from the state, they did not even belong to the family and could inherit only a bastard's portion" (91). *Medea* was first performed in 431 B.C.E., a generation after Pericles' citizenship law of 451-450, which strove to decrease population; this law shows "that the simplest means of controlling the growth of the population was by increasing or decreasing the number of females who could produce citizen children" (Pomeroy 70). With a desire to increase citizen population, the law was later relaxed. But at the time of the play, this heightened awareness of the change in legal status of foreign-born children is woven into the dramatic fabric. The Athenian audience must have been dealing with the issue of children from foreign wives, as that generation reached maturity at about the time of the play's performance. *Medea*'s opening lines address this issue.

Medea in Corinth

As Euripides' play begins we hear of Medea's troubles: she is foreign, she is a woman, she has no rights under the law, no male protector, and no way to return to her

native land. These descriptors will contribute to her decision to murder her children. We hear all this from the nurse, a slave. Slaves are one of the two voices—the other being children—to which only Euripides among the major playwrights of the 5th century gives value. The Nurse laments the troubles of the household and presents for us the initial problem of the play: Jason has taken Creon's daughter as wife, putting Medea aside, and the Nurse is afraid for the safety of the children. The Nurse states, "I am afraid she may think of some dreadful thing, / For her heart is violent. She will never put up with / The treatment she is getting" (38-40). It is the Nurse who encourages the Tutor to keep the children hidden from their mother.

Though she has been welcomed among the people of Corinth and "gave / Pleasure to the people of her land of exile" (12), Medea's foreignness is the first description on the Nurse's lips and is a prime motivator for Jason's putting her aside. The Greek—especially the Athenian—perspective on non-Greek peoples was most likely established during the archaic period, according to Yang Huang's article, "Invention of Barbarian and Emergence of Orientalism: Classical Greece." Huang writes that the term "barbarian"

> probably denoted mainly a linguistic differentiation. It was during the course of the Persian wars that the barbarian was endowed with all the cultural properties of despotism, slavishness, cowardice as opposed to Greek democracy, freedom and courage on the basis of Persian and Greek antithesis. Thus, Orientalism had became a way with which the Greeks defined the barbarian, the anti-Greek, and hence, a means with which to construct their own identity. (563)

Helen Bacon writes that Euripides applied the word "barbarian" to mean three things: unintelligible; foreign in the sense of non-Greek; and, foreign with the implication of inferiority. She observes that "Occasionally in Euripides it loses all reference to nationality and means *only* savage, evil, cruel" (10). Euripides' Athenian audience certainly would be aware of the non-Greek nature of Medea's character, which would explain her actions later in the play. Denys Page suggests that Medea is

> just such a woman as his audience would expect a foreign princess to be. She has nearly all the features of the type—unrestrained excess in lamentations, a readiness to fawn upon authority, the powers of magic, childish surprise at falsehoods and broken promises. All these qualities were known to be common in foreign parts; Herodotus and the Persian invasions had made them commonplace. (xix)

Page points out that despite the expectations of foreigners by the Athenian audience, Euripides makes an effort through the Nurse to highlight Medea's good qualities, and P. E. Easterling reminds us that the Corinthians are not afraid of her (189). Easterling also suggests that because Euripides did not want to complicate Creon's argument against Medea, there is no mention of the debt Creon owes her for having stopped a plague, which appears in some versions of the tale. From the reaction of the Chorus when they enter the scene, Medea's relationship with the women of Corinth is cordial, and they have mutual respect as well as understanding of their fates as women. Medea has a double problem because she is foreign and a woman. Although they share the typical concerns of women, she separates herself from the Chorus just as she desired to separate herself from the faceless crowds of Colchians when she first saw Jason.

Jason, too, is foreign (in that he is not of Corinth), but he is male and Greek, so the law is on his side and the king is his friend and father-in-law. Medea is struggling against what looks like insurmountable odds as the play opens, and though what has been done to her is unpleasant, she has no recourse but to act. Even the Tutor, a male slave who chides the Nurse as she laments Medea's situation, thinks little of Jason's putting Medea aside for a more advantageous marriage and he wonders what all the fuss is about. After the Nurse learns that Medea and the boys are to be banished, the Tutor asks,

> What's strange in that? Have you only just discovered
> That everyone loves himself more than his neighbor?
> Some have good reason, others get something out of it.
> So Jason neglects his children for the new bride. (85-8)

The Tutor's matter of fact comments garner sympathy for Medea. It is significant that the Tutor feels no need to mention her foreignness as the Nurse does; for him, the problem is so commonplace that he does not need the excuse of her difference to explain it. Jason will use the argument of her alien status against her when he enters the play, telling her, ". . . instead of living among barbarians, / You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways, / How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force" (536-8). Her response a few lines later is "You thought it not respectable / As you got on in years to have a foreign wife" (591-2). Her acknowledgement of her "otherness" and his pointing it out are interesting when one considers that according to the myth, her father Aeëtes is from Corinth (Grimal 16), her aunt is the goddess Circe, her uncle descended from Aeolus. She is not as "genealogically" foreign as we are led to believe, and her

father, who seems a tyrant in *Argonautica*, is beautifully defended by Mary Frances Williams:

> The figure of Aeëtes delightfully confounds Apollonius' supposed distinction between Greek and barbarian. The wild, oriental king, dwelling on the edge of the world, who speaks Greek, has family connections to Greece and family associations with the Greek god Hephaestus, who lives in opulent splendor in the most Homeric and Hellenistic of palaces, surrounded by the latest technology, and who preserves a Homeric courtesy, appears to out-Greek the Greeks. (476)

Williams also notes that although Medea and Aeëtes live in Colchis, Jason has no trouble understanding them. What, then, makes her so foreign? It is, of course, her actions, which are known to all in Corinth. No respectable Greek woman would behave as Medea has done. The Nurse speaks to us in the first few lines about Medea's killing Pelias, and in Medea's offstage lament, she cries aloud about killing her brother, the betrayal of her father and her land, reinforcing the savagery Huang wrote about as expected of foreigners. The people of Corinth—represented by the Nurse—are aware of her deeds, and yet they have made her welcome among them; only Creon is afraid of her.

The Nurse, a woman and marginalized person—most likely a foreigner herself, since she is a slave—speaks of the troubles visiting Medea. She lays out the situation and the background in a succinct and direct monologue, hints at the future, expressing all the concerns she has for the children and for Medea, and gives details about events and her mistress' reaction to them. The fears the Nurse has are very specific and stem directly from Medea's "proud mind" (104): she fears ". . . she may sharpen a sword and thrust to

the heart, / Stealing into the palace where the bed is made, / Or even kill the king and the new-wedded groom" (40-2). As a representative of the Corinthian community, the Nurse is both sympathetic towards Medea's plight and fully aware of the potential danger she poses. The Nurse's freedom to speak results from the fact that the danger is not directed towards her. Structurally, the prologue builds and builds, contrasting the Nurse's concerns with Medea's anguished cries from off stage. Medea strikes us as the quintessential woman scorned, and our pity for her is mirrored in the Chorus' fear. D. J. Conacher speaks of the play's structural opening: "The series of emotions traversed—sympathy, apprehension, horror—anticipates in a few rapid strokes the responses which, in the same sequence, the action will evoke. . . . The direction of this tragedy requires that the Chorus should *begin* by feeling sympathy for Medea" (187-8). The Chorus' conventional role in Greek theater is to represent the larger community; to function as a built-in audience to the actions on stage; to function as an actor in the drama, and to set a mood for the audience. Euripides wrote an all-female Chorus for this particular play, allowing for a greater connection to and sympathy with Medea. When the women come, they react to Medea's cries as she suffers in the house. They hear the wailing and have come to talk, communication and a sense of community being important aspects of their role.

Medea's first speech to the Chorus has three distinct sections. She is concerned that the women of Corinth will think her rude, so she comes to speak with them; she laments the roles of women and commiserates with all women about marriage and childbearing; she tells them of her desire for revenge and asks for their promise of silence if she can find a way to punish her husband.

Concern about how others will see her is her primary motivation as she greets the women. She says,

> Women of Corinth, I have come outside to you
> Lest you should be indignant with me; for I know
> That many people are overproud, some when alone,
> And others when in company. And those who live
> Quietly, as I do, get a bad reputation. (214-8)

As in the *Argonautica*, she is worried about the perception of the Corinthian women. The way others will see her and the way she sees herself through their eyes and opinions motivates her to explain her fears and disappointments. She suspects they see the worst in her, even when they are, as the Chorus shows, sympathetic and friendly. But for Medea, sympathy and friendliness are not enough. She uses sympathy to maneuver others to her own end; her initial speech will manipulate the Chorus.

Up to this point, as the Nurse tells us, she had been "not stirring, not moving her face from the ground" (27); a woman so caught up in her misery might not be overly concerned about neighborly appearances, yet Medea rises and greets the Chorus. Her anxiety about how they will perceive her takes precedence over her own grief, and she knows that everyone in the city is talking about her marital woes. Her concern that people are proud, whether "alone" or "in company," brings together the idea of private problems becoming grist for the public mill while reinforcing that she is concerned about everyone's opinion. She wants to be seen as polite and appropriate when the women come, and she herself points out that she must be extra careful in behavior since she is a foreigner. She states, "a foreigner especially must adapt himself" (222). Does she use her

"other-ness" as a shield, or to garner greater sympathy from them? She has an ironic position as both a foreigner and the daughter of a king—someone who is both lesser and greater than they. She seems to give them the impression that she will hold nothing back and will acknowledge all that she is and all that she has done. This open honesty contrasts with the lies and dissembling she will use with both Creon and Jason.

The second part of her speech speaks of the plight of all women—marriage, childbirth and the difficulties of being subordinate to men. Medea's speech serves a double purpose in lamenting her fate while connecting her to all women, since they suffer as "the most unfortunate creatures" (231). Their bodies are taken and used, they have to learn the characteristics of a husband's ways, and they lack freedom to live their own lives and must focus only on their husbands. She then speaks her famous lines on the dangers of childbirth:

> What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time
> Living at home, while they do the fighting in war.
> How wrong they are! I would rather stand
> Three times in the front of battle than bear one child. (248-51)

Note how she would rather do a particularly masculine activity than one which is most completely feminine. William Allan discusses the importance of women and procreation to the state after 451 B.C.E. and hits upon "a fundamental realignment of the conventional gender roles which must have shocked the largely male Athenian audience" (55). This "realignment" will be explored at much greater depth in relation to Medea's character. For now, she introduces the preference for masculine behavior and does not mention the joy of motherhood, since that does not serve her purpose here. She then

asserts that the Chorus members are luckier than she, for they at least have a home, whereas she is a "refugee" who cannot return to her native land. This reminds them again that she is different, foreign. She does not mention killing her brother or betraying her father because she lamented from offstage at the play's opening, she only subtly intimates *why* she cannot return home. Her "private" lament, which ironically the audience could hear, contrasts strongly with her circumspect information shared with the Chorus when she speaks with them. The private concerns of her marriage, by accident or design, are publically pronounced.

Finally, she arrives at her purpose in coming out of the house: she asks for their assistance. If she can find some way to wreak her revenge on Jason, she will, and she asks the Chorus to keep silent about it. This promise made without knowing the full story or promising something unknown parallels the oath motif we will see later with Aegeus and with Jason. Easterling writes, "With the Chorus she is at her most frank and open, winning their whole-hearted support with her account of the miseries of a woman's life. . . . How much, we may ask, of what she says to the Chorus is special pleading, designed to make them promise to keep her secret?" (191). Probably most of it, and the Nurse, who knows her well, has already affirmed this, warning the Tutor,

> . . .keep them [the children] to yourself as much as possible
> Don't bring them near their mother in her angry mood.
> For I've seen her already blazing her eyes at them
> As though she meant some mischief and I am sure that
> She'll not stop raging until she has struck at someone. (91-95)

But it is not hard for the Chorus to promise something vague, something unknown, something unthinkable, especially after so moving a speech from the victim. They readily agree that she should punish Jason if she can and affirm her distress. But, like Hera and Athena, they have no concept of where she and they are heading.

The Chorus as Silent Witness

The woman's role of keeping silent seems ironic here, as Medea, the woman "trapped in a culture that denies her a public and poetic voice" (Rhem 100), imposes silence upon others; thus, Medea's interactions with the Chorus is not one of friendship but disguise and subterfuge. This is wonderful irony, as she works the community of Corinthian women, using them as an audience for her woes and as a audience for her preliminary plans. By asking them to keep silent, she forces them into the role of witnesses. By agreeing, they sanction Medea's actions without knowing fully what those actions are and therefore become culpable in what follows. We have the impression that she was going to carry out her plans with or without the Chorus, but she gains an advantage through winning them over. A. E. Haigh discusses the historical and changing roles of the Chorus and points out that its presence on stage for the duration of the play results in a loss of verisimilitude, because the Chorus "could easily have prevented the catastrophe" of the tragedy (252): Euripides' innovations to stagecraft did not extend to altering the Chorus' traditional role. Later, when the Chorus *can* prevent the killing of the children, they are too distracted by the tragedy of Creon and Glauce's deaths to prevent the children's murder. As Haigh points out, ". . . a single word to Jason could have averted the whole calamity. But they remain unaccountably silent" (252). Not

unaccountably: they have made a promise to Medea not to speak, and it is clear that unlike men, women keep their oaths. By entering this contract with her, they defy all conventions—political, cultural, social—and make an alliance with a "foreign barbarian" against one of their own. Through their silence and inaction they demonstrate that Medea is not the only subversive figure in the play.

The reserve and control of her opening speech to the Chorus should have given them some idea of what this woman is capable of, as she steels herself and pulls herself together to face them. We see in her a medley of traditional masculine behavior—bravery, stoicism, power—which contrasts with the crying Medea first introduced. She puts on a male face to meet them. Since her audience is a group of women, she uses language that shows they are equals, despite the fact that she is descended from the gods and is a queen. Initially, she treats Creon as an equal when he enters the scene, and the timing of his entry cuts off any additional conversation that may have occurred between the Chorus and Medea regarding her "thoughts of blood" and revenge (266).

Medea and Creon

Once the Chorus is on Medea's side, her next dramatic challenge is to manipulate Creon to gain more time and convince him she is not a threat. None of Creon's information is new to the audience, because the Tutor and the Chorus have already discussed that she is banished. Creon's direct attack and matter-of-fact demand that she immediately quit his country leaves no question of his power. Medea initially responds as a victim, stating, "Now I am in the full force of the storm of hate / And have no harbor from ruin to reach easily" (278-9). Creon's language is brutally direct, and Medea knows

the real power lies with him, that it is he who must be manipulated or convinced, not the powerless Chorus. But she appears reasonable as she asks him for an explanation. He tells her that he is afraid of her because of her cleverness and knows that she is angry; he wants to protect himself and his daughter. When she responds, she does not immediately address his fear but focuses instead on his accusation of cleverness. Initially she speaks of "a person" in the third person, stating,

> A person of sense ought never to have his children
> Brought up to be more clever than average.
> For apart from cleverness bringing them no profit,
> It will make them objects of envy and ill-will. (294-7)

Medea's use of third person places them on the same level, as if they share this trouble of presenting "new ideas before the eyes of fools" (298). She shifts to the second person when she starts to flatter and compliment him on his choice of marrying his daughter to Jason: ". . . you, I think, have acted wisely; / Nor do I grudge it you that your affairs go well" (311-12). She submits herself to him and appears reasonable, flattering his intelligence and thoughtful planning, stating, "I will not raise my voice, but submit to my betters" (315), if he will let her remain in Corinth.

Creon observes that what she says "sounds gentle enough" (316), and he begins to weaken. Yet, knowing her history, he must distrust her despite her words; when she argues earlier in the exchange "It is not / My way to transgress the authority of a king" (307-8), he knows of many examples of when she has done just that. She begs him in the name of his daughter, and he comments on loving his family. At this point some literary critics claim she starts to plan, transferring the words of Creon into a scheme for Jason,

but I agree with Schlesinger that there is no indication that this is the moment at which she decides to kill the children (Rehm, note 17 to Chapter 7). She laments her losses, the power of her love and her lack of a country, and appeals again to his fatherhood in asking for one day to make provisions for herself and her sons. Having gone into exile twice before, she understands what is involved, but appeals to his understanding as a parent for her children's sake. In Pietro Pucci's succinct and thorough analysis of the play, he suggests she has moved away from intellectualizing her situation and "plays the role of a desperate mother. She moves him to pity" (91). Creon then completely ignores his intuition and gives her one-day's reprieve, rationalizing that there is little damage she can do in that time, simultaneously stating, "Even now I know I am making a mistake" (350).

Why, when the evidence is so strong against her, his fears so real, her anger so palpable, and his speech so forceful, would he at this moment turn away from everything he knows intuitively and emotionally? Carl Jung defines intuition as "an 'instinctive' act of comprehension" and " an unconscious process in that its result is the eruption into consciousness of an unconscious content, a sudden idea or 'hunch'" (51). Creon *knows* she is dangerous, what she is capable of, and states it clearly. He denies his intuition in order to show that he is reasonable and merciful; he needs to reject his intuition to be seen as a man who has "nothing tyrannical about [his] nature" (349). His value and sense of self are connected to what others perceive. Just like Medea, he is motivated by his need to protect his reputation. His instinct is to protect his daughter from this woman; his fear is the *same* fear that the Nurse—the woman who knows Medea best—expressed earlier.

At this moment, Creon is her real enemy. She follows her own intuitive hunch and knows he will be motivated not to harm his reputation. By suppressing his parenting instinct to preserve his reputation, he follows a model of behavior, which has been seen in Medea in *Argonautica* and will be paralleled by her later in the play: she, too, will show she is motivated by what people will think of her. Medea's whole plans depends upon this one gamble—that Creon will be moved by her desperate plight and will grant her what she wants, not for her sake, but for the sake of her children, whom Creon knows are innocent.[4] Yet he recognizes she is dangerous and feels that if she can, she will harm them; he desires to protect himself before anything rash happens. Because he is so determined when he enters the scene, Medea's persuasion has to be unprecedented; in this exchange she debases and humiliates herself before him on her knees. So convincing is she that the Chorus, after Creon exits, cries in wild lament about how desperate she is, totally convinced that she is as unfortunate as she has presented herself. Since she does not want the image of herself on her knees to remain long in their memory, she rebounds instantly, scornfully informing the Chorus that she never would have flattered him without some scheme in mind; she takes control of the situation and the dialogue immediately upon his exit. Because the Chorus' role is to direct the audience and because "choruses typically [fail] to see what is clear to the audience" (Easterling 164), the Corinthian women have no idea that they, too, are being manipulated by Medea. The Chorus of women do not have her instinct for such deceit.

Medea manipulates the Chorus easily, just as she does Creon; she understands his desire to be reputable and gives him the opportunity to express publically his power. How

[4] His daughter, too, might be innocent, but that will not stop her from later killing Glauce.

can he look bad? He is motivated by his desire to make his kingdom and family safe by removing a woman who has been rejected legally by her husband and who has publicly threatened him and his daughter. Creon's giving her one day assuages his guilt—if he has any—or his ego, and he can walk away content that he is acting reasonably. It matches Medea's plan with Glauce—how does Medea know Glauce will be unable to resist the dress and diadem? She recognizes that asking the children to take the gifts to the princess will be more compelling than presenting them some other way. It is "reasonable" for Glauce to think that children are harmless, or that Medea would not give her own children something dangerous. Medea knows her enemies' minds and plays upon their innocent natures, just as she plays the Chorus. Carl Jung tells us that "No superhuman intellect is needed to see through the shallowness of many of our rationalizations and to detect the real motive, the compelling instinct behind them" (*Portable* 53). We know that Medea can see through the rationalizations of Creon and Glauce and, indeed, anticipates them. Perhaps she can succeed because of Creon's arrogance in assuming that he knows the cause of her anger. He states, "You are angry at having lost you husband's love" (284), but this is not so: what angers her is the loss of power associated with that love.

Marriage as a Symbol

The marriage bed is the symbol of Medea and Jason's relationship, not their closeness or their shared history, since

> her bed once gave her status and definition by making her mistress of a household. Both Creon and Jason believe that the loss of the relationship angers Medea, but they are mistaken. She had been wife to Jason, mother

> of the *genos* of Jason, reigning woman in the *oikos* [household] of Jason, by virtue of her marriage bed, and he, by formally leaving it, has outraged and erased these three selves. (Burnett 195)

But Medea never actually has a hereditary home with him *per se*, which makes the importance of the marriage bed and the children much more significant (Allen 60). Additionally, Jason's and her home is at the whim and discretion of Creon, and once he retracts it, she has nowhere to go. A typical divorce in Ancient Greece would have allowed the rejected wife to return to her father's house that he might arrange another marriage for her; the wife's dowry would be returned to facilitate the subsequent marriage, but the children of the union would stay with their father in his house. William Allan observes,

> A husband could not secretly divorce his wife, but usually would expel her from the house. Jason, however, has simply taken a new wife behind Medea's back and he has allowed Creon to expel her from the country. Unable to grasp Medea's sense of hurt and betrayal, Jason repeats his insensitive offer of money (612-13). (61)

The insult to Medea, therefore, is layered, because her long relationship with Jason has removed *any* safety measures a typical woman in Greece could expect. We are not informed about how or when she discovers that she has been replaced as Jason's wife, but her behavior in the play and his reluctance to meet her as an adult partner suggest Jason had not informed her himself. Jason hides behind Creon and has found sanctuary with him: Medea has nowhere to go, she has no dowry, but she is not without power—she just needs a safe harbor.

After the conversation with Creon about her own and her children's exile, she is determined to kill Glauce and the father-in-law. Medea is resolute; she will murder them "in craft and silence" (391) and, if no help is forthcoming, "will take the sword/ Myself and kill, and steadfastly advance to crime" (393-4). Her determination, her plotting and planning, her aggressive emotions, coupled with her naming of the sword, all speak of masculine behavior, and—historically, socially, and culturally—that is her real crime.

Chapter 3—Imbalance

Medea and Jung

Medea presents a woman who has not followed society's expectation of the woman's role. She has had great success when she diverges into the male realms in order to achieve success for herself and Jason. The models she has include her aggressive and deceitful father and her diplomatic husband. By adopting aspects of their behavior, Medea creates a psychic imbalance that speaks of an over-active animus. Carl Jung offers his fascinating world of archetypes, which, when expressed in literature, provides almost limitless analysis of characters' motives, patterns of behavior, and fears. Three of these archetypes—the hero, the mother, and especially the animus—have special application to the myth of Medea.

On the animus, however, Jung leaves us with frustratingly few examples, and we have to explore the anima in men to understand the animus in women. Of the anima he says, ". . . the anima is a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion" (27). This is too unwieldy a definition for use here, and we need to narrow and define this concept before applying it to Medea.

The anima, as the "projection-making factor" of the male psyche, is the female imago with all her beauty and terror, for she is holy goddess, sister, daughter, lover and mommy; she can also be a flirt, seducing vamp, Kali, and home-wrecker. By contrast, Jung defines the anima this way: "Whenever she appears, in dreams, visions, and

fantasies, she takes on personified form, thus demonstrating that the factor she embodies possesses all the outstanding characteristics of a feminine being. She is not an invention of the conscious, but a spontaneous product of the unconscious" (*Aion* 13-14). He continues:

> Woman is compensated by a masculine element and therefore her unconscious has, so to speak, a masculine imprint. This results in a considerable psychological difference between men and women, and accordingly, I have called the projection making factor in women the animus, which means mind or spirit. . . . In women . . . Eros is an expression of their true nature, while their Logos is often only a regrettable accident. It gives rise to misunderstandings and annoying interpretations in the family circle and among friends. This is because it consists of *opinions* instead of reflections, and by opinions I mean *a priori* assumptions that lay claim to absolute truth. . . . As the animus is partial to argument, he can best be seen at work in disputes where both parties know they are right. (13-14)

In *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* Jung says that when one is in the control of the anima, he is

> caught and entangled in aimless experience, and the judging intellect with its categories proves itself powerless. . . . It is a surrender of our own powers, not artificially willed, but forced upon us by nature . . . an utter and unmistakable defeat crowned with the panic fear of demoralization. (32)

This explanation of powerlessness relates to Medea as it explains what happens when one is in the grip of the projection-making aspect of the psyche. A definition of the male anima does not quite fit. In *Aion* Jung writes, "since the anima is the archetype that is found in men it is *reasonable to suppose* that an equivalent archetype *must* be present in women; for just as the man is compensated by a feminine element, so woman is compensated by a masculine one" (14), (Italics mine). Therefore we must look at what Jung says of the anima and flip it inside out when we apply it to women.

Perhaps it is better to look at a female's perspective of the animus, and for that I turn to Emma Jung. She defines the animus as "an entity not organically coordinated in its activity with the other psychic functions. It behaves as if it were a law unto itself, interfering in the life of the individual as if it were an alien element, if not actually destructive" (2). She speaks of a woman "possessed by the animus" which "has at its command a sort of aggressive authority . . . the force of suggestion it exercises is due to woman's own passivity in thinking and her corresponding lack of critical ability" (14). Additionally, she states that whereas the anima has required a man to get in touch with his lower self, women have had to overcome their timidity and "lift" themselves to their "higher" male aspects (23), the feminine being subordinate to the masculine. Although the writing of both scholars is colored by their time period and their society, both are useful and directly apply to what happens to Medea. Medea struggles to overcome those passive, acquiescent feminine aspects of herself which have not served her and "raise" herself to a heroic male ideal.

Before we can apply these ideas to her actions, we must understand what happens to get her to the point of killing the children. When Medea shares with the Chorus her

invective against Creon and we recognize the depth of her lies, Medea's animus is at work. By alluding to "all her plans" (373), she reveals that she has already fixed them in her mind, and the looked-for reprieve in the form of Aegeus gives her the time she needs to carry them out. For example, when she is crying from offstage in the opening scene, she seems to be in the "grip of something greater than herself," and is frightening. The part of her that rises up has tremendous power and strength. She never loses her logic, though, and strives to complete her plan to avenge herself on Jason and Creon. She has a conversation between her controlling and passive aspects. Fractured internally, she states,

> Ah, come Medea, in your plotting and scheming
> Leave nothing untried of all those things which you know.
> Go forward to the dreadful act. The test has come
> For resolution. You see how you are treated. (401-404)

Her inner voice takes the form of a coach, and like a hero arming for battle, she finishes her speech with a list of her assets for the coming struggle: she has this single day, she has skill in potions and magic; she is of noble parentage and Helios' granddaughter, and—saving the best for last—she was "Born a woman . . . though helpless in doing good deeds, / [Women] Are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers" (406-8).

That she assumes a role not usually designated for woman is reinforced by the Chorus' first ode, which focuses on the play's theme of reversal, not just between the roles of men and women, but in nature, as well. The Chorus speaks of rivers flowing uphill, oaths being broken and "the world's great order . . . reversed" (411); the ode then becomes specific to Medea and her own reversal as they sympathize with her plight; they have no idea how far the reversal will go.

Medea and Jason—Growing Antagonism

In the exchange between Jason and Medea, we understand clearly that he is rejecting her for political and aggrandizing reasons; he comes to Medea solely to dispatch his duty and be done with her. He knows the children will not be able to help him in his political career any more than she will, and he comes to provide them with money so that they may leave the city quickly. Medea's invective against this decision and his rejection of her is not only for her own sake, but for the sake of her children.

Before she can become the "man" her animus wants her to be, she must first recognize what she is rejecting. In order for the effect in the play to be so powerful, we need to be reminded of what she is before we see what she will become. Until now, Medea has been in every way, a devoted and loyal wife, a proper Greek citizen, a loving mother, and a provider of children. We can assume that besides speaking out against Creon and his daughter, which happens before the action of the play, she has been passive and obedient—the quintessential characteristics the Greeks wanted in their wives. If this were not so, the Chorus of Corinthian women would not be so supportive.

But these attributes have failed her; being a good wife has not gotten her anywhere once Jason exercises his right to put her aside. Passivity and procreation are no safeguards against Jason's desire for power, so Medea's voice is the voice of all women abused by man and man's law. Medea does not argue to win him back or return their marriage to what it once was, because she does not want the man; her argument has risen above that to the higher realm of justice and righteousness. We see, as Denys Page tells us, ". . . a husband whom his wife regards no longer as a hero, but as a rather ordinary middle-aged man trying to shuffle out of an embarrassing position" (xvi). Jason offers

no defense, as he offered none in *Argonautica* when he tried to abandon her to the Colchians. Once again he is a man who is "*amēchanos*—resourceless" (Heiserman 13). Why on earth Creon would want him for a son-in-law is really the question, but they seem to be of a type.

Jason enters the scene with a pompous self-righteousness and immediately blames Medea for her own troubles, telling her she should "consider/ [Yourself] most lucky that exile is your punishment" (454). His arrogance is immense, a sort of "I did what I could, but you opened your mouth—again" resignation, and he blames the victim. Schlesinger tells us that ". . . he is completely convinced of the correctness of his action, [sic] This gives him a feeling of confidence and superiority, which unintentionally exacerbates Medea's already aroused temper and wounds her still more deeply with its tone of pitying condescension" (299). In Jason's mind, he knows all there is to know about the situation, which is based on Medea's actions; nothing can touch him. He sees himself as guiltless, but he is ignorant of how his words would "intentionally exacerbate" the feelings of his wife of so many years. Page says of him,

> . . . the poet does not disturb our moral beliefs as he might easily have done by suggesting that Jason's conduct could after all be justified . . . Jason himself is not altogether hypocritical; he is stupid enough to believe his defense a good one; he really cannot understand why Medea is being so troublesome. But the poet does not intend that defense to appear sufficiently strong to overthrow our creed. His purpose in this play is rather to describe in detail how a man so situated thinks and behaves in the presence of the woman he intends to desert. (xv-xvi)

Gilbert Norwood says, "Jason is a superb study—a compound of brilliant manner, stupidity and cynicism. If his own desires, interests, and comforts are safe, he is prepared to confer all kinds of benefits" (198). He has come not to gloat, for I think that if he had his choice he would never see her again rather than face her wrath. But why come at all, then? Jason knows the sooner he is rid of her the better; he has to come to offer compensation for the non-existent dowry and to give her the means to speed her departure, saying, "I'll not desert / My friends, but have come to make some provision for you, / So that you and the children may not be penniless" (459-61).

Jason knows enough of Medea's character to recognize that this interview will be unpleasant; his attitude towards the encounter is of a duty to be dispatched. We see clearly that he has no affection for her, nor does he respect her as a human being. The only thing he is feeling is inconvenienced. When we think about all the complaining he did in *Argonautica* and the support and sympathy he received, it would follow that he might at least *recognize* the need to complain or a need to be comforted in someone else. Norwood states: "His great weakness is the mere perfection of his own egoism; he has no power at all to realize another's point of view. Throughout the play he simply refuses to believe that Medea feels his desertion as she asserts. For him, her complaints are 'empty words'" (198). The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference, and, after all Medea has done for him, this indifference is untenable to her. Once he has royal patronage, Jason claims he does not care that she has been "Telling everyone that Jason is a worthless man" (451-2), showing that she is nothing to him and he has dismissed her. Any inconvenience now will be worth it if he is free of her, for she has become a nuisance.

Medea recognizes she must do something drastic to move him from indifference to being emotionally involved again, to "seeing" her as he had before.

In his Jason-centered universe, emotionally, he owes her nothing: strategically, though, he looks to obviate any future criticism that might arise from the situation by buying her off. Legally he is perfectly within his rights to divorce her, and in Ancient Greece, the dowry would be returned to the wife upon divorce, but because in this case there was none, Jason must compensate her for it. Sarah Pomeroy writes of the Classical world: "Divorce was easily attainable . . . and there was no stigma attached. When divorce was initiated by the husband, he was required merely to send the wife from his house" (64). But Jason does not even have to do this, since Creon is the one who has banished her, thereby removing any culpability from Jason. His statement in his opening speech, "I . . . wished you to remain" (455-6) is therefore a moot and patronizing point, now that Creon has made staying an impossibility. He might even have convinced himself that his wish was indeed true. There is still, however, the matter of the children.

As we learned earlier, children belong to the father, but Jason does not want his sons and is willing to have them banished from Corinth without knowing where they will be or what will happen to them. Medea points this out,

> When in misery
> I am cast out of the land and go into exile,
> Quite without friends and all alone with my children,
> That will be a fine shame for the new-wedded groom
> For his children to wander as beggars and she who saved him. (511- 15)

These children cannot help him politically, and Jason is a political animal. He correctly anticipates that they will be a future hindrance between him and his new wife and children, especially when inheritance issues arise. In *Argonautica* he abandoned his (possible) child with Hypsipyle without consequence; that child, like these boys, can gain him nothing politically, and that child, like these, would be foreign. Hypsipyle made it easy for Jason to abandon her and the potential child. In Jason's view, why not abandon Medea, since a wife and children are replaceable? Medea's feelings of injustice, therefore, are not for herself alone; she feels the rejection visited upon her children at their father's hand.

Medea reacts as we would expect: she insults him; she reminds him of their history together; she asks him what she is supposed to do now since she has burned all her bridges in helping him; she recounts the oaths made and broken by him; and, she laments that women everywhere cannot tell a good man from a bad. She calls him shameless, ". . . the worst of all / Human diseases" (471-2), and uses this adjective to describe all of his actions, past and present. Although she has much to complain about, the main focus of her argument becomes oaths and oath breaking.

Oaths and Oath Breaking

There are two oaths which affect this play's actions: the one Jason made with her in *Argonautica* and the one she makes with Aegeus. Because Medea has no male guardian to negotiate for her or protect her, she can only remind Jason of the oaths he made to her. In his arrogance, he feels that his new marriage is politically advantageous

for her and the children as well as himself and rejects her argument, feeling she has benefitted through marriage with him.

Medea cannot argue the law, for that is on Jason's side, but she can argue against moral codes and the breaking of his promises made when he took her hand in marriage. Much has been written about Medea's right hand and its relationship to oaths, what A. P. Burnett calls *horkion* or a sacred oath object. In ancient Greece, the man committing to marriage did not touch a woman's hand, but grabbed her wrist, as seen in decorative arts when the groom escorts the bride. Burnett says of Medea's marriage that usually the right hand oath is given to the bride's father by the groom:

> Jason, however, was the enemy of his bride's father, which meant that Medea had to play parent to herself, binding her husband to his future duties as Aeëtes would have done. The 'wedding' at Colchis . . . was thus a union of Greek and Barbarian, formed in a cultural limbo, an agreement made directly between a male and a female who dealt with each other as equals. (202)

In Book 4 of *Argonautica,* on her knees before all his men, Medea asks him to call upon the gods and swear an oath to honor the vows he made to her when she gave him the talisman against the Bulls. Could Aeëtes have done more? Or would Jason have honored his oath more fully had he made it to Aeëtes, or to another male guardian of Medea? Jason's oath in *Argonautica* is "Dear girl, may Olympian Zeus himself, and Hera, goddess of marriage, who shares Zeus' bed, witness my oath that I shall make you my lawful wedded wife in my home, when we return safely to the land of Hellas" (Hunter 4.92-8). He *does* keep this oath, and then, fully within the law of that same Hellas, puts

her aside. He has no reason to do so, as she has borne him sons; infertility would be a common reason for divorce in Greece. It is simply his desire to have the power associated with marriage to Creon's daughter that motivates him to break his oath with Medea. Medea speaks of her right hand and the oaths it represents when she states,

> Faith in your word is gone. Indeed, I cannot tell
> Whether you think the gods whose names you swore by then
> Have ceased to rule and that new standards are set up,
> Since you must know you have broken your word to me.
> O my right hand . . . (492-6)

This breaking of faith remains a theme throughout the play and repeats when Aegeus arrives.

It is in Jason's retort to Medea's tirade that Jason shows himself to be a complete fool and an utterly detestable character. He claims it was Cypris, not Medea, who ". . . was alone responsible / Of men and gods for the preserving of my life" (527-8), and then states that Medea has him to thank for a few things. First, he saved her from barbarians and barbarian ways by bringing her to Greece. He ignores the fact that he is insulting her and her family. Her grandfather is Helios, a god he recognizes in his own pantheon, and she is descended from Aeëtes who was, by some traditions, Corinthian by birth, giving her greater claim to Corinth than he has. He will feel the dramatic irony of his lines "You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways, / How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force" (537-8) soon enough, but at this point he really believes he has done her a favor. Is this a reminder that his new marriage is within the law? She has also earned acclaim by coming to Greece, so he says, and, had she remained in Colchis, she would

have been without status or power. Again, he forgets that her reputation as a sorceress recommended her when he needed help with the fire-breathing bulls.

The second portion of his response is about his new marriage and the logic of it. He has married not because he wished for more children, nor because he grew tired of Medea's bed, but "that we might live well, / And not be short of anything" and "That I might bring my children up worthy / Of my position" (559-60, 563-4). Jason is most shallow here, looking for an easy life that matches his idea of his status: note that he does not include Medea in his concept of the "worthiness" of the children's "position." Later in their exchange he tells her "It was not because of a woman / I made the royal alliance in which I now live . . ." (593-4), showing his ambition and his pattern of using women to self-aggrandize.

His behavior is characteristic of males in abusive relationships. Jason must also be conscious that there is no male family member for her to return to or call upon to assist her (just as there were none to object when he entered his relationship with Hypsipyle), and he would not have to answer their complaints, if they made any. He presents a closed system of logic and believes his ideas are so correct that he cannot see any argument against them. What better way to ensure safety for the children than through a politically advantageous marriage? Ironically, they were not in danger until he creates it by re-marrying. The reality of the situation does not come into play, and like an abuser, he blames others for the problem—usually a woman—and denies responsibility for his actions.

There are other instances of Jason's abusive pattern: Abusers move around to prevent the wife from forging bonds that may help her against the abuser. Jason has no

home to bring Medea to and lives in Corinth with Creon's sanction. Medea's friendship with the women of Corinth is expedient. Abusers also leave their partners out of their plans or make plans behind their backs. The new marriage—as a plan made behind her back—comes as a surprise to her. Even the slaves of her household know of it before she does.

Abusers also use sex to control. Jason *knows* that Medea's anger results from being rejected in love and abandoned in bed; he cannot see that there is any other possible reason, and once he has a reason, he does not have to think further. Jason might be influenced by the perception, as presented in Helene Foley's *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, that women's wombs "migrated throughout the body" and made women "more susceptible than men . . . to erotic desires" (114). He states,

> Surely I have planned well? Even you would grant this if you were not so embittered by jealousy. The fact is that you women have reached the point where you think your happiness is complete when love smiles on you but, should some misfortune mar that love, you take all that is good and beautiful in life and turn it into grounds for bitter hatred. (Davie 567-73)

This mirrors Creon's argument against her, for he says Medea is "angry at having lost your husband's love" (286). The simplicity of this argument and the arrogance with which it is articulated shows that these men have little idea of the workings of a woman's feelings. Medea was not just after the love of the man but the power associated with the marriage; significantly, Jason employs the same argument for marrying Glauce. He later assures Medea that he can convince Creon's daughter to accept the children, since "I expect I'll win her round all right, if she's a woman like all the rest!" (Davie 944). His

experience with women is always the same, as Jason has never been rejected, so he believes he will succeed again, and why not? He sees no threat from Medea, just inconvenience.

The last form of abuse Jason employs is the language he uses. He has shown us his suave ways in *Argonautica* and in his current plan to "win round" the princess to keep his children in Corinth. This should not be hard given a woman who "[keeps] her eyes lovingly on Jason" (Davie 1144). His arguments for the marriage are water-tight, and the Chorus comments after his explanations, "Jason, you have set out your arguments skillfully and plausibly; it is my view, however, though I may surprise you with these words, that you have betrayed your wife and are behaving unjustly" (Davie 576-8). Even Medea acknowledges his ability to persuade: ". . . in my eyes the criminal with a gift for speaking deserves the worst of punishments" (579-80), though she does not seem to think these punishments should apply to her for the same crime. His smaller digs here and there, however, are what are so abrasive. He says that her help in obtaining the fleece was "of some benefit" (533); he calls her "surly . . . foolish . . . stupid" (447-456); at one point he tells her "No, calm down!" (Davie 551), and later, from Warner's translation, "You need no children" (565). These examples show that this man has no understanding of himself or what he is doing to Medea; he is simply blind to the threat she poses.

And yet he shouldn't be. He fails to remember his personal history and what Medea has undertaken to get them away from Colchis; how could he have forgotten her suggestion of killing her own brother, her betrayal of her father and country? Her killing of Pelias? In his hubris, Jason cannot see Medea's power and motivation. Whereas Creon rejects his intuition and awards Medea an additional day to plan her exile, Jason doesn't

seem to *have* intuition and cannot see beyond his imagined idea of Medea. Beye explains it: "Medea and Jason began their relationship upon the assumption of her vulnerability and manipulability" (154); he thinks she is weak, powerless and friendless; he believes he is in the right; he is in Greece, where law and the natural order can be invoked, and he is blind to what she is capable of—has been capable of—because these actions were done *for him*.

All these arguments and complaints against Jason build and build until Medea experiences animus possession, "draws [the] sword of power," as Jung calls it, and "immediately fills the ego-personality with an unshakable feeling of rightness and righteousness" (*Aion* 15, 16). From this perspective, we watch Medea as she moves toward the final actions of the play and removes herself from the Eros of relationship and into the realm of men. Before she can do that, however, she needs to complete her plan.

Medea and Aegeus

One of the reasons women stay in abusive relationships is that they have nowhere else to go, and Medea is no exception. Unable to return to family and friendless except through her relationship with her husband, Medea casts about for an escape route. Euripides sends her one in the form of Aegeus. To insure Aegeus will honor her requests, Medea makes him take an oath.

Aegeus, whose "marriage was childless but he has remained loyal to his wife" (Mueller 487), travels from the oracle of Pheobus and passes through Corinth, greeting Medea as an old friend and equal. His childlessness shows, as Edith Hall states, "The tragic household is obsessed with its own perpetuation through legitimate male heirs"

(104). As we have seen, Creon is motivated by concern for his daughter and banishes Medea; Jason wants a better life for his sons by establishing himself as heir to Corinth, which will only be guaranteed through male offspring. Aegeus is "at . . . wits' end" (722) and so, in his frustration, journeys to the oracle. The juxtaposition between Medea's concern for her children, Jason's desire for children of pure Greek ancestry, and Aegeus' childlessness makes for tremendous unity in the play, but Medea's request for asylum becomes the main focus of the exchange. Aegeus sees her distress, asks about its cause, and is shocked that Jason would put her aside. His surprise is important, as it gives a context for behavior outside of Corinth; when he hears what Jason has done, Aegeus replies, "Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that'; and "I cannot approve of this" (695; 707). His childlessness, though, is Medea's bargaining chip, so she pretends to be helpless before him and throws herself on his mercy, promising to end his troubles with her magic if he provides her with a home.

To ensure that he fulfills his promise, she makes him take an oath, calling on "the plain of Earth, and Helius, father / Of my father, and name together all the gods. . ." (746-7). He challenges her before swearing, asking if she does not trust him. The question of whom she trusts is an interesting one. Why does she think this oath made with Aegeus will have more weight than Jason's earlier oath? Like the earlier oath, this one is made under duress. Deborah Boedecker suggests a reason: Aegeus agrees to taking an oath because "an oath will provide him with an impressive excuse to present to Medea's enemies (his own guest-friends) should they come to Athens seeking extradition" (98). This is the same excuse used by Medea in *Argonautica* to aid Jason under the pretext of helping her sister Chalciope, since her oath made her honor-bound to fulfill it. Medea

believes in the power of oaths, possibly because of her relationship to Helios and his role as god of oaths and bases her actions on the keeping and breaking of oaths. Thus, she demands an oath of Aegeus and he solemnly makes one. Based on what Anne P. Burnett writes about oath, one can see the reason:

> Oaths were the cement of order, yet their breach carried no secular penalty because giving one's word was a religious, not juridical, act. The cosmos depended upon men's good faith, without which any oath was "written in ash" as the proverb had it. . . . The entire system ran on dread, on *phobos*, and the source of this dread was the ritualized sacrilege and the conditional self-curse built into every solemn oath. Touching an oath object that was ordinarily untouchable—an altar, a part of someone's body, the blood or entrails of a slaughtered beast—each party dedicated himself to total destruction should he (intentionally or unintentionally) not keep faith. The formulae hardly varied; the oath taken asked for utter ruin, *exoleia*, to be visited upon self, children, house, and race . . . . (199-200)

Oaths—publicly spoken aloud and calling upon the gods—bind the characters to each other, but some of the promises made and broken are implied oaths, such as the promise of a mother to protect a child, or the promise of a human not to harm another. In *Medea* we have oaths of commission and oaths of omission; Jason breaking his marriage oath to Medea is perfectly legal, but perfectly despicable. Like an "oath demon," Medea brings the punishment "formulae" to Jason and to herself, as she "destroys his house and hereditary line" (201) as well as destroying herself. Calling for the utter ruin of the family, she cries from the house before she enters the play: ". . . I curse you / And your

father. Let the whole house crash" (113-114). Since in marriage, men did not take the hand but the wrist, Medea's hand becomes her sacred oath object (204). Repeatedly, we hear about Medea's right hand and how her right hand reminds her of those oaths. The Nurse tells of "the right hands clasped / In eternal promise (21); Creon, in their exchange asks her ". . . why this clinging to my hand?" (339); to Jason she says, ". . . you have broken your word to me. / O my right hand" (494-5). Yet when asking the children to "take hold of his right hand" as they are on their way to Glauce (899), Medea breaks down thinking of the deed yet to come. She then recovers and stresses that the children have to give Glauce the gifts from their own hands, which ensures their deaths one way or another, since the people of Corinth will punish them. In the Warner translation, she tells them as they leave for the palace, ". . . give her the dress—for this is of great importance, / That she should take the gift into her hand from yours" (971-2). She kisses their hands as they leave with the Tutor, and after the Messenger tells of Glauce's and Creon's deaths, she prepares to kill the children, stating, "Oh, come my hand, my wretched hand, and take the sword" (1244); her son cries from inside the house, "What can I do and how escape my mother's hands?" (1273). The Chorus tells Jason that his sons are dead at their mother's hand, and then Medea taunts Jason from the flying chariot, "Speak, if you wish. You will never touch me with your hand . . ." (1320). By removing herself and the children from Jason's reach, she has, in essence, made them and herself sacred oath objects. The right hand, the physical representation of the promises made and broken, therefore, is a traditional pattern Euripides uses to unify the action and connect the themes. The hand that creates is also the hand that can destroy,

and once she obtains asylum from Aegeus, Medea enacts her revenge upon Jason for breaking his pledges.

Revenge and Infanticide

Medea announces to the Chorus her full plan. Secure in the promise of asylum from Aegeus, Medea celebrates and informs them she will send for Jason, apologize to him and make him believe she approves of this wedding. She will then beg that her children be permitted to stay, thereby allowing them access to the newly-wed bride in order to kill her. Finally, she will kill the children to bring complete suffering on Jason and gain fame for revenging herself on Jason. Rehm argues that because Medea does not mention the plan of killing the children earlier in the play, when it is announced at 792, it comes as a shock "and both Chorus and audience turn their sympathies away from Medea" (198). Worried about her reputation, Medea argues,

> Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited.
> A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite.
> One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;
> For the lives of such persons are most remembered. (807-810)

The Chorus, appalled, begs her not to act, and, in an effort to help her and to "support the normal / Ways of mankind" (811-12), advises her against such action. The Chorus is convinced that she will not have the strength or the heart to kill her own children, and they warn her that she will be the unhappiest of women if she succeeds. Their ode after her pronouncement questions Medea's ability to follow through with the plan, but they end their ode as if they were trying to convince themselves:

. . . You will not be able,

When you children fall down and implore you,

You will not be able to dip

Steadfast your hands in their blood. (862-5)

Easterling comments on the unrealistic nature of the Chorus: "The advantages of providing Medea with a sympathetic and understanding audience within the play far outweigh any loss of naturalism" (188). The Chorus' complete incredulity at a plan so foreign to their feminine nature freezes them from acting: they cannot wrap their minds around the idea of Medea killing her children and are literally petrified into inaction. Perhaps the lack of time between the words and the deeds prevents any action, or perhaps it is as Bernard Knox suggests, that they are too distracted by the death of Glauce and Creon to protest (287). Throughout the play their role has been that of passive witness and not within their capability to assist the children. Before Medea acts, she reminds them of her oath of silence, admonishing them to "say nothing. . . / If you love your mistress, if you were born a woman" (822-3). So Medea reminds the Chorus of her first speech to them when she lamented the shared difficulties they face as women.

Her motivation from the beginning of the play and echoing back to *Argonautica* is revisited when she explains to the Chorus why she will kill her own children: "For it is not bearable to be mocked by enemies" (797). She will not allow anyone to have "cause for laughter" at her misfortune (383) nor give anyone opportunity to be "mocked by Jason's Corinthian wedding" (405). Her fear of humiliation would be more believable had she an enemy somewhere, or if *anywhere* in her myth she experienced such humiliation first hand. Instead, the people of Corinth respect her, Aegeus sympathizes

with her, and Creon bases his actions on knowing her past; all other enemies are in her imagination. This fear of humiliation is addressed by Jay Gould:

> A defining trait of masculine competitive aggression is the horror of being humiliated by laughter and mockery and a determination to retaliate against even an imagined instance. Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* provide classical instances. But we should notice that the trait reappears in several women in tragedy. (57)

The desire to be free of scorn places Medea among the heroes of ancient Greece and reinforces the masculine characteristics which so define her at the end of this play. Why might Euripides depict her so? First, his predominantly male audience would recognize theatrical convention. Additionally, he was providing something new, for Euripides changed the story so that Medea is the one who kills her children. Third, he reinforced standard mores of society, both of how women should behave and how foreigners are expected to behave. From Medea's perspective, she has no models of heroic behavior to follow; the only heroic woman she is exposed to is Jason's description of Ariadne in Book 3 of *Argonautica*, and that was less helpful than Jason would have liked. Her other female role model is Chalciope, who does nothing but weep for her sons. Foley explains that Medea has no role models for herself, so she "deliberately imitates a heroic brand of masculinity," which, combined with Gould's assertion above, explains her motivation (264). It is very important to note, however, that the heroic code she adopts for herself is not the diplomatic one created by her husband but the one rejected in *Argonautica* through Herakles. Taking her father as a model, she becomes as ruthless, violent,

manipulating and deceitful as he was. Jason may have modeled duplicity for her, but she understood it first from her childhood.

When she actually decides that killing the children will be the best way to avenge herself on Jason has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Could she have intended to kill the children from the opening lines of the play? I hold that she did not finalize her plan until she had an escape route, but I feel the idea was always a possibility she was silently considering. Did Creon's conversation plant that the seed? Or Aegeus' discussion of the need for children? Or was it simply cultural, since nothing was more important than a male heir to whom the *oikós* could be passed? She wants to punish Jason, but punishing Creon, too, would please her. Creon gives her the ammunition she needs when he tells her he loves his country ". . . next after my children" (329). Her plan fully formed, she now has only to put it into effect.

Medea and Jason—Continued Deception

The second exchange between husband and wife is diametrically opposed to the first one, but unimaginative Jason does not wonder at the change or her motivations, since she essentially agrees with his earlier opinion. Again, why he does not know better requires us to suspend our disbelief as much as we do for the Chorus' lack of action, but the dramatic irony of knowing her plan requires so much of the audience's attention that suspending disbelief is easy. Jason is such an egoist that he falls for her flattery, her reminders of the love they shared, her description of herself and all women as "worthless. . . foolish. . . wrong" (890-1). She calls for the children to come out of the house to be with their parents before he has the chance to respond; possibly she did not want to hear

him agree with her; probably she wants to reinforce any guilt she might inspire in him. By presenting herself as logical and rational—descriptions which have characterized her interactions with him throughout their married life—she removes possible suspicions Jason might otherwise have. Convincing him that he is correct has never been hard, and since he is wise in planning the marriage, then he would be wise to trust her. She convinces him that since he is the man, he is always right. The obsequiousness is the same she used with Creon; she tells both men they have acted wisely and appeals to them as parents. Jason, having achieved his goal, can now afford to be generous and sympathetic. He tells her,

> I approve of what you say. And I cannot blame you
> Even for what you said before. It is natural
> For a woman to be wild with her husband when he
> Goes in for secret love. (908-10)

It is fascinating that Jason, after Medea concedes to the marriage, now calls it a "secret love" when earlier he was simply marrying "Not because of a woman," but to "breed a royal progeny to be brothers / To the children I have now" (593-5). His change of language is despicable, but not unexpected, and he may even believe his own words. Because of Medea's reasonable demeanor, her *masculine* demeanor, he is mollified.

Only when Medea asks the children to take hold of their father's right hand does she break down somewhat, and when he questions her tears, she weakens. Yet she uses those tears as part of her ploy to move to her next point in their discussion and in her plan for revenge—asking him to keep the children in Corinth rather than have them go into exile. Jason does not think Creon will agree to it, and Medea suggests that Jason use his

new wife's influence with her father to insure success. She then uses the line of thinking Jason had used earlier against her, about all women being alike—so long as they are happy in bed, the rest will follow. She tells him, "She will be happy not in one way, but in a hundred, / Having so fine a man as you to share her bed . . ." (953-4), only confirming two things that he has known all along: Medea's frustration and anger result from her sex life, and he is a successful lover. She strokes his ego when he assures her he will have no problem convincing Glauce by telling him, "If she is like the rest of us women," he will meet with success (944).

To insure success with her request, she tells Jason that she will send some gifts to the new bride, proving she bears Glauce no ill will. In her article "The Language of Reciprocity in Euripides' *Medea*," Melissa Mueller speaks of gift-giving in ancient Greece and about the purpose and qualification of the exchange. She explains that gifts given between aristocratic equals are not ". . . given in isolation. There is always some reference to past acts of generosity as well as to future obligation" (472). Because Medea has assisted Jason in the past and has reminded him of those deeds, she expects he will fulfill his responsibilities to her. Their earlier exchange, when he offers her money, however, does not recognize his obligation to her, for "his *intention* in giving her material help is to expedite the end of the relationship (by facilitating her exile) without losing face. . ." (478). As her husband, he should provide for her, but he has already dissolved the marriage, and Medea associates his offer of money as not "[having] value independent of the donor" (479). Further, his offer of gifts is valueless because she has lost respect for him. That he tries to dissuade her from giving gifts to his new wife speaks to his inability to understand the significance of gift giving and reciprocity, or, possibly a

discomfort because he cannot provide his new wife with material possessions. Perhaps he is afraid there will be a "future obligation" (472) as a result of this gift . Additionally, Mueller suggests that Jason's reluctance to allow Medea to give gifts to Glauce demonstrates that

> Jason clearly feels challenged by the persuasive power that he senses the gifts will have on his new wife. But he does not perceive the threat as one that stems directly from his failed reciprocal relations with Medea. It is once again anxiety about his own status and his claim to social differentiation through the ability to *give* gifts, that surfaces here as reluctance, on Jason's part, to accept anything from a (perceived) social inferior. (498)

Because the gifts are from Helios and "bestowed on his descendants" (Warner 955), they represent not just material wealth but family heirlooms. According to Mueller, the gifts are symbolic of Medea's natal family and are "implicated in her own genealogy and . . . in her history with Jason [and stand] as symbols of the autonomous power that Medea once used to give herself away in marriage" (472).

By having Jason escort the children himself to Glauce's chambers, Medea makes him an accomplice to the murder. She does not share this added bit of revenge with the Chorus, and, surprisingly, she does not gloat over this later as she gloats over other aspects of the plan; probably she understands that the children would not obtain access to Glauce's room without Jason's company. Before they leave, Jason tries to dissuade her from sending the gifts, arguing that there are plenty of dresses and gold in the palace and that "If my wife considers me of any value, / She will think more of me than money, I am

sure of it" (962-3). He might hope so, but Medea's understanding of a woman is affirmed. She knows Glauce will be unable to resist the dress and the diadem, just as she knows Creon would want the chance to look generous by giving her an additional day. She also explains herself in a way Jason understands. She states, ". . . but for my children's reprieve / I would give my very life, and not gold only" (967-8), which reinforces for Jason the femininity of her actions. He can indulge her in this gift-giving, because he will soon be rid of her.

The gifts are symbolically important, as they would normally bedeck a bride, and, by sending such gifts, Medea is representatively dressing the bride for her wedding ceremony—traditionally a mother's prerogative. Because the gifts are so beautiful, Medea additionally knows that Glauce will not be able to resist trying them on immediately. She has only moments to wait after sending the children to Glauce until the welcome news of her death arrives.

In her fascinating essay "Becoming Medea," Deborah Boedecker discusses how, in encouraging Glauce to go against her own and her father's best interest by allowing Jason's children to stay, and by wearing the heirloom gown of Medea's natal family, Medea is, in essence, "killing an image of herself." Boedecker goes on to say that Medea kills not the image as she is now, but an image that never existed (143-4). Her image of what she should be is replaced by a Medea who vacillates at this later point in the play not between a wife and a woman scorned, but between her masculine and feminine selves.

Medea is never more feminine than she is at this moment in the play, as the children part from her and the Tutor rushes in to tell her the news of the children's

reprieve. Where he expects elation, she reverses his expectation with her cries, which mirror her initial cries from offstage at the play's beginning. Because she was correct in her assumption that Glauce would accept the gifts, her children's doom is sealed, yet she shows herself as a loving and devoted mother at the end of the play—touching the children, crying over their sweet smiles, lamenting their loss in her old age. Nor is she ever more honest; we see the true mother at this moment, one who loves her children as she once must have loved their father. Finally, she relents,

> I cannot bear to do it, I renounce my plans
> I had before. I'll take my children away from
> This land. Why should I hurt their father with the pain
> They feel and suffer twice as much pain myself?
> No, no, I will not do it. I renounce my plans. (1044-8)

The silent hope of the audience and the Chorus is met, if for a brief moment, and the mother has won out over the wife, the feminine over the masculine, the animus defeated. And then, the house crashes.

Chapter 4—Sweet Revenge

Vision Realized

At lines 1078-80, Medea presents the culminating moment of all that brought her here and becomes the climax of the play. The inevitability of the children's deaths hinges on these two lines, which demonstrate her struggle between the feminine and the masculine, between her passion and her reason. A few lines before, she is heartbreaking in expressing her feelings about motherhood:

> Come, children, give
> Me your hands, give your mother your hands to kiss them.
> Oh the dear hands, and O how dear are these lips to me,
> And the generous eyes and the bearing of my children!
> . . . Oh how good to hold you!
> How delicate the skin, how sweet the breath of children! (1069-75)

Then, her warrior self rises up and defeats the feminine, as she states, "I know indeed what evil I intend to do, / But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury, / Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils" (1078-80). "Fury" reminds us of The Furies, who hover in the audience's consciousness throughout the play.

There have been signs of Medea's imbalance of masculine and feminine throughout the play, especially in the language she uses when speaking to herself in third person. Medea the mother conflicts with Medea the scorned wife; the female non-Greek trying to fit into the Greek society conflicts with the Colchian princess; the passionate

woman scorned wars against the reasonable victim of the law. In "Medea's Divided Self," Foley writes,

> . . . to read the speech 1078-80 as a victory of passion over reason would be anomalous to producing a Medea who resembles Jason (who is more concerned with the ill effects of passion on reason) more than herself. In the latter case, the audience would surprisingly confront in the monologue the victory of an irrational masculine imperative over a rational maternity. By suppressing all together the claims of her maternal sides, this interpretation of 1079 confirms our sense that Medea's choice for revenge has been inevitable from the start, that her self-debate aims finally not at persuading herself to save the children (a plan in any case abandoned after 1058) but at making the crime seem inevitable to herself. (255-6)

Medea convinces herself that there is no choice; in order to fully punish Jason, the children's deaths are unavoidable. Clauss offers a reason: "The Euripidean Medea, who is being rejected by her husband, and hence denied, must insist that he acknowledge her. She has little choice then but to act in terms of the one faculty which he, like any other male, notices in a woman, childbearing" (50). Earlier, his need for Medea was for political gain, but he has created a situation for self-aggrandizement through the marriage.

Before we hear the report of the murder, the Chorus delivers an interesting ode about the nature of child-rearing and the irony of raising children only to have them die. The Chorus tries to rationalize Medea's future actions, just as Medea herself rationalizes

her plans at 1078. By discussing the inevitability of anyone child's death, the Chorus is trying to justify the circumstances of Medea's killing her sons; yet, to say "they will die anyway" is the lowest level of validation for her actions. This is a most strange exchange, since the Chorus has been quite vocal about trying to convince Medea that she will make herself "Of women . . . the most unhappy" (819) if she kills the children. The Chorus speaks of a few women who are educated and have the Muse to guide them, and how the Chorus has "entertained thoughts more subtle and engaged in arguments more weighty than the female sex should pursue" (Davie 1081-84). The "blessing" of being childless and the problematic nature of rearing children seem to be the "weighty arguments," but there is an intimation of the problematic nature of educated women or of women who reach above their prescribed station. Is the Chorus condemning Medea, or is the Chorus simply recognizing that children die? They end their ode with foreshadowing probably directed at Jason as well as Medea:

> What is our profit, then, that for the sake of
> Children the gods should pile upon mortals
> After all else
> This most terrible grief of all? (1112-15)

The Chorus' reflection is important at this point in the play; their argument of inevitability excuses their inactivity, since they will not act to save the children.

Concerned for Medea's safety, the Messenger who comes with news of the deaths of Creon and Glauce tells her to take what she can and run for her life; he knows the people of Corinth will kill her for the murder. The Messenger's warning testifies to the continued good reception Medea has received by the Corinthians because he does not call

for her death. Rather than running, however, she delights in her revenge, which is naturally disturbing to the Messenger, and he questions her sanity. He responds to her invitation to tell the story, not to please her but because of his own outrage at witnessing Glauce burn alive. This is a difficult moment for the audience and a dangerous one for the playwright: Euripides runs the risk of losing the audience's sympathy for Medea when she revels in the murders. She says, "Do not be in a hurry, friend, / But speak. How did they die? You will delight me twice / As much again if you say they died in agony" (1133-35).

The Messenger explains the murders, describing how Creon, with his unflagging instinct towards protecting his daughter, shows himself as more maternal than Medea in his last actions. As he reaches out to embrace his child and assist her in her suffering, the two become fused in burning flesh, and, in a macabre inversion of life passing from parent to child, as her pain becomes his pain, her death becomes his death:

> Then the old man wished to raise himself to his feet;
> But, as ivy clings to the twigs of the laurel,
> So he stuck to the fine dress, and he struggled fearfully.
> For he was trying to lift himself to his knee,
> And she was pulling him down . . . . (1212-16)

Her death is gruesome, and we have to wonder if she deserved it; is Glauce guilty of anything? Her compliance with the marriage cannot really be held against her, as she could have no say in her father's choice of husband for her. The reason we associate her with the enemies of Medea is, like Hypsipyle and Medea herself, Glauce has fallen under the spell of Jason, who is undeserving of any woman's affection. By loving him, Glauce

will only be feeding his ego. Our sympathies lie with Medea from the beginning of the play, and we are especially sympathetic to the nature of her marriage once we see the initial exchange between husband and wife. Glauce becomes additionally unpleasant to the audience as the Messenger describes her actions when the children arrive with the gifts. He claims he

> Followed the children into the women's quarters.
> Our mistress, whom we honor now instead of you
> Before she noticed that your two children were there,
> Was keeping her eye fixed eagerly on Jason.
> Afterwards, however, she covered up her eyes,
> Her cheek paled, and she turned herself away from him,
> So disgusted was she at the children's coming there. (1143-49)

Significant to the role of women in power is their association to men. When he says, "Whom we honor now instead of you," he is equating honor with marriage and Glauce's relationship to *Jason*. As the daughter of the king, was she not worthy of honor before? The description of Glauce's rejection of the children reinforces Medea's decision. Correct in knowing that the Corinthian people will never accept her sons, Medea cannot leave them behind, for what mother would expose her children to such rejection? We wish Glauce had a backbone, or at least the intelligence to question what kind of man her father has selected for her, but Glauce is a child-like, innocent woman who mirrors the younger Medea in her devotion to the good looks of her husband. She is everything that Medea was when Medea first saw Jason and is now everything that Medea is not. Glauce's actions toward the innocent boys, however, go a long way in negating any

compassion the audience might have held towards her. Before he leaves the scene, the Messenger refuses to pass judgment on Medea's actions, assuming, as she does, that she will escape punishment. He condemns the thinkers of the world, those "who are held / Wise among men and who search the reason of things" (1224-5) as the most unfortunate, just as the Chorus earlier spoke of "weighty things" that women should not think about. It seems at the end of the play their messages are of ignorance and bliss and about not trying to rise above one's station. The Chorus does pass judgment, but upon Jason, not Medea, stating "Heaven . . . has fastened many / Evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them" (1231-32). From the beginning they had felt that if Medea got the chance to punish her husband, she should. The idea becomes explicit not only to show support of Medea, but to explain the Chorus' inaction in helping the children. Just as they agreed to assist Medea, they also committed themselves to silence.

Her plan has succeeded: Creon and Glauce are dead. Medea has to act and act quickly to ensure the revenge against Jason is complete. She knows Jason will be coming to her directly, just as she knew Glauce would not be able to resist putting the dress on straight away. Medea explains that the children have to die, so they might as well die by her hand than by one "less kindly to them" (1239). She rushes into the house as the Chorus asks for divine intervention, knowing at this point that only the gods can stop her. The children cry aloud in torment, begging to be saved from their "mother's hands" and the "sword" reminiscent of Medea's own cries from off stage when the play opens. Charles Segal discusses the play's structure at this moment: "Euripides makes the bold stroke of intertwining the Chorus singing with the children's cries at the moment of their death" and explains that the juxtaposition of the two creates a "shattering" of the Chorus'

"reflections on divine vengeance" (170). We cannot focus on their words, punctuated as they are with calls for help, and even the Chorus vacillates between two extremes, even as Medea did earlier, wondering, "Shall I enter the house? Oh, surely I should / Defend the children from murder" (1274-75). Medea's actions are so contrary to human nature, so removed from understanding, that even with the Chorus' conviction and rationalization about Medea's behavior, at the moment of murder and the cries of the children, they react as humans.

It is important to the the masculine/feminine tension of the play that she uses the sword against the children rather than a "feminine" poison. Until now, Medea has used poison and potions to great effect: the Prometheus potion protected Jason from the fire-breathing bulls, and Pelias was killed in an effort to create youth that would have been restored through a potion. Glauce and Creon have succumbed to the powerful burning potion—why not use one on the children? Poison would, of course, be too slow in this instance, and she has to act before Jason returns from Glauce's chambers to her house. As she promised earlier, taking up the sword marks her actions as particularly masculine and, by association, heroic. It also calls to mind her right hand and the oath taken there. The gory details are not included in the play; Segal argues this enables us to "retain a modicum of sympathy for Medea" (170). The cries of the children leave the actual murders to our imaginations, which is often more powerful than any description.

Anguished, Jason bursts into the scene after hearing of the terrible deeds committed by his wife and shows his first moment of concern for his sons: he rushes to save them from the inevitable vengeance of Corinthians. This altruistic moment is short-lived, however. When he learns from the Chorus what Medea has done, his first response

is not for the suffering of his dead sons, but for himself: "O woman! You have destroyed me!" (1310). This masterful handling of Jason's character by Euripides shows us, in one poetic line and with laser accuracy, both Jason's inflated ego and the success of Medea's desired revenge. Unfortunately, she does not hear it, as he cries it *before* she appears on stage, floating in a chariot, the bodies of her sons with her. Yet the audience knows that everything she hoped for is realized with his exclamation. Jason's character has neither grown nor changed; he can think only of himself and still refuses to accept any culpability. His ensuing invective against her sounds much like his initial arguments, although this time he is not as collected and poised as his earlier righteousness made him. Now, in his outrage, he calls her a traitress, a monster, a hateful thing. He lists the evil she has done, restates that she killed the children "for the sake of pleasure in the bed" (1338) and laments the loss of his "newly wedded love" (1348) and family. Ironically, Jason himself mentions the oath that he broke by his reference to their marriage bed.

At this moment Medea has come for the final exchange and to insure that Jason understands absolutely what has been done to him. Her revenge can only be complete if she has full knowledge of both her own suffering and his. She explains that his pain has not yet begun, stating, "Not yet do you feel it. Wait for the future" (1396), demonstrating that in his old age he will have no one to care for him and after his death, no one to mourn him. Her cold behavior reflects the complete demise of any emotion she might have had for him; her indifference is total but for the one thing she wants from him—to know he is suffering. Like Jason, when he does not react to Medea calling him worthless (451-52), she says she does not care if he calls her a monster and compares herself to Scylla. Laura McClure tells us, ". . . she exhorts him to continue hating her and

denounces his speech as empty and vain . . .” (392). She is beyond feeling pain from him or even the fear of his retribution. When he calls upon the Furies, those “agents of divine justice” (Allen 98) to punish her, she replies, “What heavenly power lends an ear / To a breaker of oaths, a deceiver?” (1391-92).

Thus, she finally returns to his breaking of oaths. All her arguments against him relate to his breech of contract—his breaking of oaths. The novel way with which Euripides handles the punishment is discussed by Emily McDermott: “breach of oath, though a crime, was one whose punishment would be expected to issue in some unspecific way and at some unspecific time from gods like Themis and Zeus” (32). Medea enacts her revenge, once more acting beyond human capability. If oaths were religious rather than secular agreements, Medea should trust that the gods will visit the appropriate retribution upon Jason, but she acts for them and acts in a classically heroic manner to insure the punishment is not “unspecific,” and that it will come sooner rather than later. She needs to see the revenge first hand. Jason destroyed a marriage and through it her hopes for the children and her own future, so Medea returns the deed.

Medea’s ability to enact such heroic behavior stems directly from the imbalance of her animus as well as her sense of isolation. In ancient Greece, security comes from the male, without exception. Medea has no males—no sons, father, or brother—to return to; therefore, she can only look to herself for help. Compliance by the Chorus is not assistance. This is not to say that all women who act for themselves are unbalanced, but Medea functions in a man’s world by men’s rules; she uses female tools of weakness and manipulation to great effect, but she must have more skills to succeed. The strength she shows, however, stems from her righteous anger, which transcends masculine and

feminine. In addition, strategic planning, forming alliances, keeping level-headed under stress, applying logic and focus, using the tools at hand, understanding the enemy and using his weakness against him—all characteristically male behaviors—are fully present in Medea. Her interactions with Aegeus, she insures her future safety by recognizing an opportunity. Although she will be replacing one dominant male for another, this choice does not matter in the overall context, since there is no way around such a relationship in the Greek world. Even the chariot comes from the patriarchal grandfather, but this is not problematic. Medea manipulates these dominant males for her own ends.

It is interesting to explore whether her isolation creates her evil pattern or if the pattern creates the isolation. If we argue that Aphrodite encouraged her initially to betray her father, then she has separated from the natal family before she establishes her violent model of behavior. Nevertheless, the violence and the isolation are so intertwined that they appear co-dependent; we should not forget that she comes to Hera's attention because she is "full of wiles." One of her wily designs is harming the guilty by killing the innocent. She kills Apsyrtus or has him killed simply to buy time for her escape; certainly this makes him an innocent victim. But whom does she harm in this instance? Her father becomes her enemy once she throws her lot in with the Argonauts, reminding us that "the enemies of my friend are my enemy," even if moments before she owed her allegiance and duty to her father, her king, and her people. Pelias' daughters, who simply want to protect their father from senility in his old age, kill him and cut him up at Medea's request, creating a situation where the Furies will visit them because they succumbed to Medea's manipulation. Margaret Visser makes a connection about Pelias' daughters' role in their father's death:

> It would have been simple [for Medea] to cut Pelias up herself, as she did the ram which she subsequently turned into a lamb. But how much more piquant to make Pelias' own daughters do it; thus they achieve, out of unmarried women's love for their father, that destruction of a parent which Medea had caused when she abandoned her own father for marriage with Jason. When, much later, Medea murdered Jason's new bride, she once again made the girl the involuntary cause of her father's death. (156)

Through Pelias' death, Jason's father is avenged, but this act reinforces Medea and Jason's isolation. Medea acts without the presence of Jason when she goes to Pelias and his murder forces them again into exile. After, in Athens at Aegues' court, Theseus will barely avoid her attempted poisoning. The formula is unnatural, but effective: Medea uses children to deprive fathers of sons. She does not stop simply because the children are her own. It does not matter that Apsyrtus is her flesh and blood—the outcome of helping Jason is the same. The resulting isolation, also, is the same. Lack of time reinforces the basic pattern of using the innocent to punish the guilty; this is not a time for innovation—Medea defaults to the tried and true.

Medea's Animus

Emma Jung says that in getting in touch with their animus, women must "overcome [their] timidity and 'lift' themselves to their 'higher' male aspects" (23). The expectation of the heroic woman is explained in Pomeroy: "Self-sacrifice or martyrdom

is the standard way for a woman to achieve renown among men: self-assertion earns a woman an evil reputation," and "Because of the limitations of 'normal' female behavior, heroines who act outside the stereotype are sometimes said to be 'masculine' Again, it is not a compliment to a woman to be classified as masculine. . ." (109, 98). Yet, as stated earlier, being the ideal female in the Greek society has gotten Medea nowhere. She has nothing with which to fight against the injustice she suffers; she has a good reputation, but not respect; power, but no security. She is a character driven by the patterns of her past and because the experience in Corinth has taught her that she is seen by others—especially Jason—as less than she sees herself, she must go completely outside the "normal" rules in order to achieve her desires.

The split we observe in Medea between her nurturing mother and warrior animus has the potential to destroy her. As a character of extremes, she cannot be in two such potent psychic places at the same time: there simply is not room for both. Once she has decided to kill the children, she rushes into the house. This action has not only to do with Jason's pending arrival: she knows her will might falter. She has shown signs of vacillating earlier and cannot allow herself to succumb to what she perceives as weakness. To follow through with her plan, she must remove herself from the presence of the Chorus, those women who wish her not to kill or who might show her pity at her moment of crisis. She has to overcome so much outer pressure, hold so much at bay. Medea must divorce herself from her Eros and become a "machine" in order to kill the children. This disassociation and separation of self requires a rejection of what is normal for the female and probably a rejection of Medea's self-image, for surely she sees herself as a nurturing mother, despite her complaints against motherhood. Emma Jung writes,

"that the animus behaves as if it were a law unto itself, interfering in the life of the individual as if it were an alien element, if not actually destructive" (2). How easy it would be to explain that Medea has become possessed by something outside herself—that she is a witch, a foreigner, a demon—but Euripides has crafted her so carefully and unfolded her character so masterfully that we know these would be lame excuses and not in keeping with Medea's character. A hidden aspect has been within her from the beginning, has always been acting upon her and through her; just below the surface is this pure power, energy, force. She gives herself over to it, and like her foreignness, embraces that aspect of herself. We also witness how otherwise useful and sometimes admirable traits, when combined with passion and hatred-as-strong-as-love, can destroy.

If Eros is an expression of woman's "true nature" (Jung *Aion* 14), then Medea does not express the nurturing aspects. Rather, she enacts the aggressive nature of the masculine Logos. Why such imbalance? Euripides has walked a fine line between crafting Medea a woman with women's emotions and making her something else. Is she a god, a force of nature, or has she become simply the archetype in its most mythic and crystalline form, one that is so pure as to be almost unrecognizable? As an audience we want to understand her behaviors. Why connect to her "woman scorned" aspect only to reject her later based on her reactions and calculating emotions? We are *unable* to disassociate her from that woman scorned—as humans we always want to know why someone does what they do. Like the goddesses, the audience wants to label; like Jason, spectators want to find a reason for someone's behavior so they can understand it and then, perhaps, judge them for it. The audience wants to place these characters next to like examples so they can understand the way the world works. Instead of creating a

comfortable category, Euripides pulls his audience apart by creating sympathy and understanding for her motives—her scorn, life's injustice, her hurt for the children's sake, her fear at exile. This characterization leads them into a false sense of their own security, by making the audience unable to reconcile the magnitude of her reaction. Euripides appeals to his audiences' pathos, but the audience finds that it cannot, in the end, understand her. No like-pattern exists—no other models—that the audience can compare her to. This is the psychological genius of Euripides' *Medea*.

Although some critics suggest that Medea destroys herself at the end of the play because she denies that which is human, I contest that she is re-made, almost re-born, not into the evil witch of barbarian origin, but into a distilled expression of self. To get to this point she has to acknowledge and embrace all that has come before, all that will come after, and fully recognize what it will mean to her, both in terms of her pain and in her success over Jason. She must embrace her "otherness", her foreignness, her differences. She plays by her own rules since the rules of Greece have proven inadequate to her needs. She accepts the Greek perspective that her acts are barbarian because the Greeks have no other context in which to view her. Both cultures would be appalled by her actions. When she acts outside the Colchian and Greek societal mores, she becomes something entirely different, something unto herself, indefinable by any terms yet, paradoxically, something we *can* understand without condoning her choices. Knox says that her behavior in the end "made her something more, and less than human, something inhuman, a *theos*" (315). Christopher Gill observes, "I think that much of the special quality of Euripides' presentation of her motives for infanticide . . . lies in the way in

which we are encouraged to see the ethical force of her grounds for acting as she does while sharing her repugnance for the act, and the consequences, of infanticide" (171).

The audience can and cannot understand her. We desire to see her humanity and want to make a connection with this woman, not reject her out of hand because what she does is so horrifying. Our sympathies remain with her, since her suffering is complete. In the Davie translation, even she states, "Oh, I am a woman born to sorrow!" (1250). And yet, her grief will be colored with the knowledge that Jason, too, is suffering, so just as we do not pity Jason because his misery is for himself and not his dead sons, we cannot fully believe Medea's suffering, knowing as we do that the cause of her pain is connected to her celebrated revenge. She will console herself over the loss of her sons with the knowledge that she has gotten her revenge on Jason; even her speaking of her future suffering is disingenuous.

As she speaks from the chariot of how Jason will suffer, the influence of the animus colors her language. McClure mentions that "At the level of grammar, Medea's abrupt imperatives underscore her discursive dominance" (392)**.** Whereas earlier she begs Jason and fawns before him, at the close of the play she is directing him on what to do, what to think, and how to feel. Medea's indifference extends to her language. Her cool, calculating monologue at the end of the play shows not just power and control over Jason, but the knowledge and calm which comes from being vindicated. In contrast, Jason's passion results in name-calling and accusations.

Carl Jung states that "the animus is partial to arguments, he can best be seen at work in disputes where both parties think they are right" (*Aion* 14). Medea is not only morally justified (in her own mind); she has physical evidence that her actions have been

sanctioned by at least one of the gods because of the arrival of her grandfather's flying chariot. And yet she is not completely disconnected because she is enjoying Jason's suffering in a measured way, given the dead children at her feet. This contrasts with the joy and enthusiasm she shows when the Messenger describes Glauce and Creon's death. At the close of the play, the characters review, as convention of the Greek theater dictates, the characters' complete understanding of events. Jason fully understands that Medea has destroyed him utterly, but he still cannot understand *why*. He is beyond comprehending her motivation in killing the children. His ego and hubris prevent him from understanding Medea's needs and emotions. He remains clueless about her expectation of his fulfilling his oaths and remains naïve in his understanding of the power she wields.

Gill explains, "In this scene, Jason (by contrast with his position in the *agôn*) has the role of accuser. He presents himself, in a mode characteristic of tragic dénouements, as having reached, too late, a kind of understanding that eluded him before" (170). Jason's understanding is not about himself, but the kind of woman he married. He insists that she was unhappy in bed; in his last lines he refuses to see Medea as anything other than what he perceives: a woman who can easily be put aside with impunity. Jason is almost beyond the audience's pity. His language, vacillating between frustrated rage and shocked incomprehension, shows not only a lack of comprehension, but also a lack of control; he curses and begs. By contrast, Medea's direct, factual language is brutal, as she beats Jason with phrases such as "The children are dead. I say this to make you suffer"; "They died of a disease they caught from their father"; "Now you would speak to them, now you would kiss them. / Then you rejected them" (1370, 1364, 1401-2). We move

between despising him and feeling sympathy for him. The loss of a child is unimaginably terrible, but his words are not for the sake of the children's suffering, but for his own. And Medea's language, with its harsh control and detached manner, shows she is either not herself, or more herself than she has ever been before. She states, "You, as is right, will die without distinction, / Struck on the head by a piece of the Argo's timber, / And you will have seen the bitter end of my love" (1385-87). What started with love ends with indifference, and the circle closes.

Medea the Feminist / Hero

In the early ode, the Chorus hopes to rally behind Medea as a spokeswoman for feminine power: "Story shall now turn my condition to a fair one, / Women are paid their due. / No more shall evil-sounding fame be theirs" (418-20). By the end, they are greatly disappointed, for she gives them nothing they can emulate and certainly nothing which would make the world a better place for women. The reversal they were hoping for was a little more power or respect; what they did not expect was the reversal of the sanctity of motherhood. Foley writes,

> Yet Euripides also seems to imply that the oppressed, by being trapped into imitating their oppressors can in the end only tragically silence what should have been their own true (here maternal) voice, destroy themselves and confirm an unjust status quo. (266)

Does Medea destroy herself? Seidensticker suggests, "The price she has to pay for her revenge is high . . . the loss of herself as a woman and a mother" (163). Certainly she has

destroyed her mother role, but has she lost herself as a woman, or has she become, as Durham suggests, an "Everywoman" (55)?

Medea does not imitate her oppressors, and she certainly does not confirm her own "status quo" by remaining subordinate to the men. By taking up the sword and fighting for what she believes, she has become heroic; by getting away with the crime, she fails to fulfill the expectations of the tragic heroic model for the theater; rather, she becomes a kind of hero that Jason would never have been—would not even understand. More like Herakles or her father, Medea becomes heroic in the epic sense. Christopher Gill (1996) places Medea along side Achilles as a "problematic hero," since their actions appear as "exemplary gestures" which deeply question "the place of interpersonal relationships in the living of a human life" (154). Bernard Knox (1986) observes that Euripides presents "the revenge in heroic terms, as if she were not a woman, but an Achilles or Ajax" (315). Foley (2001), too, compares Medea to these heroes: "Like Ajax or Achilles, she would deliberately sacrifice friends to defend her honor against a public slight from a peer. She has the stubborn individualism, intransigence, power, near-bestial savagery, and lack of pity of such beleaguered heroes" (260). These heroes have been assaulted, abused, attacked or hurt in some way, as opposed to an Oedipus or other tragic hero who acted solely out of his own character flaw.

Clauss describes tragedy and history to be the "outcomes of epic" and as a result share a number of similarities:

> Epic and tragic figures alike demonstrate power more than anything else. All epic heroes are confident in themselves. Apart from the help of the deities—help they feel so much to be their due as to be simply a natural

> extension of themselves—epic heroes are autonomous. . . . Finally, epic and tragic hero figures are the center of the narrative because they themselves are so preoccupied with self. It is the extreme of ego; nothing else matters. (58-59)

Medea shows these characteristics as she fulfills McClure's concept of ideal heroism: passionate intensity, daring resolve, inability to tolerate injustice or disrespect, avoidance of laughter, desire to appear formidable, need for fame (381). These characteristics can best be seen through revisiting some earlier patterns of Medea's behavior.

Medea Revisited

Medea's emotions in the play fall into patterns seen earlier in *Argonautica*. Passion is at war with reason. She wishes for Jason's life then; now she wants him to live only to have him suffer. Additionally, by the end of the play she reverts to earlier roles, such as princess of Colchis and the granddaughter of a god. The precedents established early in life influence our actions, but as established models of behavior they are not limited to action; Medea reverts to established modes of feeling, as well. There are numerous examples in *Argonautica* where her reaction is perhaps extreme: her emotions after falling in love with Jason, or her desire to burn the *Argo* when Jason and her brother talk of abandoning her. The flashes we see in *Argonautica* of Medea's narrow emotional range and passionate intensity guarantee an emotionally unbalanced character.

The struggle between passion and reason brings us to the work of Burnett and her discussion of the conflict between *thymos*—the psychic aspect or spirit which turns emotions into impulses, and the *bouleumata*—the plans which issue from the mind (273-

4). What are the causes or triggers which turn emotions into impulses for Medea? She is motivated by one thing alone: fear of ridicule from her enemies. How can this fear, a potentially moot point, motivate her to the point of murder? As Rush Rehm writes, "After the gruesome murder of Glauke and Kreon, the idea that someone might laugh at Medea is hard to credit" (146). But she is a victim of her strong personality, which refuses to let this idea of scorn go. Dodds states, "Her reason can judge her actions, which she frankly describes as a 'foul murder' (1383), but it cannot influence it; the springs of actions are . . . beyond the reach of reason" (98). This is not the only instance where reason is useless: she deliberates with Jason about his breaking of oaths, of his responsibility to his children, of his debt for all she has done for him. She might have tried to reason with Jason over his marriage had she the opportunity to know of it, but the play begins after he has put her aside; her choices are few to none, and any choice other than killing the children will not have the desired effect on Jason. We see what Jung describes in *Aion*: "No matter how friendly and obliging a woman's Eros may be, no logic on earth can shake her if she is ridden by the animus" (15).

Her split— her need to nurture her children and her desire for revenge—brings her to her greatest enemy of all: herself (Conacher quoted in Knox 441). She is the only person who can stop herself, and the only aspect of her self—her *thymos*—which might stop her is pity, an emotion she scorns as weakness. This is the sole emotion which could prevent her from avenging herself on Jason. Her concept of her self-image and her refusal to allow herself to be a victim of potential scorn can be traced to her earlier actions. She creates a pattern of being a decisive and assertive woman, despite her violent choices necessary to achieve those ends. These early patterns of action and devotion to

Jason have not really changed; where once she was motivated by Aphrodite and Eros' arrow of love, later she desires something else entirely. A moment of awakening occurs when she experiences her desire—her first flush of passion—become love. She wanted Jason alive for his own sake, not just for hers, and she was satisfied with the knowledge that he was going to live. This desire/love matrix becomes inverted after the events of the play; the love evaporates, but a new variation of the initial desire remains. She still desires that he live, but only to insure that he suffers. Her methods, which have not yet met with failure, cannot fail now, and she takes up the sword against Jason with the same intensity with which she wielded it for him earlier.

Another pattern she reverts to is the behavior of a princess of Colchis and granddaughter of the god. Her sojourn in Corinth as Jason's wife was not commensurate with her status, since Jason's standing in Corinth was limited until he married Glauce. Medea, though, returns to her original status as powerful woman—albeit older and wiser. The reminder of her lineage manifests itself in the arrival of chariot from Helios. By sending the chariot, Helios affirms her actions. It is interesting that Zeus is mentioned in the last few lines of the play, ostensibly because he is the god of oaths. The lines reinforce the importance of oath-breakers in this play, as well as fulfill the theatrical convention of leaving the audience with a reminder of the role of the gods and through expressing an explicit theme of the play.

And where is Hera with her statement that she will "never cease to honor" Jason? Once Hera gets revenge against Pelias through Jason and Medea, she is either no longer interested in Jason, or, by failing to intervene against Medea to defend Jason's children, she affirms Medea's actions because Jason has broken his oath. Helios, too, supports

Medea by giving her the means to escape the potential wrath of the Corinthians, but more than that, he symbolically presents to us a Medea whose role reversal is complete. She becomes "untouchable." Floating like a god above his head, she prophesizes Jason's future death and establishes religious rites. Medea assumes a symbolically elevated role, like a "Fury" or other avenging figure, who will "haunt" Jason for the rest of his life.

Funeral Rites

By assigning Medea the power to control the funeral rites and rituals which will be associated with the children's deaths, Euripides reinforces Medea's elevation to godliness. Medea's preventing Jason from touching the boys' bodies raises the bodies to "oath objects" and sacrifices, reinforcing the play's theme. Yet the play's close does not satisfy. Structurally, it fulfills the conventions of the theater as it brings closure to the *agôn* between Medea and Jason. She devastates him as a character and destroys any hope for his future. This contradicts the traditional expectation of the play's closing because the audience usually watches as the transgressor is punished. As a murderer, Medea should be punished, but "It is precisely this success in scot-free filicide that makes the ending of the play so difficult both morally and psychologically" (Segal 176). Euripides is innovative with his climax to the myth; he places this in familiar terms because Medea's conflict against Jason is complete, so the audience understands the end of their struggle. Whereas the angry Medea might potentially put the audience at ease because it can relate to her, the audience may not understand Euripides' omission of punishment for her transgressions. The audience is left wondering how she will get away with the murder, not so much in relation to the Greek people, but to the gods. The justification of

the way she will escape punishment occurs in two forms: expiation of the sin and the creation of funeral rites.

Expiation of the crime of killing her children must traditionally arrive through suffering, and Medea has already acknowledged the suffering she anticipates because of the murder. Elizabeth Bryson Bongie explains her sacrifice in the context of other protagonists of the Athenian stage:

> Actually Medea is probably the most genuinely "heroic" figure on the Greek stage in that she shows greater determination in the achievement of her ends and makes greater sacrifices to her honour than does any other tragic figure: Ajax sacrifices his life as does Antigone, Oedipus sacrifices his eyes and his home, Heracles his humanity, Philoctetes his revenge, but Medea sacrifices her own children. (7) . . . She went to the outer limits of daring and passion; while other heroes might blind themselves, kill themselves, or wreak terrible vengeances, Medea, to show the mettle of her character, sacrificed what to a Greek would be more precious than life itself—her children, her hope for the future. (30)

The tragedy of this sacrifice can be understood by the gods; to kill the best thing about Jason means she has to kill her own best things. Medea is confident she will be able to expiate this crime: of the other crimes she has committed, there seems to be no need for expiation.

When Medea refuses to let her sons be touched by their father, she makes them "oath objects," like her own right hand. Additionally, she takes control of the funeral elements. Kerri Hame in her "Female Control of Funeral Rites in Greek Tragedy:

Klytaimestra, Medea, and Antigone," tells us are "normally associated with males" (7). The patriarchal male took possession of the dead, and women would ask permission to clean and dress the body for burial or cremation; Medea's refusal to allow Jason to touch them makes her revenge complete, for this is the one thing he has asked of her, and she very thing she denies him. She also directs him to bury his bride: "[In] Medea's eyes his proper place is with his new family and bride, and it is his bride's burial that he may take charge of and participate in—not that of the children he had abandoned" (Hame 7). At this moment, what more graphic reminder to Jason of his lost sons and Medea's revenge could there be? Jason is also motivated, presumably, for the proper handling of the rites for his sons; he fears that because she is a foreigner, Medea may make mistakes.

Additionally, what Euripides does to help make the unfamiliar familiar is to conflate the rites created by Medea at the end of the play with the historical cult of Hera Akraia. According to non-dramatic sources, the Corinthians, guilty of the murder of Medea's sons, suffer various plagues and hardships until they make recompense by sending their own children to perform the rituals:

> Although the play proclaims that Medea is the murderess, the rite that Medea founds, by linking up to the historical rite, shifts the guilt to the Corinthians, who paradoxically must atone for a murder they did not commit. Medea not only founds the rite, but ensures that its meaning, departing from the "truth" of infanticide that the play tells, re-writes her history in her favor. (Goff 83-4)

It is in keeping with the behavior of this woman that such a paradox exists and places her actions in a category usually reserved for trickster characters, demonstrating her

cleverness. It will be a salve to her troubled soul that the Corinthians will be suffering the loss of their own children, if only temporarily. The paradox is also apparent when she calls the killing of the children a "sacrifice" (1054); by changing the term, she elevates the crime. Barry Powell explains that

> Any sacrifice, regardless of the victim, is an attempt to adjust relations between the sacrificer, or those he represents, and a divine power. Man offends deity; deity, by oracle or portentous events, displays displeasure; man atones for the offense through sacrifice; deity accepts the atonement. The greater the offense, the greater the sacrifice; human sacrifice buys the highest return, especially when the victim is pure. (528)

The reason Medea does not feel that the murder of her brother or Pelias requires the same sort of expiation is unclear; we do know that Circe, a goddess, is able to cleanse Jason and Medea from the crime of killing Apsyrtus. Medea is fully aware that destroying her own children is offensive to the gods, just as she is completely convinced that she will be able to remove the offense. She tells Jason, "I shall establish a holy feast and sacrifice / Each year for ever to atone for the blood guilt" (1382-83). It is unclear where she gets this knowledge and certainty; she was less certain of absolution when she killed her brother, as evidenced by the sheer terror she demonstrates in Circe's presence. Pucci has a more fitting term than sacrifice for Medea's choice—he calls it "beneficial violence" (132). He explains that if she were really creating a ritual, she would change the motivation and intentions, but because she does not, he suggests that

> the central aspect of her deed . . . substitutes Jason's children for Jason: an innocent or not guilty entity is destroyed in place of a guilty one. Because

> of this simple substitution, the children look to Medea like sacrificial victims. First, they replace Jason because they are the most precious thing he has . . . and second, their murder is intended to resolve her crisis and to be, therefore, her final act. Because of the refuge Medea has found in Athens, no retribution will follow. (134)

The term "sacrifice" connotes for her, as well, the size of her loss, but we must remember that greater even than her love for her children and her anger with Jason is her fear of being maligned and ridiculed. When we place this on the scales opposite the lives of her children, it becomes difficult to keep our sympathies. In truth, how can *anything* be worth the life of a child?

Catharsis

Normally, Greek play send with catharsis and discovery, and although Jason fully understands the truth of Medea's action, he does not accept or understand them. The looked-for catharsis does not happen: Medea does not suffer as we understand she should or as we would if we were in the same straits. She cheats the audience again in two ways; first, we want to see what form her punishment will take, just as she made sure Jason got his, and, second, we know what she does next. Medea will try to kill Aegeus' son and will also get away with it. According to Barry Powell, she flees from Athens with Medus, her son by Aegeus, and returns to Colchis. There, Medus kills Aeëtes, takes the throne, enlarges his kingdom, and "becomes the ancestor of the Medes, another name for the Persians, Greece's deadly enemy during the Classical periods" (529). Medea's legacy of violence returns again and again through her descendants.

The end of the play falls into Gilbert Murray's description of Euripides' work:

> Of his seventeen genuine extant tragedies, ten close with the appearance of a god in the clouds, commanding, explaining, prophesying. The seven which do not end with a god, end with a prophecy or something equivalent—some scene which directs attention away from the present action to future results. . . .The method is to our taste quite undramatic, but it is explicable enough: it falls in with the tendency of Greek art to finish, not with a climax, but with a lessening of strain. (267-8)

The "lessening of strain" still leaves us straining. Perhaps Page says it better: "Euripides . . . was exploring regions of thought and character which the plain man preferred simply to ignore. . . He does not condemn, he does not criticize. He tries to understand why such people do such things" (xv). But to end by saying, "It is what it is" leaves us equally unfulfilled. Kitto is correct when he calls Medea "the impersonation of one of the blind and irrational forces in human nature," but he relieves the strain when he explains how: "In the last analysis, Euripides' tragic hero is mankind. Some natural passion breaks its bounds, and the penalty has to be paid, either by the sinner or those around him, or both" (202, 197).

Medea's decisions, difficult and complex as they are, spring from what influences her. Her lack of feminine role models, the manipulation of the goddesses, the oaths Jason makes and then breaks, her isolation and foreign status, her inability to fight against the injustices because her gender and the law are against her—all these challenges are overcome. She taps into her intelligence and understanding of human nature to plan, execute and escape punishment while successfully avenging herself upon her husband.

Medea becomes a hero in the classical sense, and her main struggle against Jason and Creon is less compelling than her psychic one. She is split between warring selves. Her nurturing motherhood and her heroic avenger compete until she finally acts, and in that choice, she creates both suffering and triumph. The audience sympathizes with her and reviles her. Though she succeeds in the heroic sense by obtaining revenge, she ironically fails to avoid the ridicule which motivates her actions in the first place. Forced to obtain revenge, Medea acts as she has to, reminding us of the darker side of human nature and the power of a woman in the grip of something greater than herself.

Chapter 5—Revisions

BELOVED

Medea is based on the mythic past, in a time before time, while *Beloved* is the fictionalized story of a real slave and her decision to kill her child. Placing the two stories side by side raises a number of questions: How are Medea and Sethe alike, and how are their situations similar? Does the myth inform the novel? What truths from the human realm support the mythic? And what can both the human truth and mythic truth teach us about suffering, tragedy, and killing?

Medea and Sethe both kill their children as a reaction to their personal and cultural circumstances; they feel they have no other choice, and their agency, despite its horror, is effective. Medea's and Sethe's roles in the larger community come into play in the decisions they make, since the community has the opportunity to act or not act; therefore, the women function in isolation. Morrison is quoted in an interview with Paul Gilroy: ". . . Margaret Garner didn't do what Medea did and kill her children for some guy. [The killing] was for me this classic example of a person determined to be responsible" (1993, cited in Peach 109). Lillian Corti echoes this opinion: "Unlike Euripides' Jason or Morrison's schoolteacher . . . Sethe and Medea display the ability to accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions" (63). Corti also reminds us that these works reflect ". . . the psychological experience of the protagonist as one in which the self is attacked by a part of itself" (61). The struggle and its resulting actions are internal for both women: something inside them makes infanticide a logical option.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a modern tale of infanticide that explores the circumstances that drove Sethe to kill her baby, including the system of slavery she was living under and the abuses associated with it. Coupled with Sethe's fear of the master of the plantation is a fear of separation from her children because schoolteacher has the power to sell off any of them. Her various responses to the system of oppression show Sethe's self-sufficiency. She also draws strength from her motherhood, her family, and her ability to survive, but these same strengths ironically contribute to her hubris and isolate her from the Cincinnati community of fellow former slaves. Her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, too, becomes estranged from the community's spiritual center. But separation is not limited to people; Sethe disconnects herself from the painful memories which threaten her. She refuses to think or speak of those memories, and, as a result, becomes fixed in time and silence. By extension, this rejection of the past hurts Denver, Sethe's daughter.

The disconnect from memories is reflected the narrative style Morrison employs, as glimpsed stories and half-tales are visited and revisited until the story becomes clear for the reader. *Beloved* explores the psychological fall out of slavery from multiple points of view, as each character's narratives adds information and revisits earlier plot elements. Like the characters themselves, readers have to connect various story elements to reach a fuller understanding, and we only do so after we are invested in the characters. Before examining these elements, we need to summarize Sethe's story.

. . .

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* relates the story of a slave family in Cincinnati during Reconstruction, based on a newspaper clipping Morrison discovered when she was editing *The Black Book* in 1979, describing the actions of a slave named Margaret Garner. Steven Weisenburger explores the historical facts in his *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South* (1998). In short, in the winter of 1856, the Ohio River froze, allowing slaves to walk from Kentucky to free-state Ohio. Pursued and eventually discovered by her owner, Margaret Garner attempted to kill her children rather than have them return to slavery; she succeeded in killing her daughter Mary by slicing her throat. The resulting trial became a media sensation, with abolitionists rallying behind Margaret Garner, making her a symbol for their cause.

Morrison chose to tell the tale from multiple character's perspectives years after the baby was killed. In Morrison's handling of the story, Beloved, the ghost of the dead daughter, comes back in the flesh to Sethe's home, where she forces characters to face their own histories and memories, regardless of the pain. Through this ghost, Sethe faces daily the fact that she killed her own child, and the resulting psychic dynamic almost destroys Sethe. By contrast, by interacting with Beloved, Denver grows and creates hope for the future.

When *Beloved* opens, Sethe, the mother, is living in Cincinnati in 1873 with Denver, now eighteen-years-old. Sethe had been a slave on a Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home. The plantation was extraordinary for the autonomy afforded the slaves by their master, Mr. Garner. He allowed them to carry rifles, think for themselves, even learn to read and count if they wanted. Baby Suggs describes it: "The Garners . . . ran a special kind of slavery, treating them like paid labor, listening to what they said, teaching

them what they wanted to know. And he didn't stud his boys" (*Beloved* 140). The Sweet Home boys included three half-brothers, Paul A, Paul F, and Paul D, as well as Halle and Sixo, a slave with Indian blood. Sethe arrives on this plantation to replace the aging Baby Suggs, whose freedom had been purchased by her son, Halle. This act of purchasing freedom for his mother is the reason fourteen-year-old Sethe selects Halle as husband from among the Sweet Home men; they have four children together. When Garner dies, the plantation passes to Garner's brother-in-law, schoolteacher, and life goes from tolerable to unlivable under his tenure. He is an abusive master, so Sethe and Halle start to think about escaping after one of the brothers, Paul F, is sold to cover debts.

They do not all make it. Sethe, pregnant with her fourth child, succeeds in getting her three children into the underground railroad and sends them to Baby Suggs in Cincinnati. She goes back to Sweet Home to look for Halle but never finds him. Instead she finds Paul D, chained, learns that Sixo has been killed, and is then abused by schoolteacher's nephews, who hold her down and "milk" her of her breast milk "for sport." When she reports this crime to Mrs. Garner, she is whipped by those same boys. Then, because they have a "stampede" of runaway slaves on their hands, schoolteacher and the nephews ignore Sethe because "Who in hell or on earth would have thought that she would cut anyway? They must have believed, what with her belly and her back, that she wasn't going anywhere" (228). She escapes from Sweet Home by herself, walking to Cincinnati, following her children. Along the way, she goes into labor and, with the help of a runaway indentured white woman named Amy Denver, Sethe gives birth to a little girl by the Ohio River; she names the baby Denver. Stamp Paid—friend to Baby Suggs—finds her and ferries her across the river. She arrives at 124 Bluestone Road,

Cincinnati, and is nursed back to health. Her sons and her crawling-already? [sic] baby are safe with their grandmother, all of them on the lookout for news of Halle.

Twenty-eight days later, Stamp Paid comes to check on the baby he ferried across the river and is pleased to see she has made it. To commemorate the event, he picks two full buckets of blackberries. To celebrate the success of her daughter-in-law's and grandchildren's escaping from slavery, Baby Suggs uses the berries as an excuse for a feast; ninety neighbors come to eat, sing and eat some more of Baby Suggs' largesse. The next morning, however, they are resentful of that same abundance, so no one sends word when four white men on horses appear heading towards Bluestone Road. When Sethe recognizes schoolteacher's hat among the horsemen, she quickly drives her children into the woodshed and attempts to kill them rather than have them return to slavery. She succeeds in killing only the crawling-already? baby by removing her head with a hand-saw; the two boys are stunned, but alive. Stamp Paid steps in to save the newborn Denver, and schoolteacher leaves without reclaiming his slaves. Sethe is then arrested and jailed, baby Denver going along with her to prison. After three months she is released and the Bodwin's, the whites abolitionists who found the home for Baby Suggs when she was bought out of slavery, arrange for Sethe to get a job working as a cook for Sawyer.

When she gets out of jail, Sethe barters sex for a headstone for the dead baby's grave, and the ghost of the dead baby moves into their home. This ghost, whose existence is never questioned by the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road, worries the family with its poltergeist actions and behaviors while, at the same time, becomes a companion for the young Denver.

Time passes, and the community which celebrated Sethe's arrival rejects her because of her decision to kill. Baby Suggs, once a lay preacher and spiritual center of the community, withdraws and eventually lies down to die. In her pride, Sethe creates further distance when she refuses to sing at Baby Suggs' funeral: the community reciprocates by refusing to eat the food she has prepared for the funeral repast.

Eighteen years later, at the chronological opening of the novel, Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men, arrives at 124 Bluestone Road, drives the ghost out of the house, and begins to create a relationship with Sethe. He takes Sethe and Denver to a carnival, and when they return, they find a young woman asleep in their yard. Thinking she knows the house because it used to be a way-station for the Underground Railroad, they welcome her without question. By having the ghost of the crawling-already? baby return in the flesh, Morrison presents a unique ghost that challenges ghost-story conventions. This ghost-in-flesh model explains why Sethe fails to recognize Beloved as her returned daughter. Denver, on the other hand, realizes the ghost of her dead sister has come back in the flesh and determines to protect her again from her mother.

Beloved, however, needs little protection: she becomes jealous of and obsessed with Sethe, demanding much of her attention. When Paul D threatens to come between Beloved and Sethe, Beloved starts to "move" him with her "power," eventually isolating him in the cold house where she has sex with him, thinking this will make him go away. Although very effective, it does not work to remove him completely. Help comes in the form of Stamp Paid, who realizes that Paul D is the only one in the community who does not know of Sethe's crime. He takes it upon himself to inform Paul D of events eighteen years earlier, and Paul D leaves Sethe the same day.

Once Paul D is gone, Beloved makes herself known to her mother by singing a song Sethe made up for her children and which only her children would know. All of the earlier hints and clues finally click into place, and Sethe understands exactly who and what Beloved is and rejoices. If the baby, now grown, has returned to her, it must mean that the baby has forgiven her for killing it. What follows is Sethe's desire to make up for all the years she wasted and suffered without this daughter, and she resolves to give the girl anything and everything, which Beloved greedily takes. Sethe loses her job, uses up all her savings on sweets and toys, and eventually starts to be consumed by the greedy and selfish mentally eighteen-month-old Beloved. When they run out of food and start to starve, Denver takes it upon herself to petition the community for help, which she gets. By asking for help, she also makes the community's women aware of the ghost and her trouble at home, and on the very day Mr. Bodwin comes to bring Denver to her new job, a group of women arrive at 124 Bluestone Road to exorcise the ghost. In the confusion between the arrival of Bodwin and the women singing in the street, Sethe mistakes Bodwin for schoolteacher, returning to take her children away from her, and she goes after him with an ice-pick in her hand. The women, led by Denver, tackle Sethe to the ground, and in that moment, Beloved disappears, returning to where she came from.

The novel ends with the reappearance of Paul D, safe to return now that Beloved has gone. Denver, working at night and nursing her mother during the day, warns Paul D that Sethe is in a bad state and admonishes him to be careful with her. Paul D finds Sethe in bed waiting to die, much as Baby Suggs did. He comforts her, gives her hope for the future, and tells her he is there to stay.

Facing Schoolteacher

The marginalization and abuses suffered by the slaves of Sweet Home manifest in physical beatings and emotional abuse from a society which does not recognize them as anything other than chattel. Morrison uses animal imagery and images of silencing the characters to convey the mistreatment and exploitation of Sethe and her family.

Because both Medea and Sethe are placed in male-dominated societies which silences women and denies their rights, we see the males treating those beneath them like chattel and grossly underestimating their strengths. Unlike the character of Medea, who can voice a protest against the injustices she experiences (if only with the Chorus), Sethe is gagged as a slave and has few of the opportunities available to Medea, as she does not even have the freedom to move about beyond the borders of Sweet Home. Both women are basically recognized by the males in their societies for their ability to produce children, and the system under which they function gives the men the right to use them as they want. Additionally, because both women have influences which lead them to infanticide, Sethe's past reveals similarities to Medea's.

As slave, Sethe has no right to her own body and, subsequently, has a skewed sense of self. But this was not the case under Garner, because he did not demand more from her body than the work of her hands. In her formative years when she first arrived at Sweet Home and was in the process of selecting a husband from among the Sweet Home men, Sethe really did have a choice and the freedom to act on it. She took a year to determine which of the men she would marry, but we do not have the impression there was pressure from Garner to do so; he had not told her to produce offspring or to select a husband, nor demanded she lay with a particular man. Sethe must have felt in possession

of her own body, must have underestimated the freedom which was her choice to marry. She must have felt her children were hers. Garner's form of slavery might have indeed, ruined them all. Paul D

> grew up thinking that, of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only five of them were men. Allowed, encouraged to correct Garner, even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission. To buy a mother, choose a horse or a wife, handle guns, even learn reading if they wanted to— . . . they were believed and trusted, but most of all they were listened to. (125)

In such a situation, it is easy to see how the slaves at Sweet Home would find the treatment under a traditional slave owner onerous.

Once owned by schoolteacher, Garner's brother-in-law and a "traditional" master, Sethe has no right to her own body and has to realign her thinking; this realignment will influence her decisions later in the story when she takes control of the bodies of her children. In the socio-economic system that allowed the slave owner to dictate all uses of the body, Sethe's motherhood, something she was able to control under Garner through selecting her husband and having children, becomes something else with schoolteacher; he sees her as a breeder. Under schoolteacher, Sethe is reminded not only that she does not have rights to her own body, but the bodies of her children are not hers, either. Barbara Christian explains it this way, "On the one hand for slave women, motherhood was denied, devalued, obliterated by slavery since it was considered breeding, while on the other hand, it was critical to the concept of self and the very

survival of self" (338). Sethe's acknowledgment of this dichotomy is part of the psychological abuse she experiences.

Marianne Hirsch touches upon this in her *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* when she writes about *Beloved*,

> . . . the economy of slavery circumscribes not only the process of individuation and subject-formation, but also heightens and intensifies the experience of motherhood—of connection and separation. It raises questions about what it means to have a self and to give that self away. It raises questions about what *family* means and about the ways in which nuclear configurations (dominant in the master culture) prevail as points of reference even in economies in which they are thoroughly distorted and disrupted. If mothers cannot "own" their children or even themselves, they experience separation and loss all the more intensely. (6)

Schoolteacher's nephews beat her and steal her milk: Sethe's attempts to claim ownership of both her self and her children by escaping. When schoolteacher arrives to reclaim her and the children, she asserts ownership by attempting to kill them. This actions and her anticipated suicide are the central axis upon which the novel rotates. Like Medea, Sethe strikes at the very heart of her oppressor by claiming for herself that which the male dominant society does not acknowledge as hers. This forces Jason and schoolteacher to recognize ownership and agency. By seizing the children—something which Jason and schoolteacher did not acknowledge as belonging to the women—and then destroying them—an idea neither man would ever have entertained, both Medea and Sethe are able to stop their oppressors.

When we turn to Sethe and begin to explore her marginalization and her motivations for infanticide, we see some similarities to Euripides' Medea, because in Sethe's status as the property of Garner and then schoolteacher, she is abused both psychologically and physically. Because life under Garner is "good enough," Sethe believes that she is safe. She has stability and a loving husband. She had been married to Halle, who fathered all her children, for six years, "A blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one . . . A bigger fool never lived" (*Beloved* 23-4). Under Garner, Halle could work on other plantations to pay off his debt incurred when he purchased his mother's freedom. The death of Garner and the arrival of schoolteacher necessitate a re-alignment of Sethe and Halle's thinking. Sethe tries to understand what kind of master the new schoolteacher is, and to do that she also has to better understand Garner. She argues with Halle that Garner was a decent master because he let Halle buy his mother out of slavery. Halle explains how Garner got a bargain: "She worked here for ten years. I . . . pay him for her last years and in return he got you, me and three more coming up" (196). Halle understands that slavery is slavery, no matter who owns them, and that by allowing him to purchase Baby Suggs' last years, Garner got a return through the younger woman. Sethe could have children and thereby increase his holding, replacing Baby Suggs who was beyond child-bearing years. Because Sethe has not had to think of it in this way before, she did not fully understand that Garner's brand of slavery was still slavery.

Still, they had been safe under Garner's possession: safe from separation, safe from abuse and neglect. Once schoolteacher arrives, he imposes strictures and limitations on their actions, movements and food, and the autonomy they had under Garner reverses

itself as he introduces a more traditional form of slavery. Most threateningly, they are not at all safe from being divided and sold off. Sethe begins to understand real fear. Halle, forbidden to work away from Sweet Home anymore to pay off the debt of Baby Suggs, is, therefore, also unable to work to purchase Sethe, the children, or himself. The unspoken threat is that schoolteacher might sell one of their children to make up the money owed for Baby Suggs' purchase. About the money, Halle says, "He must have another way of getting it," and Sethe is sleepless with fear over schoolteacher's words, "while the boys is small" (197). Schoolteacher will wait until they are older to sell them. Sethe's concern and understanding becomes what Baby Suggs understood:

> Anyone Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (23)

The threat of the sale of one of the boys makes Sethe and Halle plan to run away. Sixo, the only slave who leaves the plantation and who knows the roads around Sweet Home, has heard of a train going north.

Treatment as Chattel

In order to better understand what drove Sethe to infanticide better, we look at the cruelty she endured under schoolteacher. Morrison uses animal imagery to illustrate

some of the abuses in this novel and initiates this imagery through schoolteacher, though it is not limited to him. His seeing the slaves as animals underscores his maltreatment; they are dehumanized to him. The way schoolteacher regards and treats his slaves intensifies their fear, since he sees them as chattel, specifically, no better than breeding stock. When they run away, schoolteacher speaks of his financial ruin because of his loss. Paul D would have to be sold for $900, and schoolteacher "set out to secure the breeding one, [Sethe's] foal and the other one, if he found him. . . . and maybe with the breeding one, her three pickaninnies and whatever the foal might be, he and his nephews would have seven niggers and Sweet Home would be worth the trouble it was causing him" (227). Schoolteacher needs to secure Sethe even more than he needs to secure Paul D, since she is property which can "reproduce itself without cost" (228). The startling image of schoolteacher's nephews digging a hole for her pregnant belly "so as not to hurt the baby" before they whip her back shows that their concern is only economic (203).

When schoolteacher starts studying the slaves like a scientist, measuring their heads and recording information about them, Sethe initially scoffs at the practice but eventually becomes concerned. Overhearing schoolteacher teaching the nephews about lining up Sethe's animal characteristics with her human ones, she understands how schoolteacher and his nephew view them. When she overhears this, she has a physical reaction, "Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp" (193), an image repeated throughout the novel, and which Sethe herself calls "hummingbirds." These little needles, prickling her scalp, appear when she asks Mrs. Garner for clarification of the word "characteristics." They appear later in the novel when Morrison describes Sethe's seeing schoolteacher's hat: "little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right

through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. . . she just flew" (163), and drives her children into the woodshed to kill them. The hummingbirds, signaling danger, reappear word for word as she attacks Bodwin at the close of the novel. Morrison uses other bird images for Sethe; Stamp Paid, when he tries to explain what happened that day in the woodshed, does not tell Paul D "how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws . . ." (157).

Morrison offers a different sense of animal imagery in the scene along the banks of the Ohio and in the exchange with Amy Denver. This time, since it is Sethe talking about herself and it occurs after her escape and is, in a sense, free, there is no insult as she describes her unborn baby as an antelope, an animal she has never seen, but one whom the slave community would name when they "danced the antelope" (31). Connecting her unborn baby to its African heritage—to an animal Sethe neither knows nor understands—speaks of both a longing to connect to the past and the forced break from it because of slavery. When Sethe tells Amy Denver she cannot walk nor even crawl to the lean-to Amy has found her, the young white woman reassures her that she can. Morrison describes Sethe on all fours, the baby antelope bucking in her stomach soothed by the sound of Amy's constant chatter. This scene presents for us a mixed image: on the one hand, Amy implies superiority over Sethe as she walks beside the woman crawling on all fours, but on the other, the sound of her voice soothe the baby, signaling that Amy is no threat for Sethe.

Before she even sees Amy, the voice—which sounds to Sethe like the voice of a boy—makes her hungry. Sethe describes, "I was hungry . . . just as hungry as could be for his eyes. . . I'm gonna eat his feet off. I was hungry to do it. Like a snake. All jaws

and hungry" (31). Here, Sethe is a predator, just as Medea is described as a "lioness" (Davie, 1358). She is willing to attack whoever is coming towards her if that person prevents her from getting to her children.

When schoolteacher finds her in the woodshed in Cincinnati, he describes how Sethe, who still had "at least ten good breeding years left" had

> gone wild due to the mishandling of the nephew who overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher has chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. . . . Suppose you beat the hounds thataway . . . you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success. (149)

By placing her worth with the farm animals, by calling her a creature and her whipping a "mishandling," schoolteacher represents the slaver influenced by what Linden Peach calls the "pseudo-science of hierarchies," motivated by pure profit. Peach reminds us that slavers were influenced by the books they were reading, which justified slavery as an economic system since the African-Americans were stigmatized as beasts (106). As with Medea's fighting against a political system that placed the power of law in the hands of men and people of full-Greek lineage, the slaves had no voice against the white men's sense of their own superiority. As Barbara Christian points out, schoolteacher and others "came to rely upon colonial anthropology and vulgar interpretations of Darwinism to give coherence and respectability to popularly held racists myths. . . schoolteacher's equivalents did write treatises on slaves based on scientific observation of them and measurement of various parts of the bodies" (Peach 106). Christian explains, "Schoolteacher not only exploits slaves, he is fascinated by the intellectual arguments he

constructs to rationalize that exploitation" (338). For this reason, he can "milk" Sethe in the barn, one nephew suckling while the other nephew holds her down. Schoolteacher records the milking, "watching and writing it up" (*Beloved* 70), as if he wanted to contribute to the body of moral arguments that justified slavery. Ironically, he writes of his "experiments" with the ink Sethe herself makes. At the novel's close, she explains to Paul D, "I made the ink, Paul D. He couldn't have done it if I hadn't made the ink" (271), in recognition of her forced complicity in her own abuse. The subsequent punishment she receives for reporting the milking is directly related to the infanticide; Sethe refuses to allow her children to return to Sweet Home under any circumstances.

As a result of his own treatment at the hand of the whites, Paul D becomes critical of Sethe when she tells him about the killing and describes her much as schoolteacher does. His reaction to Sethe's choice to kill her daughter is spoken of as animalistic when he reminds her "how many feet" she has. As Sethe tells him the story of the murder of the crawling-already? baby, Paul D, reasonable and calm, tells her that her love is "too thick." He says, "There could have been another way"; "What you did was wrong, Sethe." None of this gets through to her until he states, "'You got two feet, Sethe, not four,' he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (165). By counting her feet and calling her an animal, the relationship ends.

Paul D may not be able to understand Sethe's choice, but he understands that he has been cruel: "Later he would wonder what made him say it. The calves of his youth?" (165). Does he want to punish her for his sexual frustration all those years ago when the Sweet Home men waited a year for her to choose a husband from among them? Or for the fact that he was not chosen as her husband? Does he not understand her because he

never allowed himself to love anything fully, as she has? Having survived atrocities himself, does he feel she should have endured, as he himself endured? Through labeling Sethe this way, Paul D associates himself with schoolteacher, since both men reject her for the same act, despite the fact that both men thought they knew her. Schoolteacher brags of her soup and her ink; Paul D remembers the girl from his youth; both cannot understand her actions and describe her as an animal because of them. That Paul D is in any way connected to schoolteacher would be anathema to him, but the unity in the text is noteworthy (Byerman 31). Schoolteacher makes Paul D doubt everything he understood under Garner, for schoolteacher taught him that "they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke" (*Beloved* 125). Paul D is also abused as if he were an animal.

Another animal image which has relevance is a quick reference made about Sethe's behavior when Denver talks about her mother's strength of character early in the text. Denver describes how Sethe ". . . never looked away . . . when a man got stomped to death by a mare right in front of Sawyer's restaurant did not look away; and when a sow began eating her own litter did not look away then either" (12). The consumption of the young by the sow does not move Sethe. Do we attribute this to strength or to indifference? Denver sees it as a strength, coming as it does after her mother is described as "queenly" (12). Is it slavery that has made Sethe look horrible nature in the eye? Is it her own actions? This description of the sow parallels Sixo's stealing and eating the shoat

in a scene where he observes "Definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (190).

A final metaphor and one of the worst practices of American slavery is the use of the horse bit: slaves subjected to this abuse would have a bit placed in their mouth, like a horse. Paul D wears one after he is captured by schoolteacher. He is treated like an animal later in the story when he is caged underground in Alfred, Georgia in a grave-like box too small for him to lie in. To underscore his abused body, Morrison's final page presents to us a Paul D, captured, wearing "neck jewelry—its three wands, like attentive baby rattlers [snakes], curving two feet in the air" (273). When he tells Sethe that he could not speak to Halle the day of the escape because of the iron in his mouth, Sethe thinks about people who had worn the bit,

> how offended the tongue is, held down by the iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it. She already knew about it, had seen it time after time in the place before Sweet Home. Men, boys, little girls, women. The wildness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back. Days after it was taken out, goose fat was rubbed on the corners of the mouth but nothing to soothe the tongue or take the wildness out of the eye. (71)

The slave owners' desire "to tame" their slaves through treating them like horses simply creates more "wildness." The white men could not be convinced that the slaves were not animals, that "under every dark skin was a jungle" (198).

Sethe's Self-sufficiency and Motherhood: Milk as Metaphor

To survive such abuses as those she suffered under schoolteacher requires an extraordinary strength, and Sethe's source of strength is her children. Sethe worked alone to get the children out of slavery, and she succeeds because of her determination to save her children and her love for them. The knowledge they are waiting for her, the rush to get her milk to the baby, having extended family in the form her mother-in-law encourage her, as well. She defines herself through the children, despite the fact that by the time the novel begins, Howard and Buglar have run away from her. She brought her children out of Sweet Home and was brave enough to hand them over to total strangers in the Underground Railroad going north. Paul D, when he first arrives at 124 and hears about the escape, is "proud of her and annoyed by her. Proud she had done it; annoyed that she had not needed Halle or him in the doing" (8). Her independence from men, from needing their assistance, gives Sethe a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

The role of the mother as provider and nurturer is shown through images of milk, and Sethe takes great pride in her ability to nourish her children. Sethe herself was removed from her mother's breast a week or two after her birth, so she had to take the leavings after the white babies had nursed. She determines that no one will deny her own children their mother's milk as she had been denied. Sethe describes it in a stream of consciousness passage: "Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you, to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left" (200). Milk, then, is equated with nurturing and motherhood, and the absence of milk and the separation from the

mother become expressions of the oppression of slavery. According to Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems, milk and nursing are "representative of the great mother as embodiment of the feminine principle" seen in Morrison's works (102). For Sethe, milk represents life because she knows her children cannot live without hers. Her running from Sweet Home was not just for their sake, but because she was "Concerned . . . for life of her children's mother. . ." (30). Sethe explains it to Paul D:

> "I had milk," she said. "I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl. I hadn't stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Buglar. . . . All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it." (16)

Paul D states that men understand that a suckling cannot be separated from its mother, showing his empathy, and Sethe replies, "Then they know what it's like to send your children off when your breasts are full" (16). The image of full breasts, the insistent heaviness and expectation, the sense of urgency for the baby, may not be something a man can understand, but for Sethe it explains the extreme emotion she was experiencing, the length she was willing to go in running away. She was running "from" but mostly

running to her baby sent ahead; this thought—and the desire to get her milk to her baby girl—drives her (30). Sethe would have been worried about her breasts no longer producing milk because there was no nursing baby, so she must have felt that pressure, as well. Denver's arrival and with her delivery, the assurance of breast milk, solved this problem while it also amplifies this motif.

In addition to representing life for her children, Sethe defines her motherhood through milk. She does not simply have it, but it is abundant. If milk symbolizes motherhood, then its theft becomes for Sethe the ultimate insult when it is forced from her and, by extension, from her children. Schoolteacher's nephews hold her down and nurse off her in the barn. She tells Paul D, "After I left you, those boys came and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it" (17). When Paul D questions her about the punishment meted upon her after she tells Mrs. Garner what schoolteacher's nephews had done, Paul D's horror about the whipping and the beating when she was pregnant are not as outrageous to Sethe as the fact that they took her milk:

> "They used cowhide on you?"
>
> "And they took my milk."
>
> "They beat you and you was pregnant?"
>
> "And they took my milk!" (17)

Like Baby Suggs who cannot get beyond the fact that ". . . they came into my yard" (179), Sethe's sense of injustice is complete. She describes how "they handled me like I was the cow, no the goat, back behind the stable. . ." (200), treating her as a beast both during the milking and the beating.

This moment, Sethe later learns, becomes the moment that breaks Halle. Paul D realizes Halle must have seen the nephews abusing Sethe; unknown to her, Halle was in the loft above, unable to act. Paul D explains, "You said they stole your milk. I never knew what it was that messed him up. That was it, I guess. All I knew was that something broke him. Not a one of them years of Saturdays, Sundays, and nighttime extra work ever touched him. But whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig" (68). He then tells her how the break manifested itself: "Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face" (69). Halle snapped. After hearing Paul D's account, Sethe's outrage over Halle's inability to act makes her wild, and she wonders, "He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?" (69). Paul D tells her, "Hey! Hey! Let me tell you something. A man ain't a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can't chop down because they're inside" (69).

At this moment, Sethe would have killed the nephews if she could and becomes the chopping, hacking "ax" when she kills her own baby, in contrast, both Halle and Paul D take more feminine passive roles—probably saving their own lives—by refusing to act. Both men have their manhood broken by schoolteacher and the slavery they experience, but Sethe breaks in a different way and rises up to fight back in the only way she can and through the only choices at her disposal. Sethe also knows from Paul D's addition to this story that Halle will never return to her if he is alive. Again, eighteen-years after the events at Sweet Home, she experiences yet another loss as a result of schoolteacher and the nephews treating her like an animal. Lillian Corti explains, " . . . she does not understand the extent of what was done to her and to her children until years later, when

she learns from Paul D that her husband witnessed her humiliation and probably died because of it. Sethe's children have been deprived not only of their mother's milk but also of their father's support" (65).

Associated with her breast milk are the scars on her back, since her reporting the theft of her breast milk results in the "opening of her back" with rawhide. Amy Denver calls the shape of the wounds a choke-cherry tree. Morrison writes,

> Amy unfastened the back of her dress and said "Come here, Jesus," when she saw. Sethe guessed it must be bad because after that call to Jesus Amy didn't speak for a while. In the silence of an Amy struck dumb for a change, Sethe felt the fingers of those good hands lightly touch her back. . . . "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. . . You got a mighty lot of branches. . . . Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. . . . I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this." (79)

The associations of tree to family and breast milk to motherhood are very clear, as are the outward scars as manifestation of the suffering of slavery. In essence, her scars and breasts are front and back of the same person, representing in sum the complete woman she is.

Rafael Pérez-Torres states that Amy Denver's description of her back as a tree "transformed" the whipping into "an image of fruition instead of oppression" and that "Amy gives back to Sethe her identity as a nurturing source" (187). Sharon Rose Wilson writes of the mythic aspect of trees—"from Sethe's mother's hanging and Sixo's ironic "crucifixion"—. . . to Baby Suggs' sermons in a clearing surrounded by trees and Denver's Emerald Closet" and their connection to goddess imagery and a "re-visioned

myth of transformation" (81-82). Trees have both positive and negative connotations throughout the novel. That the "tree" on Sethe's back is transformative is without doubt, since, as a result of the scars and the whipping, she refuses to ever return to Sweet Home at any cost, even if the cost is the lives of her children. Sethe tells Paul D that the first whipping she received would be the last, and both the milking and the whipping create a Sethe who is willing to do anything to prevent exposing her children to such treatment.

After she explains the events of her escape to Paul D, she breaks down, as he examines the whipping scars on her back while holding her breasts. Both her motherhood and her sacrifices are being honored by Paul D, and Sethe thinks that perhaps she can "trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank" (*Beloved* 18).

At this moment, the ghost of the crawling-already? baby makes its presence known and starts to shake the house in anger. This ghost has inhabited 124 Bluestone road for years since Sethe traded sex with the stonecutter to place "Beloved"—one of two words Sethe heard at the baby's funeral—on the tombstone. The ghost, a spiritual manifestation of the ignored past and repressed memories, eventually drives Howard and Buglar away and worries Baby Suggs until she lies down to die. The instant Sethe acknowledges the burden of repressing her memories—admitting to herself that she may want to expiate these memories by remembering them, the past makes itself physically present. With this passage, she concedes that she cannot do it alone, and that she needs the assistance of a community, even if it is the community of two people. Because Paul D's history is her history, she can allow herself to open up part of herself because he shared Sweet Home: he will understand. Has the ghost recognized that Sethe is ready to

move beyond the moment of the baby's death and move into her future? Paul D has stepped into the ghosts' realm and is taking from the ghost that which the ghost has not had to share, perhaps something which the ghost feels he has no privileges to. The crawling-already? ghost can share Sethe with Denver—they are sisters, after all, but Paul D is an interloper on her space and especially on her mother. He will take the focus off the ghost and perhaps even allow Sethe to forget. The ghost strikes back, fighting against Paul D; he drives the ghost away, wrecking the kitchen in the process.

After Paul D removes the ghost, he takes Sethe to bed—something he had longed to do since she was fourteen and a new girl on Sweet Home. Paul D's idealized image of the unreachable woman, once obtained, cannot ever live up to twenty-five years of dreaming about her. After sex, he "saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat roundness of them that he could definitely live without, never mind that downstairs he had held them as though they were the most expensive part of himself" (21). His rejection of her breasts at this point in the narrative mirrors his later rejection of her and shows Sethe's inability to compete with his idealized image of her. He will begin to understand that she has, naturally, changed, and part of Paul D's difficulty throughout this novel is that he thought he knew her. For him, she was frozen in time and he remembers her at eighteen, but he is he willing to learn about this older Sethe. The "transformative" tree on her back is just the beginning of what he will learn.

Nursing and milk become more metaphorical later in the story's chronology. When Paul D first meets Denver, he tells her, "Last time I saw your mama, you were pushing out the front of her dress." Sethe replies, "Still is . . . provided she can get in it" (11), demonstrating Sethe's sense of Denver's immaturity or fear. Yet Sethe says this to

Paul D as a joke, and with pride, since the nurturing aspect of Sethe's character is most defining. Nursing as nurturing becomes related to food, and the novel is rife with images of Sethe's cooking and everyone else's eating. It is not a mistake that she works at a restaurant cooking and sustaining strangers, that her pies sell out every time, that she defines herself by her ability to feed the whole world because "She had milk enough for all" (100).

Nursing and milk are alluded to in a later scene in relation to Beloved. In trying to determine whether to make a future with Paul D, Sethe goes to the clearing where Baby Suggs preached and has the sensation of being choked. Sethe thinks it is the ghost of Baby Suggs who chokes her; she does not realize at this point that Beloved is the crawling-already? baby who was killed. Unlike Denver, Sethe is never fully aware of Beloved's power to manipulate objects or to disappear. As Sethe begins to make up her mind that she might have a future with Paul D, Beloved starts to choke her without touching her, much as she wrecked the kitchen when Sethe thought about sharing her past with Paul D. Afterwards, Beloved strokes Sethe's neck and then kisses and keeps on kissing Sethe's neck. Sethe thinks, "She later believed that it was because the girl's breath was exactly like new milk that she said to her, stern and frowning, "You too old for that" (98). Yet Sethe fails to recognize her own daughter.

She discovers who Beloved is immediately following the warm milk and almond she gives the girls to warm them. They had gone ice skating and sliding on the creek, laughing and falling, and return to the house cold. As they warm themselves around the fire, Beloved hums a song Sethe created for her children back on Sweet Home: "It was then, when Beloved finished humming, that Sethe recalled the click—the settling of

pieces into places designed and made especially for them. No milk spilled from her cup because her hand was not shaking" (175); Sethe understands, milk in hand, the treasure that has been handed to her.

Yet another source of strength—as well as excessive pride—comes from her success and self-sufficiency in the tasks she takes upon herself, mostly for the sake of the children. When she tells him about the murder of the baby, Sethe tries to explain to Paul D what it meant to her to be successful:

> I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up until then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but still it was me doing it; me saying *Go on,* and *Now.* Me having to look out. Me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here . . . there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. (162)

By running away Sethe learns about freedom but also is able to recognize the power of her own self. She learns of her own capacity to act, the choose, to create life. This strength comes from the freedom she earns and is mostly associated with the children she

loves, whom she can love fully since they belong to her now, not to schoolteacher. The expansion, the swelling–both of happiness for a deed well-done and with the pride of having done something momentous to make the lives of her children better—makes her "[pause] to consider the size of the miracle; its flavor" (161). She tries to explain the unexplainable to Paul D, to "tell him what she had not told Baby Suggs, the only person she felt obliged to explain anything to" (161): having experienced this feeling, it was impossible for her to return to slavery.

Her language reinforces this strength when she describes what happens when schoolteacher finds her: "I stopped him . . . I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (164). Sethe can see no choice, because "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (200). The realistic paradox of Sethe's statement is profound. When Paul D tries to reason with her to see that there might have been some other way, he is surprised by Sethe's conviction that her reasoning was sound and her actions incontrovertible. Keith Byerman writes,

> Her action, terrible though it is, makes a claim for agency and responsibility. Furthermore, her refusal to repudiate (as opposed to regret) her action only adds to the complexity of the problem. Her choice reflects a sense of history in that she knows that her daughter will suffer in the same ways as previous generations of black women. (31)

All these long years later, she does not question the legitimacy of her actions in the woodshed, and would do exactly the same again—indeed, tries her best to do them again when she attacks Bodwin at the end of the novel.

What Sethe fails to consider is that where there is life, there is hope, and that, as Bodwin claims as his "one clear directive: human life is holy, all of it" (*Beloved* 260). By making the choice for her crawling-already? daughter, she takes the role of mother who "knows what's best" for the children, and places them irrevocably beyond the reach of any evil—her only motivation.

Another strength that Sethe can rely upon is her family; unlike many marginalized women, she has someone to go to when she runs from Sweet Home. Baby Suggs becomes the point, and Sethe moves toward her not only because she has nowhere else to go, but because she would not consider anywhere else; she stays with Baby Suggs because Halle would certainly come to his mother if he doesn't come to his wife (69). Although the women were not at Sweet Home together, and "Baby Suggs never laid eyes on her till John carried her to the door with a baby strapped on her chest" (187), Sethe makes a home with Baby Suggs as they wait for Halle. Baby Suggs becomes the mother Sethe never had and is a source of real strength for her, at least until the baby's murder. Sethe claims, "There was nothing to be done other than what was done, but Sethe blamed herself for Baby Suggs' collapse. However many times Baby denied it, Sethe knew the grief at 124 started when she jumped down off the wagon, her newborn tied to her chest in the underwear of a whitegirl looking for Boston" (90). Even after, it is still to Baby Suggs' caressing fingers that Sethe turns years later because "Nine years without the fingers or the voice of Baby Suggs was too much" (86).

A final strength Sethe has comes from her capacity to love. Although Paul D claims her love is "too thick", she replies, "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (164). Early in the novel, Paul D thinks that such love is

> Risky. . . very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one. (45)

But Sethe doesn't see love that way; the only thing she needs or wants is her children, and she does not care about being ostracized from the community, so long as she has her children around her. After Paul D comes and presents to her an alternative to her loneliness, she opens her heart to him, just as she welcomes Beloved when she does not know who she is.

Sethe's Isolation

Unlike Medea's triumphant ending and glorious chariot-driven exit from the scene of the infanticide, Sethe's punishment is the basis of the novel, and the years between the murder and the final release from suffering are long and difficult for her. Not surprisingly, much of her trouble is self-generated and self-sustaining. According to Corti, this is because it reflects her "riveting degree of moral resolution; it is as if Sethe were to say that she would do it all again" (63). The unexpected consequence of her decision to kill the baby is the resulting separation she experiences from the community; perhaps she thought they would understand why she did it. Like *Medea's* chorus, which serves as witness to events and refuses to act, commenting afterwards on the protagonist's struggle, Sethe's community feels no culpability in their failure to act to save the children and rejects Sethe based on her actions and the resulting pride she takes

from that action. Ironically, the very sources of Sethe's strength—pride, family, and independence—also cause her to murder. Her hubris leads to isolation and pain. Sethe never admits that the killing of the baby was a mistake or a wrong action—not to the community, to Baby Suggs or even herself. This creates a distance between her and those around her as well as internal disconnections, specifically her connection to her own past. Because she is so rigid in her ideas and inflexible in her thinking, she lacks the moderation that would allow her to get along with and in the world.

Sethe reveals her this rigidity to Paul D when she explains to him that she "put my babies where they'd be safe." Paul D's reaction to this is like the reaction of the community; his sense of outrage derives not so much from "what she had done" but "what she claimed. It scared him" (164). Sethe is adamant about wanting to keep her children from schoolteacher at any cost. She develops a strong pride around her success in doing so, parallel to her pride in escaping. That she does not care *how* she keeps the children safe from schoolteacher makes Paul D tremble: "This here Sethe was new." He had thought she was like Halle, obedient, shy and work-crazy. He thought she had not removed the ghost because she could not: "That she lived with 124 in helpless, apologetic resignation because she had no choice." When he discovers what Stamp Paid was trying to tell him about Sethe and he learns the truth of the killing, he realizes he was wrong (164). "This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began" (164).

In the minds of the community, she manifests the truth "pride goeth before a fall," and "just about everybody in town was longing for Sethe to come on difficult times. Her

outrageous claims, her self-sufficiency seemed to demand it" (171). Therese Higgins argues that

> her failure to seek assistance of the community, of the village, is perceived as arrogance which cannot be and is not tolerated by the community as a whole and by the women in particular. Sethe, for her part, believes that the community will not help her even if she did ask which, of course, is erroneous. So what she fails to do because she fears rejection causes the rejection. (104)

We can see evidence of this when she goes to the carnival, "her first social outing in eighteen years"; she overdresses for the occasion and is "embarrassed at being dressed for church. The others . . . would think she was putting on airs, letting them know that she was different because she lived in a house with two stories; tougher, because she could do and survive things they believed she should neither do nor survive" (*Beloved* 47). She thinks the community will think badly of her, possibly because she feels guilty, and her pattern of keeping herself aloof perpetuates her isolation.

At the end of the novel Janey Wagon shows us that the years have not changed the women's opinion of Sethe's pride; when Denver comes to ask for work and Janey questions Denver about Sethe's health, the description "wasn't the description she remembered. This Sethe lost her wits, finally, as Janey knew she would—trying to do it all alone with her nose in the air" (254). Ella describes Sethe as "prideful, misdirected and . . . too complicated" and describes her crime as "staggering [but] her pride outstripped even that" (256).

Sethe's lack of apology or remorse for the deed and insistence that she had done the only possible thing to keep the children safe isolates her from Paul D just as it had from the community. And what Paul D sees that Sethe cannot is that they are *not* safe, that "what she wanted for her children was exactly what was missing from 124" (164). This may be for the simple reason that Sethe herself was the greatest threat to the children; they are afraid of her. Sethe thinks she is responsible for their safety because she has always worked alone. Because she has not called upon the community for help, she does not understand the power that comes from being a member of it.

After her escape from Sweet Home, Sethe enjoys the twenty-eight days of friendship, yet "Those twenty-eight happy days were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" (173). Her loneliness can only be tolerated because she has Denver and hopes her boys will return. Such crushing ill-will from the community and its resulting isolation, either genuine or perceived, would cripple a weaker woman's spirit. Then Paul D—a concrete reminder of the past—begins the process of uniting Sethe with the community. When Paul D brings Sethe and Denver to the carnival, the community is not overly welcoming, but not cold, either. Morrison writes from Denver's perspective about Paul D: ". . . there was something about him . . . that made the stares of the other Negroes kind, gentle, something Denver did not remember seeing in their faces. Several even nodded and smiled at her mother, no one, apparently, able to withstand sharing the pleasure Paul D was having" (48). Paul D helps Sethe reconnect again with the community, and perhaps, because everyone is in a celebratory mood and can be generous, they drop their anger towards her for the day. Either way, the end of her isolation would not have happened without Paul D. As if it is too much for the ghost of

the crawling-already? baby to run the risk of being separated from Sethe, the day of the carnival and its glimmer of hope for a connection to the community is the very day that the ghost arrives at 124 in the flesh.

The Spirit of Baby Suggs

In marked contrast to Medea, who has completely cut herself off from any family who may have helped her, Sethe can rely on Baby Suggs as well as her children for support. When Baby Suggs dies, she does not leave but stays at the house as a spirit: a clearer representation of the past imposing itself on the present cannot be imagined, but because this is a blessed past, it is also a welcome one. Through her, we also see that not all the other-worldy aspects of this novel are malicious.

Baby Suggs' connection with the spirit world has two facets: she is "called" to preach the Word, and she becomes a spirit in her own right after she is dead. The calling stems from the feeling she had when she first crossed the Ohio into freedom: ". . . she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn't; that Halle, who had never drawn free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in this world" (141). Freedom opens her heart and she shares it with her community. Baby Suggs became an "unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it," and "She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (88). Her calling, disassociated with any specific religion, heals the community through faith and acceptance, asking them to believe in and love themselves, for if they will not, no one else will. This "mountain" of a woman who

has so much love and faith that she must share it with the community loses all of it with Sethe's decision to kill her children. When Baby Suggs gives up on life and starts contemplating color, Stamp Paid believes she is angry with God and blaming Him for what happened; what he doesn't understand is that she would not know what to say to her congregation were she to preach because her understanding of the world is called into question:

> Her authority in the pulpit, her dance in the Clearing, her powerful Call (she didn't deliver sermons or preach—insisting she was too ignorant for that—she *called* and the hearing heard)—all that had been mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard. God puzzled her and she was too ashamed of Him to say so. (177)

God spoke through her, but it didn't make a difference and they—the white slavers—came into her yard to reclaim their property. Morrison writes, "The heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn't count. They came into her yard anyway and she could neither approve nor condemn Sethe's rough choice" (180). She cannot blame her daughter-in-law, and she cannot blame God, but she can blame the white man: the gifts of being free, owning property, speaking the Word—none of it meant anything in the end. She gives up preaching because she does not know what to say to others. Like Paul D's questioning his manhood and what he knows as true, Baby Suggs discovers that everything she thought was not so was; consequently, she, like her daughter-in-law, stops thinking.

The other aspect of her spirit life is that her ghost does not leave 124, remaining there to help Sethe and Denver. Although she rejects the community in response to their

lack of action the day the horsemen appear, she refuses to abandon the women who remain. As a connection to the past and to the history of both Sethe and Denver, Baby Suggs is crucial to the novel's conclusion; were she completely to pass out of the plot, there would be no one with the authority to place the past where it belongs. Grandma Baby is a bridge for Denver when her mother, who refuses to speak of her past, is busy dealing with Beloved. To Sethe, her spirit in the keeping room brings comfort and Sethe misses Baby Suggs' presence and comfort, but that is all. By contrast, Baby Suggs converses with Denver and becomes the catalyst that moves Denver into her future.

Food as Alienating

Milk represents nurturing; stolen milk represents slavery. Morrison uses the images of food and feasting to represent the power of community: it can nurture or it can starve its own members. Sethe's eventual healing depends upon the community's intervention into her life through food, just as her isolation had been because of an overabundance of it. Food images throughout the novel either draw community together or push it apart. Potatoes cooked by Sixo; a piece of fried eel in Sethe's hand as she waits on the bank of the Ohio; the corn celebrating the marriage of Halle and Sethe; the candy purchased for Denver at the carnival; the celebratory meal Sethe cooks after determining to create a future with Paul D; the appeal for food at the end of the novel because the women at 124 are starving—these examples show how hospitality and empathy are shown through sharing food. But food also alienates in this novel, demonstrated by the resentment after the respective celebratory feasts commemorating Sethe's escape from slavery and Baby Suggs' funeral.

The celebratory feast begins with Stamp's two full buckets of hard-earned blackberries that he brings to 124 because he was happy that Denver and Sethe have escaped. Baby Suggs, wanting to do "something with the fruit worthy of the man's labor and his love," made pies, and, "because three pies, maybe four, were too much to keep for one's own," she invited others until 90 people feasted late into the night (136). But then,

> Baby Suggs' three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe's two hens became five turkeys. The one block of ice brought all the way from Cincinnati—over which they poured mashed watermelon mixed with sugar and mint to make a punch—became a wagonload of ice cakes for a washtub full of strawberry shrug. 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? (137)

The resentment stems, ironically, from Baby Suggs' generosity, which the community sees as pride. Had she not invited the neighbors and had she kept the pies to herself, she would have been better off, because

> To take two buckets of blackberries and make ten, maybe twelve pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town, pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice *and* sugar, batter bread, bread pudding, raised bread, shortbread—it made them mad. Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as

> God knows they had. Who had not even escaped slavery—had, in fact, been *bought* out of it by a doting son and *driven* to the Ohio River in a wagon—free papers folded between her breasts (driven by the very man who had been her master, who also paid her resettlement fee—name of Garner), and rented a house with *two* floors *and* a well from the Bodwins . . . It made them furious. (137)

Baby Suggs should have known the community's response. In Morrison's description of Baby Suggs' life at 124 before the trouble happens, she says that "Talk was low and to the point—for Baby Suggs, holy, didn't approve of extra. 'Everything depends on knowing how much,' she said, and 'Good is knowing when to stop'" (87). In her happiness over the successful escape of her grandchildren, "When the idea of a whoop moved to the front of her brain," she holds it back, "not wishing to hurt [Halle's] chances by thanking God too soon" (135). But with the feast she goes too far, according to the community, and they do not stop schoolteacher and the others because, "Maybe they just wanted to know if Baby really was special, blessed in some way they were not" (157). Their resentment at her good fortune and their desire to bring her down a peg is not less hurtful because she understands their motivation. The day after the party she "smells disapproval" and "free-floating repulsion" and comes to realize, "Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (138). The result of this feast and the aftermath of the killing force Baby Suggs to separate herself from the community irrevocably. Morrison writes,

> After sixty years of losing children to the people who chewed up her life and spit it out like a fish bone; after five years of freedom given to her by

> her last child, who bought her future with his, exchanged it, so to speak, so she could have one whether he did or not—to lose him too; to acquire a daughter and grandchildren and see that daughter slay the children (or try to); to belong to a community of other free Negroes—to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed—and then have that community step back and hold itself at a distance—well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy. (177)

Therese Higgins explains the resentment of the community and connects Morrison's work to the Lovedu people of Africa, who believe "that what one has, one shares" and that the receivers will reciprocate. Because the community in *Beloved* cannot give back in kind, they resent Baby for it (104). Yet, by the end of the novel the community will return the good will and food to Denver; without knowing it, they give much more than they received. Baby Suggs was celebrating with excess; the food they give to Denver keeps her and her family from starving, so they are actually giving in *greater* measure.

When Baby Suggs cuts herself off from the community, she inadvertently removes Sethe from it. People stopping by to see Baby Suggs would naturally have had contact with Denver and Sethe in the same house, but the rejection of the community by Baby Suggs also removes Sethe; without Baby Suggs to bridge the gap, there is no way for Sethe to connect. They may have forgiven Sethe because of their love for Baby Suggs, but once Baby Suggs closes her doors, they do not have to forgive. And because Baby Suggs does not blame the community for failing to send warning across the field when schoolteacher arrives, they do not even have to forgive themselves. Why doesn't

Baby Suggs, who had given so much to those around her, call her neighbors out on their lack of warning? They do not seem, in the years between the celebratory feast and the novel's beginning, to have worried themselves much over their lack of action. Stamp Paid recognizes the neighbor's lack of effort for what it is, when he thinks to himself, ". . . he's always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing—like, well, like meanness—that let them stand aside, or not pay attention, or tell themselves somebody else was probably bearing the news already . . ." (157). All of this leaves Baby Suggs indifferent; she quits speaking the Word in the clearing, and lies down to die because "she could not approve or condemn Sethe's rough choice" (180).

After the murder, Sethe's haughty pride and lack of remorse prevents her from crying at the dead baby's funeral, just as she doesn't cry when she is placed in a wagon commandeered to drive her to prison: "Holding the living child, Sethe walked past [members of the community] in their silence and hers. . . . Was her head a bit too high? Her back a bit too straight? Probably" (152). After Baby Suggs dies, another feast is held, but rather than causing problems, this one simply highlights them:

> The setting-up was held in the yard because nobody besides [Stamp Paid] would enter 124—an injury Sethe answered with another by refusing to attend the service Reverend Pike presided over. She went instead to the gravesite, whose silence she competed with as she stood there not joining the hymns the others sang with all their hearts. That insult spawned another by the mourners: back in the yard of 124, they ate the food they brought and did not touch Sethe's, who did not touch theirs and forbade

> Denver to. So Baby Suggs, holy, having devoted her free life to harmony, was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite. (171)

The community suffers from the loss of Baby Suggs, because no one can replace her. Stamp Paid, as representative of the neighborhood, had tried to persuade Baby Suggs to stay within that community after the feast and the infanticide, but Baby Suggs is too isolated by Sethe's choice and by the psychological vestiges of slavery. She never recovers to unite with the community again. We would think that the loss of such an important and well-loved member of the community would soften the other members of that community toward Sethe, as they might forgive her for Baby Suggs' sake. When Sethe doesn't allow herself to suffer or show weakness, they, too, respond with excessive pride. When her voice does not blend with theirs, when she does not cry with them, she pushes them further away and they push back until the chasm is too wide to cross and Sethe is alone with her misery and her past.

Ironically, the rejection by schoolteacher is what allows for her freedom, but really Sethe simply becomes isolated from the community because of her pride. She holds herself aloof, implying by her rejections of those around her that she is better than they are, that she does not need them, nor does she want to associate with them. They resent her for it completely, as they remind themselves that they are better than she, since they never killed their own children. They could not have anticipated what was going to happen in the woodshed as a result of not warning Baby Suggs of schoolteacher's presence; most likely they expected Sethe to be returned to slavery. When she murders her baby, their culpability in the event is eclipsed by Sethe's; what they did was spiteful

and wrong: what she did was unspeakable. Fully aware of their feelings about her actions in the woodshed, she removes herself from their scorn: "She didn't want to jostle them or be jostled by them. Feel their judgment or their pity. . ." (191). In her mind she does not need them—she has her children.

Silence

Morrison's handling of the events surrounding Margaret Garner's escape from slavery in 1856 contrasts earlier slave narratives, written for a predominantly white audience. Samuels and Hudson Weems write, "What concerns Morrison in *Beloved*, however, is not what history has recorded in the slave narratives but what it has omitted" (96). By allowing readers to experience her characters' memories of slavery, Morrison gives voice to the experiences and suffering of slaves, yet, at the same time, she silences her characters for much of the novel. By the novel's end, however, the many silences are broken.

The community's rejection of Baby and of Sethe manifests in silence; no one speaks to Sethe, Sethe speaks to no one, and 124, the house which was itself a symbol of communication since it functioned as a half-way house for the underground rail road, falls silent except for the ghost. It appears that the ghost was a pest before Denver started going to Lady Jones' to learn to read. After Nelson Lord, a fellow student, asks the questions, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104), everything changes for Denver:

> The monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost. Before Nelson Lord,

> she had been barely interested in its antics. The patience of her mother and grandmother in its presence made her indifferent to it. Then it began to irritate her, wear her out with its mischief. That was when she walked off to follow the children to Lady Jones' house-school. (103)

Apparently, the ghost feels abandoned by Denver because Denver is gone each afternoon. The answers to Nelson Lord's questions, once she puts them to Sethe, are enough to deafen Denver because "the thing that leapt up in her when he asked it was a thing that had been lying there all along," and "terrifying things about her mother were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her" (102). Jean Wyatt explains that "Denver's deafness and mutism are hysterical; that is, they are without physiological cause" and are associated with an "intergenerational transmission of trauma" (67, 66), because Denver cannot reconcile the mother she loves with the murderer she knows her to be. This comes from the lack of communication about the events of Denver's youth and the "trauma" Sethe has experienced. Sethe spends all her time and energy fighting off her memories and refuses to speak of events others can remember and that for Denver are only half-rumors and fragmented stories. Denver never learns from Sethe the horrors Sethe was trying to avoid.

Wyatt tells us that because Sethe refuses to speak of the murder, Denver physically manifests the silence through her inability to hear and speak (69). When Denver does gather the strength to ask her mother about Nelson Lord's questions, she doesn't hear the answer and spends two years in utter silence:

> The return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs,

> signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite. Buglar and Howard grew furious at the company of the women in the house, and spent in sullen reproach any time they had away from their odd work in town carrying water and feed in the stables. (*Beloved* 104)

Perhaps Denver's returning from Lady Jones' house school allows the baby ghost to vent her anger; certainly Denver's deafness forces her to stay home, close to the house and therefore close to the ghost. The others in the household start to leave: Howard and Buglar run away, and Baby Suggs responds by lying down in bed to die.

The deafness and muteness of Denver are examples of silencing and stifling associated with the mouth and throat. All are instances of the subjugation of slaves and of women. From the very beginning, we see examples of the refusal to speak, from Sixo's no longer speaking English back on Sweet Home to Baby Suggs' refusing to speak the Word in the clearing after the baby is killed. When she sees her mother hanged, Sethe starts to stutter. When Sethe uses her voice to speak out against the injustice she experiences at the hands of schoolteacher and the nephews, she protests to Mrs. Garner, who is herself unable to speak because of a goiter. Sethe is whipped as a result of her complaint. And as Sethe is being milked by the nephews, Halle is silenced, watching from the loft above her, unable to speak or move, and, as a result, silenced forever in Sethe's life, since she believes he will never return to her. Paul D, likewise, is silenced with a horse bit in his mouth at Sweet Home and can only make eye contact in Alfred, Georgia, with his fellow inmates. It is he who tells Stamp Paid, "That ain't her mouth" (154) when shown the image from the newspaper clipping reporting Sethe's crime. Even

Beloved is choked by a raisin and goes on to choke her mother in the clearing. And as the baby is buried, Sethe hears only two words of the service at her daughter's graveside.

As the first novel which gives voice to the psychological complexity and vestiges of slavery, Morrison moves her readers from silence to speaking, from repressing memory to embracing the past, from denying the body to embracing, renaming, and finally, to loving it. She does all of that through the character of Beloved, the past come alive.

Chapter 6—Haunted Visions

Imbalance and Infanticide

The circumstances and history which brings Sethe to this moment create in her an imbalance. Whereas Medea took up the sword and assumed a masculine heroic model, Sethe's imbalance takes a different form: she becomes more feminine—not in the nurturing sense, but in the sense of an animal protecting its young. She focuses solely on her children and the desire to protect them. Her terror of returning to slavery drives out any other thoughts; she does not think—she acts. Medea understands the suffering she will create for herself, hesitates, and rationalizes her actions to herself, yet still chooses to kill the children, having weighed her options fully. Medea acknowledges the nurturing mother and the warrior avenger, and chooses one over the other. Sethe has no such ability; she is pure mother and acts only on love. To Sethe, there is no choice.

Sethe's infanticide, as horrible as it is, is not the only occurrence in this novel of infanticide; as infanticide was familiar to slave women. Like the Chorus of *Medea* speaking of Ino's killing her children, we hear of other examples in *Beloved*, and, as with *Medea*, there is a marked difference between the circumstances: Ino kills her children in a fit of madness imposed by Hera and afterwards throws herself in the sea. Her madness and subsequent suicide lead the Chorus to feel she cannot be blamed for her actions. Any number of myths have a child killed or exposed because of some curse or to circumvent potential tragedy. The true story of Margaret Garner's killing her daughter Mary is just

the first infanticide in Garner's tragedy: as she and her family are shipped down river to be sold in Arkansas after the trial, the boat collides with another boat and a number of people drown, among them, Margaret's daughter Cilla. According to the reports, Margaret was joyous at the news that her daughter had drowned and had therefore escaped slavery, and it is uncertain if the daughter was thrown in the river by her mother or if she fell in during the confusion (Weisenburger 224-25). In *Beloved,* Ella and Sethe's mother destroy their babies by the white men who raped them, establishing a parallel history and a pattern of mothers killing children. Nan, the slave who nursed the babies on the plantation where Sethe was born, tells Sethe,

> "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe," and she did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him." (62)

That Sethe's mother was raped by the white men and threw her babies away makes her infanticide acceptable. Ella has the same experience: "She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by 'the lowest yet.' It lived five days never making a sound" (258-59). Ella refuses to nurse the child, and it starves to death—a clear contrast to the motif of milk in Sethe's narrative. What makes Sethe's infanticide so unacceptable is both her lack of remorse and her belief that she will be keeping the children safe by killing them. Her claiming their bodies as her own and deciding the way they die—to her thinking their deaths are inevitable under schoolteacher, just as Medea knows her sons

will answer for the deaths of Creon and Glauce—is perhaps understandable: she knows they will not suffer if she kills them. She does not consider the act of murder or the pain associated with it; she simply needs to get them beyond the reach of schoolteacher through whatever means possible. Jan Furman writes,

> Morrison renders the terrible moment with perfect reason and clarity. Practiced Morrison readers may phrase a note of sorrow for the painful inevitability of things, but they never ask why. The feeble question is left to the sadistic slavemaster schoolteacher and his nephews. (Paul D and the community ostracize Sethe but not because they cannot understand why she acts: they question her right to do so.) (69)

Her lack of remorse angers the community, that and the fact that though they have been waiting for Sethe to suffer, she does not seem to, and they resent her for it. They cannot see her isolation as anything other than self-imposed, and their memory is at once discriminating and very long. When the community angrily envies all the things Baby Suggs has—her freedom, a house with a well, the calling, her grandchildren around her—they selectively forget that seven of her eight children were sold or that a damaged hip gave her constant pain, but they can dismiss these things because they have all suffered. With Sethe, it is the same because her suffering has not been greater than theirs, and the community can hold themselves above her, smug in the knowledge they have never acted as she had. Ella "understood Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it . . ." (*Beloved* 256). They had all endured atrocities under slavery—some of them worse than Sethe—but they had come through without murdering their children.

Had the community asked, Sethe could have explained her reasons to them, since the community already knew her reasons: "That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (251). But Sethe refuses to allow her children to suffer in the same way: "And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let that happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children" (251). Marianne Hirsch explains, "When Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children's lives, no voice in their upbringing . . ." (197).

Sethe's rigidity about what she did stems from her belief that "There was nothing to be done other than what she had done . . ." (*Beloved* 90), and that the baby's death was "perfect." This is the real problem: Sethe saw no other available solution; therefore, she does not regret her decision to kill her own child. Her extreme behavior stems from something within her—she does not seem to have the flexibility of mind to consider other options because, for her, killing the baby was the only way to keep her from schoolteacher. Sethe's psychic problem is that she feels the infanticide was a good thing: she did not reason it through or see, as Paul D suggests, that there might have been some other way. Additionally, she is as firm of mind about the decision as she was eighteen years earlier, and the ensuing years of suffering and solitude have not changed her opinion about what she did. This firmness of mind and singleness of purpose can be admirable in some circumstances, but Sethe's extreme fanaticism about keeping the children from schoolteacher is like her ability to avoid thinking about the past.

Memory and Rememory

Because Paul D is from Sethe's past, she is forced to remember Sweet Home and to revisit the stories associated with it. But these memories threaten her; thus, one of her strengths is her ability to separate herself from her past by cutting off her painful memories. The result, however, is that Sethe loses a portion of herself. By refusing to think about her past, she has locked it in time and thinks she is keeping it at bay; she does not allow herself to process the abuses by thinking about them, and she, in essence, disassociates herself from part of herself, as "she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (6). The power of memory is stronger even than Sethe's will, however, so recollections slide back to her consciousness when she least expects them:

> She might be hurrying across a field . . . Nothing else would be on her mind. . . Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; of Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled out before her in shameless beauty. (6)

Because memory comes upon her unwittingly, Sethe cannot trust herself to think about anything, and as a result, becomes frozen in time, unable to plan for the future, unwilling to revisit the past. What she does not understand—cannot understand—is that if she does not come to terms with her past, she cannot move into her future. What adds to her refusal to think about the past is her fear for Denver: Sethe believes that her past can

impose itself on Denver's life, and Sethe's every objective is to keep Denver safe. Since "nothing ever dies" (36), the memory of Sweet Home as a dangerous place is real. Sethe explains to Denver, "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. . . even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there." When Denver asks if others can see these pictures, Sethe explains that a person can

> bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. . . . Because even though it's all over . . . it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what. (36)

Denver again asks for clarification, commenting, "If it's still out there, waiting, that must mean nothing ever dies." Sethe tells her, "Nothing ever does" (36). Sethe's belief in memory and the power of the past never to go away completely explains her inability to move forward, since she is literally fighting these memories. The inadvertent result is that Denver, too, is stuck in stasis, without a past or a future.

With the arrival of Paul D to 124 Bluestone, Sethe has to allow some of that past to enter her mind, but rather than seeing a change, we find that she is just as firm in thinking her decisions were the right ones as they were when she originally made them.

By not thinking about them, by not being introspective, Sethe shows a lack of processing and growth. Since she does not think about the events of the woodshed, they never move into the realm of memory for her. Because she does not have to think about them nor explain them, they remain the immoderate ones she made eighteen years before. This continued lack of moderation results in a lack of self-healing. When she decides in the Clearing that she wants to make a future with Paul D, she plans eventually to hear his story and tell him her own; she recognizes that a future must include its past, and she plans to put the story of the murder behind her. In her mind, she will be able to make Paul D understand what the community has failed to understand, because "her story was bearable because it was his as well" (99). Having endured schoolteacher, Sethe thinks Paul D will grasp what she had intended for her children in a way the community does not. Instead, he points out her imbalance by calling her love "too thick," counts her feet, and leaves.

Otherworldly Elements—Return of Beloved

Morrison gives the power of memory a force with a life of its own, and, as Sethe learns again through telling her story and subsequently, by being rejected by Paul D, memory is dangerous. Sethe thinks it is especially dangerous because one person's memory can impose itself on another. Morrison plays with this idea, and the ghost of the crawling already? baby becomes the physical manifestation of memory and of the past.

Much has been written about the nature of this particular ghost, and Morrison forces us to re-define ghost stories and introduces us to a ghost-become-flesh in the character of Beloved. As a "traditional" ghost or spirit, there was little she could do or

affect; we see this for the years that she "haunts" 124, once her tombstone is placed above her grave and she is given a name. Initially, the ghost is just a worrisome nuisance. The women of the house attribute this to the fact that the ghost is just a baby. Sethe believes the ghost drives off her two boys, when "the house committed what was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time" (3). Denver does not think this is true, for "If so, what took them so long? They had lived with it as long as she had" (103). What, then, brings about the change in the ghost? Apparently, the ghost feels abandoned by Denver once Denver starts going to Lady Jones' to learn to read.

In order for the ghost to fulfill her childish wish for her mother's presence or her malicious desire for revenge, she must become more than simply the mischievous presence who turned over slop jars or crumbled soda crackers, strewing them in a line. Once flesh, she retains many "un-human" or "super-human" abilities associated with the spirit world or with poltergeists: she moves silently, is able to disappear, lifts the rocker with one hand, levitates Denver, chokes herself and her mother. Beloved is described as having no lines in her hands or feet, signs which many members of the community understand to mean that she is a ghost, and, like Janey, to admit, "I guess there is a God after all" (254). What the community cannot see is how Beloved enslaves the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road, though they know that one "Might see anything at all at 124" (185).

In her *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Trudier Harris calls Beloved "a witch, a ghost, a devil, a succubus . . . a demon" (153) and later a "vampire" (155). She can also be seen as a physical manifestation of the past—history come alive and memory incarnate. The nineteen-year-old has the mental capacity and desires of an

eighteen-month-old baby about to enter the terrible two's. How she actually comes to be at 124 on the day of the carnival is never explained because Beloved does not have the language to make clear what happened to her, and Morrison does not explain Beloved's passage from the other world to this one. Those familiar with African traditional tales recognize that Morrison turned to the African abiku and ogbanje ghosts for her model of Beloved. According to A. B. Ellis, the Yoruba-speaking people believed that the world was inhabited by many spirits who, because they are hungry and cold, tried to inhabit a child's body. Since there are more abiku than bodies to inhabit, the abikus outside demand sustenance of the abiku inhabiting the child, and eventually the abiku inside the child and the child himself waste away. According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, this abiku "remains an elusive child who disorients his parents and the community because of his many incarnations and cultural pluralism" (664). Ogunyemi explains:

> As an agonist, the abiku emerges as a perverse, ghostly intimation of a horrendous past, a critique of a tedious present, and a reminder of a mortality. . . The parent hopes that, with communal support, the abiku child, willful, unruly, and different in outlook, will choose to remain in the world of the living, deferring death and movement to the other place. (663-4). . . . The child's desire for attention keeps parent and child intensely invested in each other. Though the parent is initially in control, as the situation worsens, s/he cedes authority to the child, who enslaves the parent. (666)

Clearly, Morrison draws upon this tradition with the relationship of Sethe and Beloved, as her plot follows Ogenyemi's outline almost perfectly; the only variation is that Sethe does not seek the community's help.

Dismemberment—Narrative Style and Structure

Dismemberment, both physical and psychological, is woven into the fabric of this novel and is specifically seen in the ghost of Beloved. It is also appears in the broken families, a character's physical dismemberment, the lack of connection to one's own past, and Morrison's fractured narrative. All these elements are representatives of slavery.

Whether readers are familiar with Yoruba ghost stories or not, Morrison has made newed the ghost story genre, as she makes her ghost a thinking, feeling character, one who has difficulties holding herself together; Beloved is afraid of breaking into pieces. We are led to understand that the ghost making herself flesh, becoming manifest, apparently requires some effort or consciousness on her part. As a baby, her throat was cut, spilling the blood out and soaking Sethe's chest, her "eyes staring between the wet fingers that held her face so her head wouldn't fall off" (150). More than once, Morrison narrates that Beloved's emotional difficulties manifest in her literal trouble with holding her body together. After Sethe invites Paul D back to her bedroom and Beloved learns that she has lost the power she had gained over him through their sexual relations, Beloved loses a tooth. Morrison describes her feelings:

> Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe

> all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. (133)

Exploding reminds us of the throat cutting, her blood pumping down through her mother's fingers. Being swallowed associates Beloved with Denver's taking the baby's blood right along with her mother's milk. What a perfect metaphor for this girl, who has the best of her mother and the worst of her in the same gulp! The murderer/nurturer scares Denver every day of her life, for she understands what her mother is capable of—has known it from her youth. Beloved, by contrast, has experienced Denver's fear first hand; her fear is lack of control. She is afraid of losing her mother and of losing control of her physical self.

Beloved's dread of exploding or falling apart mirrors the larger pattern of dismemberment we see throughout the novel. Examples include the stories of a headless ghost-bride behind Sweet Home, images of Nan missing a hand or Here Boy breaking into pieces when the ghost throws him against the wall, dislocating his eye and breaking two of his legs. When Beloved disappears from Denver in the cold shed, in her grief over the loss, Denver "does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream" (123). She, too, feels split apart. At the novel's close, even Sethe worries about keeping herself together; Paul D offers to bathe her, and she wonders, "Will he do it in sections?

First her face, then her hands, her thighs, her feet, her back? Ending with her exhausted breasts? And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?" (272).

More important than physical dismemberment for the characters, though, is being cut off from family or loved ones and being cut off from one's own memory. It does not matter if this is a conscious decision, as with Sethe and Paul D, or unconscious one, as with Denver; the inability to come to terms with the past prevents any hope of the future for the characters, perhaps with the exception of Paul D. His hopes in the beginning of the novel are small: "If he could do those things [walk, eat, sleep, sing]—with a little sex thrown in—he asked for no more, for more required him to dwell on Halle's face and Sixo's laughing. To recall trembling in a box built into the ground" (41). Just as he "loves" small, he also hopes small. Like Sethe, he disconnects himself from his memories to avoid the pain they cause him. He locks all his memories in his "tin box" of a heart, which subsequently rusts shut.

The community, in contrast, remembers clearly and constantly the events which Sethe tries so hard to suppress. Their remembering as they look at Sethe or hurry to pass 124 Bluestone Road makes Sethe stifle the memories even further. She feels—correctly—they are judging her constantly for the actions of eighteen years ago. No one can get beyond the single fact of the baby's murder, and until they do, both the community and the inhabitants of 124 are atrophied, cut off from either themselves or each other.

Drummond Mbalia explains how the ghost "succeeds in dividing 124 from the rest of the African community. It is she who drives Howard and Buglar from home . . . she who separates Paul D, Sethe, and Denver" (91). This separation motif is an extension

of slavery. Ghosts are usually perceived as "disembodied," as the ghost of the crawling-already? baby acts as a poltergeist for all the years before she becomes flesh. Baby Suggs herself becomes only fingers in the Clearing to Sethe, just a voice to Denver at the end. Baby Suggs reinforces this idea of the body in pieces as she asks the community to love their flesh, their eyes, their mouths, their livers, and finally their hearts. Dismemberment, both figurative and literal, is connected with its opposite: "re-membering" and with remembering as characters have to recognize ownership of the bodies which had not belonged to them when they were slaves. Sethe explains it when she speaks of her twenty-eight days of freedom: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (*Beloved* 95). Baby Suggs asks them to claim for themselves their own bodies, and with them, their histories. Characters in this novel have to rebuild themselves, accept their past as a part of their present, and embrace and love themselves. Sethe also reflects this "ownership" of her children as she drives them towards the woodshed after seeing schoolteacher's hat among the horsemen in the road: "She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them" (163). In her analysis of this novel Sharon Rose Wilson associates these actions with goddesses who try to burn away their children's mortality by placing them in a sacred fire (79). Examples appear in the Egyptian Isis myth and with Demeter with Demophon; we can also relate these women to Medea's convincing the daughters to cut Pelias into pieces to avoid infirmity and to delay death. The obvious connection is to the Osiris and Isis myth, where Set (or Seth), Osiris' jealous brother, kills him and cuts him into pieces, scattering them around Egypt. Isis, as loving

wife, re-members her husband's body parts and binds them together in cloth (the etiological source of mummification), and he enters the underworld to be king of the dead. Horus, Osiris' son, enacts the revenge for his father's murder. In *Beloved,* Sethe re-members her past and builds the stories of her life, but she will be on the receiving end of revenge when her daughter returns.

The fractured families and people parallel the fractured nature of the narration. The shifting narrators, the re-working and revisiting the same story thread from different perspectives, prevents us from seeing the whole picture before we invest in the characters. Linden Peach describes the narratives as a quilt, since "None of the narratives in *Beloved* can be read independently of another . . ." (110). The characters themselves give each other snippets and sections of stories, illuminating the past, adding to the picture until the stories are finally placed in their appropriate position to make a larger picture. Paul D, for example, fills in a piece of missing information about Halle, which lets Sethe know he will not be returning and so her wait for him is over, clearing a path to create a future with Paul D. Linden Peach attributes this idea of "re-memory" to "a dispossessed people. Since slavery destroyed not only whole communities but entire families. . . the only way in which individuals could acquire any sense of their ancestral line was to possess and piece together the stories and memories of others" (102). Morrison's style of fragmenting the narrative, reminiscent of William Faulkner, is in reaction to slave narratives, which "sought to be all-inclusive eye-witness accounts of the material conditions of slavery" (Mobley 359). As a narrative style and as a motif, piecing together the stories from the smaller pieces of information allows readers to come to the

story slowly, to commit to the characters and the plot before we discover who actually killed the baby.

Denver and Beloved

Denver, the first to recognize Beloved, desires to protect her from Sethe, knowing that she is capable of murdering again. From the moment she sees Beloved, Denver is "shaking. She looked at this sleepy beauty and wanted more" (*Beloved* 53). Her hunger for her sister is based on the profound loneliness she suffers for eighteen years, and Sethe is happy her daughter has a companion and encourages the friendship. But Denver becomes obsessed with Beloved and is desperate to always protect her from their mother; she assumes the nurturing, protective role: she hides the sheets when Beloved wets the bed, teaches her to tie her shoes, feeds her sweets to soothe her, and comforts her much as a mother would. Denver becomes enthralled with and terrified that her sister will leave. She is also hurt that she herself is not the main reason Beloved has come back.

When Beloved chokes her mother in the Clearing as Sethe is trying to determine if she can build a life with Paul D, Denver is fully aware that her sister is doing it. Why the complacency? Denver feels she cannot lose Beloved by having her leave, so desperate is she to have someone who can end her loneliness. Morrison writes,

> During the first days after Paul D moved in, Denver stayed in her emerald closet as long as she could, lonely as a mountain and almost as big, thinking everybody had somebody but her; thinking even a ghost's company was denied her. So when she saw the black dress with two

> unlaced shoes beneath it she trembled with secret thanks. Whatever her power and however she used it, Beloved was *hers*. Denver was alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe, but felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love another. The display she witnessed at the Clearing shamed her because the choice between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict. (104)

When Denver challenges her sister about the choking, she is warned to watch herself, and Denver cedes her power in the same way her mother does later in the novel. In essence, Beloved forces Denver into another silence. When Beloved "disappears" in the cold shed and Denver believes she may have "gone back" to where she came from, she knows

> This is worse than when Paul D came to 124 and she cried helplessly into the stove. This is worse. Then it was for herself. Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. . . . Denver breaks into sobs. She doesn't move to the open door because there is no world out there. . . . She won't put up with another leaving, another trick. Waking up to find one brother then another not at the bottom of the bed . . . her mother's hand on the keeping-room door and her voice saying, "Baby Suggs is gone, Denver." (123)

Denver's desperate loneliness consumes her. So when Paul D's and Beloved's sex in the shed is so loud that it wakes her, Denver does not say a word, for if Sethe were to know, Beloved would probably be sent away, and Denver would lose the only friend she has.

Morrison describes Denver's need in terms of food and hunger, connecting to the

earlier motifs of community and milk. She expresses Denver's love for Beloved as "beyond appetite . . . a place beyond hunger" (119), saying she will "inhale deeply the sweet air from her mouth" as Beloved sleeps (121). So although Beloved has no need of love from Denver, Beloved has complete control over her because of Denver's own need. Denver's fear of her sister's departing and obsession with her comes partially from being so desperately lonely her whole life, but also from the information passed to her from Baby Suggs. In a stream of consciousness passage, Denver explains how she has nothing to fear from Beloved. Baby Suggs "said the ghost was after Ma'am and her too for not doing anything to stop it. But it would never hurt me" (209) because she had "swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (205). Denver subsequently believes she is "charmed" and all the evidence proves it: she survived her mother's attack in the woodshed, lived when she was born so very prematurely, and was delivered by a whitewoman who appeared to help her mother in a boat along the Ohio River.

More than the loneliness makes Denver cling so desperately to Beloved; Beloved allows Denver to learn about her mother. The same could be shown through Paul D; when he first arrives, Sethe acts like a young girl, swinging her bare feet and flirting, and Denver sees another side to her—not necessarily one she likes, since Denver has been, until Paul D's arrival, the center of Sethe's attention. By answering Beloved's demanding questions about Sethe's past—"Tell me your diamonds"; "Your woman she never fix up your hair?" (58, 63)—Denver begins to learn more about her mother's history even as Sethe revisits memories she forgot she knew. Despite the fact that Denver learns through these conversations, she discovers nothing more about *why* Sethe did what she did, since Sethe still cannot think about it enough to talk about it. Byerman suggests,

erroneously, that "By accepting Beloved, Denver can erase the psychological damage of having a mother who kills daughters. The restoration of the sister means that Sethe's threat is removed" (32). If this is so, why does she spend the balance of the novel after Beloved's return trying to protect Beloved from her mother? Denver feels threatened on every page of the novel, and she actually increases her watchfulness, as she must assume responsibility for Beloved *and* herself. Maybe, like Sethe, she sees Beloved's return as a gesture that Beloved has forgiven her mother for cutting her throat, but unlike Sethe's belief that if Beloved returned, then perhaps her boys will, too, Denver holds no such expectations. Like Here Boy, who "won't be back" (55), Denver knows her brothers are gone for good, and it is on her shoulders to guard and protect Beloved.

Paul D and Beloved

Paul D, last of the Sweet Home men, presents a male-oriented look at the ghost as he maintains an outsider's perspective on the events at 124 Bluestone Road; he serves the narrative purpose of adding the story of what happened after Sweet Home. As a bridge between Sethe's past and her present, he helps her connect to her own memories and facilitates healing. He also initially overpowers the ghost of 124; after he passes through the pulsing red light, Paul D fights not to cry. This struggle between masculine and feminine behaviors is at the center of Paul D's growth and healing. When he understands the suffering imposed upon both women by the ghost, he fights back physically and verbally. Trudier Harris explains that Paul D sees the house as both threatening and emasculating:

> For Paul D, . . . the house is immediately his enemy, a veritable threat. . . . the spirit of maleness in this initial battle seems stronger even than Beloved's supernaturalism. . . His vocal masculine will is stronger than her silent, though sometimes noisy, desire. The power of his voice to command behavior, even that of spirits, is ultimately stronger than the spirit's desire to resist. (155-6)

Harris also explains that the ghost has not truly been exorcised by Paul D but has withdrawn to gather power and plan an even greater return (155); this is true if we consider that the next time she comes, she returns in human form. We revisit the motif of femininity and reproduction, since both are needed in order for the ghost to become flesh. A male passing through the red light—the menses? the hymen?—is the catalyst for the arrival of the ghost, for we are reminded that the last time a man passed through the door was when Stamp Paid carried Baby Suggs out. Denver and Sethe's simply invoking the ghost of crawling-already? after Baby Suggs' death wasn't enough: Denver and Sethe hold hands and say, "Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on" (4). Sethe's sex with Paul D calls Beloved up and will bring the past to Sethe literally, just as Paul D's sex with Beloved will call up his heart. Sharon Jessee claims that Beloved comes "because Sethe *brings her back with her thoughts"* (134), but how can that be when Sethe has lived with the ghost for years and nothing has changed to bring her to 124 except for the arrival of Paul D? I agree with Jessee when she claims that " . . . Paul D gave Sethe a safe place in which she could 'remember things' and 'feel the hurt' she had repressed for eighteen years" (134), but she had hardly started to allow herself to remember anything in the "safety" before Beloved shows up. Paul D's passing through

the pulsing light of "virginity," Sethe's "water breaking" when she sees Beloved's face, and the sexual union itself "create" Beloved and reinforce the motif of feminine reproduction seen in the twenty-eight days Sethe was free and the nine months that Beloved is with them.

It is important that Paul D's intuition goes on high alert once he sees Beloved, because one character in the novel has to be distanced enough to create a conflict: the women have embraced her wholeheartedly. Even before the ghost arrives, he knows that Denver is "expecting something and it ain't me. . . whatever it is, she thinks I'm interrupting it" (41). His recognition of the oddness clinging to Beloved keeps him from initially falling under her spell, and he sees her as the "enemy" for the whole novel: ". . . Beloved was different. . . It bothered him. Maybe it was just the fact that he didn't bother her. Or it could be timing. She had appeared and been taken in on the very day Sethe and he had patched up their quarrel, gone out in public and had a good time—like a family. . . He wanted her out . . ." (66). Like Here Boy who disappears the moment Beloved appears, Paul D is aware of something, and the idea of someone else's memory comes into play, since he never really knew the crawling-already? baby, so she cannot be *his* memory. The power of his unease, however, is like the power of a memory. Sethe talks of memory being like a "picture floating around out there outside my head" and, that a person can "[bump] into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (36). Paul D's reaction to Beloved is like a character's experiencing someone else's memory. He tells Stamp Paid, "First minute I saw her I didn't want to be nowhere around her. Something funny about her. . . She reminds me of something. Something, look like, I'm supposed to remember" (234). He knows the past is dangerous, as does Sethe, who spends all her time

and energy "beating back the past" (73), and if Beloved reminds him of something, it can only be something from his own past—something he has successfully avoided since Sweet Home and Alfred, Georgia. By disconnecting himself from his past—something he thinks he does to protect himself—he also cuts part of himself off from his consciousness, which leaves him fractured and incomplete. But if Beloved is the past, she forces the past upon the present. In her stream of consciousness passage, she states, "All of it is now it is always now" (210) showing that for her, the past is the present (and her future) and that the past imposes itself on the present always. By blocking it off, Paul D limits his present.

Because Paul D comes between Beloved and her love object, Beloved must remove him, and she does this by further emasculating him; he cannot refuse her sex. By having sex with her, he loses control of his masculine power through an ironic twist, as she dominates him. If he is sleeping with his "past," his tobacco tin heart—which had rusted shut—can open, and he has to embrace and internalize his past if he is going to move forward. He has to touch both Beloved *and* himself "on the inside part" (117).

The "hunger" used to describe Denver's feeling towards Beloved is repeated through Paul D's lack of control when it comes to Beloved. She begins to move him physically away from Sethe. He describes, "But it was more than appetite that humiliated him and made him wonder if schoolteacher was right. It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he was able to do about it" (126). The control Beloved has over him makes him wonder if he is a man, for schoolteacher is convinced that the slaves of Sweet Home are less than men, and with Beloved, Paul D finds that this is so because a "girl young enough to be his daughter . . . cracked his resolve" and made

him "a rag doll" (126). Just as she has with her mother, Beloved can destroy Paul D by consuming him and by creating a hunger in him, a hunger which he can neither control nor deny. Paul D thought he had command of himself, but she makes him question the foundations of his manhood, as his body "betrays" him just as it did in Alfred, Georgia. Using parallel language to Denver's fear of losing Beloved is Paul D's inability to resist her:

> For his life he could not walk up the glistening white stairs in the evening; for his life he could not stay in the kitchen, in the keeping room, in the storeroom at night. And he tried. He held his breath the way he had when he ducked into the mud; steeled his heart the way he had when the trembling began. But it was worse than that, worse than the blood eddy he had controlled with a sledge hammer . . . It was he. . . who could not go or stay put where he wanted to in 124—shame" (126)

That this ghost and her control of him are *worse* than the worst he had experienced is a testimony to her abilities and her malignancy. He knows that by having sex with Beloved he risks losing Sethe, and because he finds himself incapable of fighting Beloved, he needs to turn to Sethe for assistance even though it "shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him . . ." (127). In contrast to other characters in the novel asking or not asking for help, it is important to see that Paul D *does* ask, and the results are positive.

Ironically, sleeping with Sethe, the imagined girl of all those years, does not open his heart the way sleeping with Beloved does. In his mind, is he sleeping with the younger version of the imagined woman, trying to recapture himself as he was when she

was young? If not, then why does the desire to have Sethe pregnant fly out of his mouth when he goes to her to confess that Beloved was "moving" him? He claims he "could not command his feet, but he thought he could still talk and he made up his mind to break out that way. He would tell Sethe about the last three weeks" (126) of sex with Beloved. Instead of the truth, he blurts out that he wants Sethe to carry his child. Sethe is Paul D's "solution: a way to hold onto her, document his manhood and break out of the girl's spell—all in one" (128), and, as he walks Sethe home from work, "snatching at each other's fingers, stealing quick pats on the behind [they were] "Joyfully embarrassed to be that grown-up and that young at the same time" (129). Intuitively, again, Paul D understands that to appeal to this woman by how she defines herself (as mother) will soften her towards him.

But it is not to be, as the news of Sethe's past from Stamp Paid moves him more than his own past does. Trudier Harris observes it will

> force him off the premises altogether. After all, what option does he have? To stay is to contemplate the violations he has committed—sleeping with a woman who has been much abused and abusing her further by sleeping with her daughter/ghost. To go or to stay is to contemplate a possible further evil—having slept with the devil—either in the form of the mother or the daughter. (Harris 157)

Paul D becomes, once again, a wandering man, "ineffectual and ultimately homeless" (Byerman 35), but now he has nowhere to wander to, as the object of his eighteen years of wandering has been realized; before he knew the information from Stamp Paid, he had a sense of a expectation—something to look forward to in the form of seeing Sethe and

Baby Suggs again, but once he hears about the murder, he is cut off from any potential future. Beloved, either in her ghost-made-flesh form or through the fact of her murder, has stopped him cold, and he can neither leave Cincinnati nor go back to 124. The opening of his heart and recognition of his own history is not enough to heal him; he has to act upon the internal changes by deciding whether he wants a future with Sethe; implicit in this future would be forgiving her for past decisions. He must also reclaim his own body, which has betrayed him by having sex with Beloved when he simply did not want to desire her. Finally, he must face his history and his own memories, which threaten so often, and put them behind him by planning for the future.

Byerman explains the difficulty Paul D experiences in this novel as a problem of compliance. Whereas "Sethe takes responsibility for the future by destroying it," and "her action, terrible though it is, makes a claim for agency and responsibility" (32, 31), Paul D, by comparison, "calls into question his self-definition; because he has only reacted, though courageously, he is made guilty of acquiescence to the system of domination" (32). We see this in his submissive relationship with the weaver woman in Delaware, and we see the passivity again with Beloved when she approaches him for sex in the cold shed. Until he acts for and by himself, he, like Sethe, is held captive by his past.

Sethe and Beloved

Once she recognizes who Beloved is, Sethe does her very best to make up for the murder and the eighteen years of separation; the resulting dynamic between them almost destroys Sethe, as Beloved will not forgive her mother nor allow her mother to move on, creating a cycle of abuse, guilt, and destruction.

Different from her control over Denver and Paul D, who are able to eventually leave 124, Beloved enslaves her mother most completely. Initially, "Sethe was flattered by Beloved's open, quiet devotion" (57). Storytelling "became a way to feed her" (58) and replaces milk as Sethe's nutrition for the girl. Because she forces Sethe to re-live her past and makes Sethe "[remember] something she forgot she knew" (61), Beloved reinforces the idea that she is literally a manifestation of memory. Sethe does not recognize her immediately the way Denver does; therefore, Sethe is able initially to disassociate herself from Beloved, which allows her relationship with Paul D to develop. Once Paul D is gone and she knows who Beloved is, she can focus only on her crawling-already? baby. Beloved had always taken as much as she could from those around her, and in their kindness, Sethe and Denver had given willingly, but once Sethe knows who and what Beloved is, she can deny her nothing. Beloved starts demanding at such a rate that Sethe "effectively destroys herself, her home, and her relationships through this obsession" (Byerman 35). Sethe realizes she will not have to explain herself since the baby has come back to her and, as Sethe thinks, remembers everything. Yet Sethe goes to great lengths to explain herself anyway. She almost becomes compulsive in her desire to have her daughter understand why she did what she did. Ironically, at the same time, she tells herself that she does not to have to remember any more. By saying so to herself, she is simply allowing herself finally to remember. The reader, therefore, can piece together all the earlier snippets of fractured stories. We have a clearer understanding of her motivation when she no longer *has* to fight off the memories, or when they are presented to us as half-images which come upon her when she least expects them.

Once the reason for repressing her memories is removed, Sethe is succinct in her explanation as if she were talking directly to Beloved. No longer having to "[beat] back the past" sets Sethe free (73), and she can remember whatever she wants because the memories cannot cause her the harm they had previously. We can see through Morrison's structure of stream of consciousness how the memories come upon Sethe, like a flood or a wave. Sethe begins to embrace them. But, as Byerman tells us, "To recover the past is to recover slavery, which is the effect Beloved has on Sethe" (32). Sethe simply replaces one master with another.

Beloved, however, could not care less about understanding Sethe's motivation in murdering her; she only wants to take and take from her mother. This is where critics start to use the word *vampire* for Beloved. After a month of playing house,

> the mood changed and the arguments began. . . . and the more [Beloved] took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children. . . Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would change places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. (*Beloved* 241-42)

Sethe loses balance and perspective, unable to reconcile her guilt or properly explain; what she does not realize is that she is dealing with a ghost who has the mental capacity of an eighteen-month-old and who will never stop, never forgive her mother for abandoning her. In a distorted inversion of the milk metaphor, where all Sethe wanted to do was nurture her children, Beloved starts to consume her mother right along with all the

food in the house; when they run low, Sethe does without until "there wasn't a piece of clothing in the house that didn't sag on her" (239). Denver finds a way to feed them—something the other two women do not even wonder about because they are too focused on each other. The food gives Sethe and Beloved enough strength to keep fighting. Denver realizes

> even when Beloved was quiet, dreamy, minding her own business, Sethe got her going again. Whispering, muttering some justification. Some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come. It was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out. (252)

Beloved unconsciously uses Sethe's maternal instinct against her, stating those things which would be most hurtful to any mother—that she cried alone, that she was abandoned, that men abused her, that she was hungry (241). Beloved strikes at Sethe's core, because she strikes at Sethe's fears for her children. Sethe meant to keep her children safe by killing them, and yet they are not safe; through the arguing with Beloved, Sethe learns she has to place her failure at keeping Beloved safe alongside having murdered her. In trying to make herself understood, Sethe loses herself. Morrison writes: "Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (251). Denver also understands "Sethe's greatest fear was the same one Denver had in the beginning—that Beloved might leave" (251). She simply cannot convince her eighteen-month-old-minded daughter that "what she had done was right because it came from true love" (251), and she cannot see the impossibility of trying.

Sethe's struggle to make Beloved understand is heroic, and she truly believes she will succeed and that her daughter will know it was done for her own good. On the second page of the novel, when ten-year-old Denver and her mother call the ghost to end the "persecution," Sethe tells Denver that "if she would only come, I could make it clear to her" (4). Sethe is convinced she has ability to make the baby ghost understand because, although "For a baby she throws a powerful spell," Sethe knows it is "No more powerful than the way I loved her" (4). Love is going to make everything right. Everyone else, even those who love her, reject her for her actions: when Beloved, too, refuses to forgive her, Sethe—like Halle—snaps.

She loses herself in trying to please Beloved, revealed by the way Sethe ignores Denver, since the two "were only interested in each other" and Sethe "cut Denver out completely" (240). If Sethe defines herself through her motherhood and loves her children more than herself, then her treatment of Denver shows clearly that she is unbalanced. Denver begins to have trouble telling the two women apart as they play, since Beloved mimics her mother's actions and voice, and Sethe gets thinner and thinner. As a bizarre doppelganger, Sethe and Beloved both have a singleness of purpose, which excludes everything else, including Denver. This goes on for months, wearing all of them out and eventually terrifying Denver.

Connecting to the Past and Motherhood

Sethe's lack of experience with her mother and through her, her own history creates an incomplete picture for Sethe, who idealizes the daughter she could have been to her mother, if she had had the chance. She wished to identify and be identified by her

mother, and the lack of possibility influences her relationship with Mrs. Garner and with Baby Suggs and, eventually, results in her imbalance as a mother to her own children. Part of this stems from Beloved's presence, which helps Sethe restore memories of her mother as well as acknowledge the loss of her.

Part of Sethe's problem with trying to be an ideal mother stems from her lack of opportunity to care for her own mother and the limited relationship she had had with her. Though as a baby, she had been nursed for a few weeks, she was unable to remember her mother. Sethe tells Denver and Beloved, "I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. . . She didn't even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember. . . " (60). Not knowing which of the slaves working the rice in "Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?" is her mother, the "eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones—pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her stooping in a watery field," and from that point, Sethe recognizes her mother because of a "cloth hat as opposed to a straw one" (30). The singularity of her mother's hat is reminiscent of how Sethe identifies schoolteacher.

Part of Sethe's extreme mothering of her own children comes from seeing her mother hanged and the fear that her mother, either by trying to run away or by dying, had abandoned her. To insure the same does not happen to her children, she gives and gives of herself. Marianne Hirsch tells us that "Dead mothers do elicit a certain nostalgia; nevertheless their absence invariably furthers the heroine's development" (48). In Sethe's case, her development is unbalanced, as she has no mother image to model.

Sethe is not nostalgic about her mother, for she does not have enough memories of her to be nostalgic, but she does have an idealized vision of what she *could have been* as a daughter, and this vision influences her when Sethe herself becomes a mother at 14-years-old. Sethe only spoke to her mother on one occasion, and she describes to Denver and Beloved her memory of their conversation:

> One thing she did do. She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark'. (61)

It is no accident that the breast is where the identification mark can be found, and young Sethe, fearful that she will not be identifiable to her mother, asks to be marked in turn, so they will be the same and recognizable to each other. In reply, her mother slaps her face in the only conversation ever reported.

Just as Medea wants Jason to see her and recognize her, to acknowledge her and the sons she bore him, Sethe wants to be identified by her mother. The desire to be recognized, to be known and seen, is a pattern reinforced at the novel's close. Beloved becomes "disremembered," as she has no name and remembering "seemed unwise" (274). And in Sethe, we see that she has forgotten herself and needs to be found and reminded of who she is. Fear of becoming one of "Sixty million and more" anonymous slaves who are nameless and forgotten is the fear seen in the child Sethe, as she wants her mother to connect with her, to claim her and mark her in ownership, and to make her part

of a lineage and a history. Why does her mother slap her? Is it because Sethe is unworthy of bearing the mark? Does the slap foreshadow the scars Sethe will bear from schoolteacher's ownership? Sethe explains to Denver that she finally understands why her mother slapped her: "I didn't understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own" (61).

This brand on her mother' rib, known as a *dikenga dia Kongo,* is a circular universal glyph which acts as a map of the cosmos, or to trace the movement of the sun, or to show that the spiritual world and the physical world are mirror images, or all of these at the same time. This round brand "not only connects [Sethe] to her mother, but . . . her mother to an African past" (Zauditu-Selassie 156). In addition to the language which Sethe loses, she had a visual connection, also lost to her. The sweeping loss of Sethe's mother's people, encapsulated in the one line, "I am the only one got this mark now," shows a young Sethe just how tenuous the connection to her mother, and through her mother, her African past, actually is.

Nan, too, connects to the past through speaking to Sethe in the African tongue which Sethe cannot remember, but knew as a child; Sethe attributes her lack of memory before Sweet Home to the differences of the languages. Samuels and Hudson-Weems attribute her inability to recall events before Sweet Home "to her successful act of 'disremembering,' of consciously obliterating her painful past" (99). By blocking out the past, she establishes a pattern for herself that we see throughout her story, yet she cannot stop the memories from entering her consciousness. Both her mother and Nan, therefore, bring her to a history before her own history and give her memories which are not her own, which, with Beloved's help, she allows herself to remember. These two women

give her—in fragments—a sense of who she is and a feeling that she is part of something greater than just herself. When she sees her mother hanged and Nan "snatched me back. Before I could check for the sign," Sethe "stuttered after that. Didn't stop till I saw Halle" (*Beloved* 201). Sethe's inability to articulate, to speak of her past, follows the pattern of silence and sound woven throughout this novel, and she stops having difficulty with communicating when she sees Halle—her future husband—and can start a new history with him.

Sethe associates the scar with her mother and hopes to be able to use it for identification—to connect herself to her mother and to find her again. Ironically, Beloved's scars under her chin, made when Sethe used a handsaw to slit her throat, and the three scratch marks on her forehead when she held the severed head onto the body fail to alert Sethe to her daughter's presence. She even comments to herself about how alike Beloved and Denver are, almost like sisters, and that there was no competition between them (99). When Sethe finally does recognize her daughter, sound prompts the "click," once Beloved hums the tune Sethe made up for her children.

The absence of Sethe's mother influences her treatment of Mrs. Garner, who is never a surrogate mother to Sethe, but whom she "tended . . . like I would have tended my own mother if she needed me. . . I couldn't have done more for that woman than I would my own ma'am if she was to take sick and need me and I'd have stayed with her till she got well or died" (201). She also loves and cares for Baby Suggs, whom Zauditu-Selassie describes as a mother substitute "that Sethe can comfortably remember. . . and is one who can teach Sethe knowledge of traditional practices and provide a sense of spiritual and cultural continuity" (156-57). Because Baby Suggs is the spiritual leader of

the community, she represents the mother figure, and if Sethe needed a model for her own mothering, she could not have a better one. She offers the practical information Sethe needed about her babies, which is why the baby was crawling already when Sethe arrives. At Sweet Home, Sethe had no one to ask, as Mrs. Garner never had children. Baby Suggs knows it was the quality of the food that made the difference, and as a "mother substitute," takes on the nurturing role for Sethe's children as they await her arrival.

After Sethe kills the child and tries to kill the others, Baby Suggs gives up on her life and her calling, which adds to Sethe's guilt. When she thinks of what kind of daughter she might have been to her own mother, and then compares it to the kind of daughter she *was* to Baby Suggs, she comes up short, which is partially why she becomes so desperate to make Beloved understand her actions. As repayment for the love and nurturing she received from Baby Suggs, Sethe causes Baby Suggs' collapse; Baby Suggs can neither condemn nor condone her daughter-in-law's actions, and so, where this mother-daughter relationship had the potential to begin to heal both women a little bit, that is not to be. It will take the next generation of mothers and daughters, with the help of the grandmother, to heal the breech. Denver is that next generation.

Chapter 7—Denver the Pattern Breaker

Visions of a Future

Denver breaks the patterns of isolation established by Sethe, both in Denver's connection to her own past and as a bridge to the community; she befriends her neighbors when she asks for help and, in return, is nurtured by them. She also breaks the silence imposed by her mother's inability to speak of the past, and, as a child who has had a "charmed life," she was raised outside of slavery and can move forward to a future that is hopeful and fulfilling. If Beloved represents the past, then Denver is the future.

One place we see Denver as a symbol of hope is at her birth. Punctuated throughout this novel are moments of poetic beauty which can be read as prose poems, independent of the text, but which slide perfectly into the narrative through the intensity and power of metaphor. One such passage appears just after Denver's birth in the boat along the Ohio River:

> Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects—but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one—will become all of what is contained in the spores: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (84)

Placed as it is within the chapter of Denver's birth, Morrison's image of the spores speaks of an every-day miracle, the mistaken and unrecognized potential of life. This metaphor speaks of hope and how it is often overlooked, but certain. Denver is this hope, this future, not just for the women at 124, but for the ex-slaves, for the community, for all who have suffered and survived. Higgins describes her as "the hope of the new generation of African Americans, those who embody both individual strength and the strength found within the community" (107). She will be able to assert her autonomy in ways that her mother, Baby Suggs and others could not, which not only makes her different from those who come before her, but also frees her to become a hopeful symbol.

Throughout the novel, Denver's character is the one that undergoes the most psychological growth and change. Even though she has a "charmed life," she has to overcome and accept her challenging childhood. Denver is fortunate to have lived at all since her birth was premature: in Denver's recollection of the story, Sethe was only "in her sixth month of pregnancy" when she ran away from Sweet Home (30). Her mother's making it to 124 and Denver's being raised in freedom speaks to her good fortune. When Sethe needs help with the delivery of the baby, providence or some other power sends Amy Denver. When Sethe tries to kill Denver in the woodshed, Stamp Paid steps in to "snatch the baby from the arch of its mother's swing" (149). Denver had the protection of something that prevented the rats in the prison from biting her. She also must have been a brave child to wander over to Lady Jones's house and to enroll herself in reading lessons: ". . . she had done it on her own and was pleased and surprised by the pleasure and surprise it created in her mother and her brothers" (102). At Lady Jones's she is happy—so happy, in fact that she does not know "she was being avoided by her

classmates—that they made excuses and altered their pace not to walk with her" (102). Yet her bravery at searching out Lady Jones juxtaposes how fragile she is: a single question, asked not in meanness but in curiosity, shuts her down. Her loss of innocence and her loss of happiness arrive with Nelson Lord's query about Sethe and the murder, and she goes deaf: "For two years she walked in a silence too solid for penetration but which gave her eyes a power even she found hard to believe" (103), but even in this silence Denver finds power. Denver explains it: "So quiet. Made me have to read faces and learn how to figure out what people were thinking, so I didn't need to hear what they said" (206).

The resulting loneliness, partially from the silence, mostly from her mother's behavior, wears her out. From the first few moments she appears in the novel, she is miserable in solitude and isolation. When her mother, whom she has never had to share with anyone, speaks to Paul D about Sweet Home and about her father, whom she has never seen, she cries ". . . tears she had not shed in nine years (16)" She has an emotional crisis because Paul D's arrival has reinforced for her just how isolated they are. She states, "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (16). When Sethe tries to blame their isolation on the haunted house, Denver insists that is not so and claims, "It's us! And it's you!" (16).

After her brothers run away and Baby Suggs dies, Denver has only her mother for company, so when she sees Beloved on the day of the carnival, she takes possession with a ferocity borne from nine years of years of solitary confinement. Her ability to recognize and connect with the psychic elements of her world is an extension of her "charmed" life,

as she develops extraordinary powers, such as her ability to see the ghost in the white dress and to see Beloved before she appears. They have all lived with the ghost of the baby, but only Denver seems to appreciate it. Morrison writes, "None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting, but *knowing* the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it scared them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company" (37). Denver explains that Baby told her ". . . that I shouldn't be afraid of the ghost. It wouldn't harm me because I tasted its blood when Ma'am nursed me. She said the ghost was after Ma'am and her too for not doing anything to stop it. But it would never hurt me" (209).

The tale of a nurturing and violent Sethe, manifest through this image, is one which Baby Suggs chooses to tell Denver: as a result, Denver both fears and loves her mother, and the "unmanageable dreams about Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost" (103). Denver originally had been indifferent to the ghost's presence, but once she hears Sethe's answer to Nelson Lord's question and goes deaf, Denver stays deaf until she hears the baby trying to crawl up the stairs. That she alone knows the source of the noise speaks of her psychic abilities and the ghost becomes her "secret company," so it is no wonder that Denver recognizes Beloved when she arrives on the stump. Denver gives details about identifying the ghost after the mischief it causes: "Look like I was the only one who knew right away who it was. Just like when she came back I knew who she was too. Not right away, but soon as she spelled her name—not her given name, but the one Ma'am paid the stonecutter for—I knew" (208). Denver's ability to experience the poltergeist-powers of Beloved, such as Beloved's disappearing in the cold shed or supporting the rocking chair with one hand,

differentiates her from Paul D, who is also aware of these powers; where Paul D wants to challenge Beloved about her presence, Denver wants only to protect her.

> Denver's fear of her mother extends to a fear *for* Beloved, because Denver knows . . . the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (205)

It was Baby Suggs who told Denver that evil can "come right on in the yard if it wants to" (205). This was Baby Suggs' breaking point—the fact that the whites did whatever they wanted and could still hurt her despite her status as a freed woman. Young Denver must have picked up this fear from her, and as a result, never crosses into the road. Denver does not know if the danger comes from outside her mother and acts upon her, or from inside her mother waiting to come out, so she waits for signs, for the catalyst. Not surprisingly, then, as self-appointed lookout, Denver develops an apprehension about leaving the house which parallels the community's fear of entering it, forcing her isolation. The difficulty of growing up in such a situation is imaginable; Denver has to reconcile Sethe's dichotomous aspects: "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it. She missed killing my brothers and they knew it" (205). Once Beloved arrives and Denver

has company, we see a growth in her character as she practices patience while nursing Beloved and subterfuge as she lies to Paul D about the rocker. Denver's fear shifts: whereas before she had "spent all my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me" (207), now she feels the need to prevent Beloved from loving Sethe too much and to watch for the thing inside Sethe which makes her kill.

With Beloved's arrival a different kind of "magic" becomes available for Denver: the power of words and a connection to the past. She begins to hear the stories of Sethe's and her mother's lives. Through story telling, both girls are nurtured. Denver already understands the power of the stories and remarks to Beloved that her Grandma Baby spoke of Halle and "used to tell me his things" (207), the little anecdotal details and snippets, which flesh out a person for another. Denver had not had much luck getting stories out of her mother before Beloved arrived; she had learned to read her mother's mood—"the slow blink of the eyes; the bottom lip sliding up slowly to cover the top; and then a nostril sigh, like the snuff of a candle flame—signs that Sethe had reached the point beyond which she would not go" (37). When Beloved starts asking questions, "It became a way to feed her. . . Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling." Denver, who had only gotten "short replies or rambling incomplete reveries" because "every mention of [Sethe's] past life hurt," hears the stories alongside her sister (58). Sethe and Paul D resists their own histories because the stories are painful. Denver cannot get enough of them, and for her, because she has so few tales of her childhood, they are all precious. For her, they create a history beyond her own and tie her, as Nan's stories did for Sethe, to her ancestors. These stories give Denver a place in a

family and genealogical line of women—a tradition and history which is bigger than herself and her small life at 124.

But not all of what Denver experiences is good. By spring, she begins to understand the severity of the situation, as Beloved has taken control of the house and her demands have become violent. Denver believes Sethe has lost her mind, as Baby Suggs had when she asked for color. Always on her guard to protect Beloved, Denver's ". . . eye was on her mother, for a signal that the thing that was in her was out, and she would kill again. But it was Beloved who made demands" (240). So, like Baby Suggs who was looking the wrong way the day schoolteacher arrives to collect Sethe and the children, Denver, watching her mother, does not initially understand that the danger does not come from her. Beloved has become so challenging and Sethe so acquiescent, "it shamed her to see her mother serving a girl not much older than herself" (242). Months of playing with Beloved and her mother delight Denver, but when things change to months of arguing and demands, ". . . little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might" (242). When she gets to the point of not being able to tell Beloved from her mother because they are both so thin, when they have begun to starve, Denver realigns her thinking and recognizes that she will have to act if they are to survive.

Denver's refusal to accept things as they are, despite the tremendous love she has for both women, is the first step in her journey to womanhood. When Baby Suggs had stopped preaching in the clearing after Sethe murdered the baby, she refused to "Say the word," said no to Stamp Paid when he begs her to continue, no to God and finally, no to life. Sethe says, "No. no. Nonono" to schoolteacher and to Bodwin because both have

come to take away "her best thing." Sethe's "no" is a refusal—her children will not be dirtied, will not be compared to animals, will not returned to Sweet Home, will not be taken by the white man. For generations of slaves with the inability to reject their circumstances, is there a greater freedom than the freedom to say no? Denver joins her mother and her grandmother in refusing to accept her world, but unlike the other two women, Denver has better results because she does not simply reject her world—she asks for help, reinforcing her role as a character of the future and of hope.

Until this moment in the novel, Sethe's inability and unwillingness to acknowledge her past had frozen Denver, as well: connected as closely to her mother as she is, Denver has been incapable of growing or moving. Jean Wyatt describes the situation of mothers and daughters: "If one is fused with the other, one cannot move in the direction of growth, which entails differentiation" (*Reconstructing* 199). Normally that differentiation would happen earlier in childhood and be a gradual process, yet for Denver it does not happen until she is eighteen years old. Sethe's inability or unwillingness to separate herself from her child stems from her desire to have that child safe; her extreme mothering—one developed without any models of mothers—has her metaphorically wrapping her arms around the children and holding them against her. She thinks she will even be able to protect them from the *other side* when she is dead. Sethe tells Paul D, "I'll protect her while I'm alive and I'll protect her when I ain't" (45).

When Sethe has the opportunity to mother Beloved, she sacrifices everything to this daughter, as she thinks that is what a mother should do. And so, Sethe is locked in time, not able to re-live nor able to ignore the moment when she kills her crawling-already? baby. Sethe has avoided thinking about the painful incident for eighteen years,

allowing it to enter her consciousness as little as possible, but with the arrival and recognition of Beloved as the crawling already? baby, Sethe becomes trapped *forever* in that moment, returning to it over and over again, just as she had avoided it earlier. She worries it, picks at it like a scab, and reworks and rewords the episode so that the baby will finally understand why Sethe had to kill her. Byerman explains that for Sethe

> The present and the future must be sacrificed for the past because the suffering must be atoned for in some way. Taken as the embodiment of the killed daughter, she [Beloved] offers Sethe an opportunity to do penance for her hurtful action. In a sense, Sethe is offered the possibility of erasing history by living in it. She can undo her "crime" by devoting her life to the nurturing of the ghostly presence. By neglecting the present in the form of Paul D and the future in the form of Denver, she can purify herself. . . .But of course, nothing can make up for death; to try to "fix" the past is to be consumed by it. (32)

Sethe's struggle is noble in that she is striving for Beloved's understanding and for acceptance, but like her "too thick" love, she goes too far and tries too hard, sacrificing everything for her daughter: ". . . Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (*Beloved* 250). Beloved wants nothing from Denver, leaving her free to understand and act on what is happening to her mother.

Although Denver has been frozen with her mother in time, her time is not an avoidance of the past, but an absence of a past as a result of her mother's silence. Pérez-Torres speaks of how "Readers are placed generationally in a space that floats

somewhere between an absent past and an absent future. . . . The story of slavery . . . is premised on the absence of power, the absence of self-determination, the absence of a homeland, the absence of language" (181-2). As a vestige of slavery, the forced separations of families shreds any hope of a family history for most ex-slaves. For Denver this is only partially true—the other truth is that her mother simply won't speak of it, and so Denver has no access to her own history. Byerman describes how the past, embodied in Beloved, "is about itself, not the present. The present, in fact, must be destroyed if the past is to prevail, for the present is what came into being as a result of the destruction of the past. . . It is only when Denver breaks free of the grip of her sister that she is able to reclaim the present" (32). Significantly, it is hunger—the lack of food and the wasting away of Sethe, "Who had milk enough for all"—which finally moves Denver to do something. Wyatt calls this hunger a "healthy" hunger, compared to her earlier hunger for Beloved and associates it with Denver's hunger for learning and reading at Lady Jones's (*Reconstructing* 199). Once Denver steps out of the home and into the community for help, both hungers are satisfied.

Because the murder is not Denver's memory, Denver *can*, unlike her mother, get beyond the moment. Despite the fact that she has been made immobilized emotionally and physically by her mother's fears and the isolated way they have lived since Baby Suggs' death, Denver finds the strength to move forward. If Beloved is the daughter who is the embodiment of the past, then Denver is both the present and the future. Sethe discourages Denver from leaving the house, for she believes that keeping her children by her is the same thing as keeping them safe. Sethe fails in her mother's role of preparing her child for adulthood and eventual independence because she will not let go, a bizarre

inversion of the fragmentation and separation motif discussed earlier. She does not think about a possible future or adulthood for her eighteen-year-old daughter. Though she has not thought about her own future either, Denver understands the immediate danger they face. Late in the novel when they are starving, Denver thinks, "Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then?" (*Beloved* 243). Denver has the ability to look into the future and see what awaits them; frozen in the present as they are, neither of the women she lives with can do that.

This ability motivates her: "She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (243). She cannot get advice about where to go from Sethe; her mother might argue with her to stay where it is safe. Just as she has been influenced by her mother, Denver also remembers the authority of Baby Suggs' loss and suffering as she stands trapped on her own front porch. And then she hears Baby Suggs laugh, "clear as anything." Though Baby Suggs had given up on life, she had never given up on *Denver*, and in her hour of need, Baby Suggs gives Denver truth and the advice: "there is no defense" against the world or against the white man. The spirit of Baby Suggs tells Denver to "Know it, and go out the yard. Go on" (244). Baby Suggs also mentions her daddy, and Denver calls on his strengths—the same strengths seen in Sethe: courage, decisive action, recognition of the enemy, and the ability to carry on. Morrison calls her "her father's daughter after all" (252).

In her *Risking Difference,* Jean Wyatt discusses the moment when Denver takes her first steps into the road and by extension into her future, and Wyatt connects it to the power of speech. The conversation between Denver and Grandma Baby, according to Wyatt, is "hardly reassuring" (73). Baby Suggs laughs at Denver and then asks her, "You

mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your Daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps?" (*Beloved* 244). Certainly all of these stories and memories are painful ones, but Wyatt explains that Denver is able to step into the yard after hearing them listed because "It is the speech act itself, the voice of the grandmother putting the past where it belongs, into oral history, that frees Denver to enter the present" (73). Denver's own history and her family's history is a source of her strength, and Sethe's inability to discuss it has, until this moment in the novel, stranded and isolated Denver from that strength. Sethe's silence stems from love and the desire to protect her daughters; Baby Suggs is motivated to speak by the same things.

Denver replaces her mother as the caretaker and provider for the inhabitants of 124, and "decided to do the necessary" (252). She starts to weave her way among the women of the community as she returns plates, baskets, and bowls that held food, thanking the women for their help and forging small bonds all the while. By contrast, Sethe's inability or unwillingness to ask for help means that she never matures, reinforcing her paralysis. This role reversal occurs with the arrival of Beloved, because Denver learns to nurse and care for her sister. Later, she must care for her mother and nurture her in turn, and for a while, the food, which arrives from the community, keeps them alive. Eventually, however, Denver realizes she cannot rely on the community's generosity. She asks Janey Wagon for a job, knowing she has to do something to help them and herself. This act of telling Janey the story of what is happening at home leads to the disappearance of Beloved from 124.

The Community

Sethe and Denver's healing could not happen in isolation, and the community, like a chorus of a Greek play, ever-present and forever commenting on the actions of 124, eventually comes to Sethe and Denver's aid. The women's connection to the community is the real difference between *Medea* and *Beloved.* By embracing Denver and assisting Sethe, the women of Cincinnati erase their sin of eighteen years earlier and provide the necessary support system for the women of 124 to move into the future.

Stamp Paid tells Paul D about the nature of his neighbors when he tries to offer Paul D a place to stay instead of living in the church basement: "Stay around here long enough, you'll see ain't a sweeter bunch of colored anywhere than what's right here. Pride, well, that bothers em a bit. They can get messy when they think somebody's too proud . . ." (232). They had been "messy"—even Stamp himself felt some meanness towards Sethe (171), and his pride is hurt when he finds himself unable to knock on the door of 124 because he never had to knock before: "Dispensing with that formality was all the pay he expected from Negroes in his debt. . . Rather than forfeit that one privilege he claimed for himself, he lowered the hand and left the porch" (172). After a week of trying, he does eventually knock, but it does not make a difference: the women of 124 are so completely cut off from the community that they cannot even answer the door when he knocks, "Softly at first, then harder. At the last he banged furiously—disbelieving it could happen." When he looks in the window, "Sure enough, there they were, not a one of them heading for the door" (184), so focused are the women of 124 on each other.

But this refusal to hear and the resulting silence does not last, and Denver asks for help. Though Stamp Paid would have offered it or seen the need for it had he been permitted to enter 124, Denver needs the *female* community in order to grow and heal. This giving voice to the histories and the memories frees the characters and allows them to heal. Just as Sethe lost her stutter the moment she saw Halle—her future husband and father of her children, and therefore *her* future—Denver takes Baby Suggs example and tells Janey what has been happening at 124, also ensuring a future. Unlike the Chorus in *Medea* who are asked to keep silent, Denver turns to the community and slowly breaks down 18 years of silence and isolation, for, once they hear Denver's story, the women of the community change their attitude about what is happening in Sethe's house. Higgins observes that although the men in the form of Stamp Paid and Paul D assist in the healing process, the women take charge and make it happen, for "if the women forgive Sethe, then the men will follow suit" (105). The women in the community were divided into three camps: "Those who believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through" (*Beloved* 255). All of them are influenced by their memories of Baby Suggs and speak kindly to Denver as she returns their bowls and plates, thanking them for their generosity. And yet, even they do not remember exact details as they talk about their memories of Baby Suggs and events at 124. What happened eighteen years earlier has grown almost to mythic proportions, as evidenced by their inflated memoires of the food at the celebratory feast: "Sethe's two hens" backing up the blackberry pies become, eighteen years later, "twelve turkeys" (249). When Janey Wagon describes to the community what the ghost Beloved is doing to Sethe, the rumors become exaggerated, like the number of turkeys.

Ironically, the embellishments to the story rile up the women in a way that the simple truth would not: “It took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation” (255). Ella gets especially angry: “When Ella heard 124 was occupied by something-or-other beating up on Sethe, it infuriated her and gave her another opportunity to measure what could very well be the devil himself against “the lowest yet” (256). Ella connects to Sethe’s suffering by comparing it to her own. As “choragus” and spokesperson for the group, she fabricates a story of the ghost whipping Sethe daily (255), and encourages the community, which had shunned 124, to turn their attention to Baby Suggs’ familial home. Ella, who had “junked Sethe and wouldn’t give her the time of day” (256) after Sethe got out of jail, thinks there might be some hope for Denver. Ella’s matter-of-fact philosophy of “stomping out the past” is closest to that of Baby Suggs when she tells Denver to “Know it, and go out the yard” (245). Both women’s practicality stems from having a realistic understanding of the world and themselves in it. Ella sees every day as a trial and believes there is enough grief in the world without a ghost coming back in the flesh. She takes Sethe’s problem very personally. As a young woman she had been raped by a white man and his son and conceived a child. She herself allowed the child from the rape to die because she would not nurse it. As a leader of her community, she gathers the women and then they “get down to business” (257). Despite the fact that some women feel Sethe had this coming to her, Ella argues that “What’s fair ain’t necessarily right” (256). Many help. Whether they believe in the ghost or not, they are unwilling to blame Denver for her mother’s choices, nor let one of their own go hungry:

> Maybe they were sorry for her. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain. Maybe they were simply nice people who could hold meanness towards each other for just so long and when trouble rode bareback among them, quickly, easily they did what they could to trip him up. In any case, the personal pride, the arrogant claim staked out at 124 seemed to them to have run its course. (249)

They had failed in alerting Baby Suggs of schoolteacher's approach, but eighteen years later, they unite to reach out to the women of 124. Eighteen years earlier, they had been silent; at the novel's end, they are loud. Linden Peach explains:

> In African society moral judgment is invariably a matter for the community to which the individual is answerable. In *Beloved* the community which initially betrays Sethe significantly comes together at the end of the novel and recues her from killing Edward Bodwin. (109)

They had only really come to exorcise the ghost: unexpectedly and felicitously, they stop Sethe from killing again while also protecting Bodwin, their society, and Sethe all in the same moment and reinforcing the implicit theme of the power of community when it acts together.

When thirty women arrive at 124 at 3:00 on a Friday afternoon, the first thing they see is younger happy versions of themselves "playing in Baby Suggs' yard, not feeling the envy which surfaced the next day" (*Beloved* 258).Whether they remember the details correctly or not, they recall how they *felt*, and this is what they want to recapture. In Baby Suggs' yard and in the Clearing, life was celebrated, the body was honored, their painful histories were acknowledged. Baby Suggs brought her community hope and self-

respect, and in honoring how they felt then (free? welcome? stuffed with food? safe?), they return for Denver's sake to the yard where they once celebrated.

Trudier Harris explains that the women are not simply altruistic since "Beloved is a threat to their psychological sphere." Harris observes, ". . . they are simultaneously attracted and repulsed by the evil in their midst. They see in it tiny mirrors of the selves they have suppressed, and they want it extracted before it touches them too greatly or even has the potential to reclaim them. And they are offended" (161). She further explains, "Letting Beloved run her course may mean the destruction of them all. They must exorcise that part of themselves, therefore that is a threat to them" (161-2). Instinctively the women understand that something has gone too far. No one doubts the existence of the ghost, but apparently, even ghosts have lines that they should not cross. Wilfred Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems suggest that the women of the community

> consider Beloved's physical presence evil. More profane than Sethe's original act. Convinced, nevertheless, that 'the past [was] something to leave behind' (256), thirty women embark on the necessary purification ritual to cleanse 124 Bluestone Road and the community once and for all of Sethe's original sin. (120)

It is not simply to help Denver or to forgive Sethe, to honor Baby Suggs or help them forgive themselves: just as they had to determine if Baby Suggs was indeed blessed, the women of the community try their strength against this otherworldly force, and they surprise themselves "by their absence of fear" (*Beloved* 261) when they see Beloved. Confident they will be able to eradicate the presence through prayer and talismans, they gather their collective strength and focus it on "the devil child" who is beautiful and had

"taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling" (261). Significantly, the women have no plan as they gather in the road outside 124; because they do not know what they are dealing with, they do not know how to prepare, but they come anyway, arming themselves with Christian and African objects. Intuitively, these women recognize slavery when they see it. "Upon their arrival and upon seeing Beloved," Higgins explains, "they know instinctively what to do. Their subconscious knowledge of their ancient African roots takes control as Ella begins to holler . . ." (106). Ella, not moved by Christian prayer, but by an anger sprung from thinking about the "hairy white thing fathered from 'the lowest yet'" coming back to life, gives voice and begins to holler, and with that word-less and primal yell, the exorcism of Beloved begins (258-9).

Structurally, the climax of the novel pulls together every motif we have seen in two brief paragraphs: violence, attempted murder, maternal love, animal imagery, Sethe's pride and her intractable nature, Beloved's supernatural control, the evil of the white man, Denver's choices, and the saving grace of community. It happens quickly: the women gather and start to sing; Denver is looking in the wrong direction; Sethe is called onto the porch by their singing and sees a hat; she flies towards the man with an ice-pick in her hand; Denver runs to stop her mother from killing Bodwin; Beloved, abandoned by her mother again, disappears. Morrison re-creates the tableau of the slave ship from Beloved's earlier memory: "a hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking" (262). Denver and the community protect Bodwin from Sethe and Sethe from herself by beating her to the ground and creating a hill of people. When Paul D sees her again, Sethe's mouth is swollen from Ella's punch. The whole community had to fall on Sethe to stop her; once

again, she shows her strength and determination in preventing the white man from taking her "best thing."

But where does Beloved go? What happens to her? Trudier Harris provides interpretation of the exorcism:

> In this reading of this scene, Beloved can leave because she has accomplished two things. First, she has caused Sethe to become temporarily deranged. Second, the result of that derangement is that Sethe acts without thought, instinctively, to save Beloved. What Beloved could not see as the 'crawling already? baby,' she is now able to see as an adult: that her mother's actions, many years before and in its current duplicate, was indeed one of love. This reading does not mean that the demon changes her nature, but that she achieves her desire: tangible evidence that her mother loved her best of all. (163)

The split of the character is interesting: Harris connects her ghost aspect with actions we normally associate with ghosts—she wanted to "derange" her mother or haunt her. Yet as a daughter, she only wanted conformation that Sethe acted in her best interest and that she *was beloved*. Both aspects are answered in Harris' reading. We know she returns to the past, where she belongs. As a physical manifestation of the past, she has been given too much emphasis by Sethe, who relives the murder over and over. The resulting stagnation cannot go on forever, and since Beloved is not of this world—does not belong in this world—her hold was tenacious at best. It is not hard to imagine her "erupt[ing] into her separate parts" (*Beloved* 274).

That Denver gets to her mother first to stop her from attacking Bodwin is very hopeful. She is the one most affected by the situation and most in danger from her mother and sister's single-pointed obsession. She is the one most capable of making the change for her own sake as well as he mother's. When she meets Sethe's violence with a force of her own, she is operating with the same instinctual response that Sethe had all those years ago. Denver doesn't think—she acts. Her desire to protect her mother at all costs is her only motivation. More importantly, she faces the fear of her childhood: she knows that the "thing that was in her" that made it permissible for Sethe to kill her children was now out (240). Denver's watching for it for all those years comes to fruition. She faces this childhood demon, wrestles it to the ground, and vanquishes it, thereby securing her adulthood. Like the women of the community who confront the ghost without fear, Denver defies the murderer in her mother and passes safely to the other side without losing her mother or herself to its terrible power.

Denver moves toward her future with the hope and love embodied in the preaching of Baby Suggs. Denver has important role models for her own development: the strength of her mother, the literal spirit of her grandmother, a community which opens its arms to embrace her, and even good working relationships with the white men. The assistance from the white Amy Denver, which she cannot remember, manifests itself in the Bodwins, both in the form of a job and Edward Bodwin's disregard of Sethe's attack on him. Denver lights up "like someone had turned up the gas jet" when a young man calls her name on the street, and we anticipate that she will have a future, get married, and raise a family. She has grown, changed. When Paul D asks her if Beloved was really the dead sister returned to life,

> Denver looked at her shoes. "At times. At times I think she was—more." She fiddled with her shirtwaist, rubbing a spot of something. Suddenly she leveled her eyes at his. "But who would know that better than you Paul D? I mean, you sure 'nough knew her."
>
> He licked his lips. "Well, if you want my opinion—"
>
> "I don't," she said. "I have my own."
>
> "You grown," he said. (266-67)

Denver neither wants nor needs Paul D's sanction or thoughts, for she is free of being dependant on adults thinking for her, and she lets him know that she had known all along and been silent about his indiscretion and that the silence was her *choice*. She has matured, will be discreet, and is protective of her mother. She ends her conversation by offering Paul D a kind of forgiveness by inviting him to visit her mother, but she admonished him to be careful, as Sethe is fragile. Does Denver intuitively know that Sethe needs Paul D's help to heal, since she has learned about young men in her own healing process?

Whereas one daughter represents the past, Denver is the future, and not just her own future, but Sethe's, as well. The past seen through Beloved does not leave any room for the present and must give way to the future, so Beloved *has* to go. And she goes as she came: without explanation, without clear cause, and rather than wonder at the how and why of events, Morrison leaves both the reader and the characters with the memory of how they *feel*.

The Healing of Paul D and Sethe

The ending of the novel is hopeful. Paul D returns and Sethe lets him. He acknowledges his own history and plans a future with Sethe. Because there has always been "something blessed in his manner" (17), he intuitively offers the ability to help and to heal. After Beloved leaves and Paul D returns to 124—his heart having been returned to him by embracing his past through sexual union with Beloved—Paul D is ready to act upon the internal changes. He returns to 124 Bluestone Road with the same intention with which he originally arrived: to place his story next to Sethe's. He functions not only as a reminder of Sethe's past and the ability to live through it, but as a bridge to the community. Peach explains,

> Indeed, Paul D's sudden reappearance after 18 years seems to cast him as a representative of the community which judged her for what she had done and which has to be reconvened as the only means by which she can achieve full absolution. They, too, of course, can only achieve absolution for betraying Baby Suggs and Sethe by coming together and rescuing her. (109)

Paul D acts as a microcosm of the larger community, which failed to understand her, rejected her, and ultimately comes to her aid at the end. When he finds her in the keeping room, laying on the same bed where Baby Suggs died, he is angered that she has given up on life. When she asks him if he will count her feet, he tells her he will rub them, just as Amy Denver's massaged Sethe's feet when she was running away from Sweet Home. In the first instance, Amy tells Sethe that "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (35), suggesting that her road to recovery with Paul D's help will be a painful but sure one.

Paul D points out her individuation from her children, furthering her healing. Earlier, she had defined herself only as the mother of her children, whom she saw as her "best things." He tells her, "You your own best thing, Sethe. You are" (273). He can see the woman better than she can see herself; plus, he loves her. Paul D remembers what Sixo said about the thirty-mile woman, how she "gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in the right order. It' good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (272-3). In a reversal of all the character's fragmentation throughout the novel, Paul D will be able to put the scattered and broken pieces of Sethe back together, just as Sethe will be able to replace Paul D's manhood for him. Morrison writes, "He wants to put his story next to hers." He ends with a recognition of the power of the past, saying, "Sethe . . . me and you, we got more yesterday that anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). With this statement, Paul D acknowledges their past and places it, as Baby Suggs did with Denver, where it belongs.

Chapter 8

Medea and Beloved—Comparisons and Conclusions

Rather than a compilation of antiquated stories which are used to help explain the unexplainable, myth explains what it is to be human. The patterns of myth, echoing through the ages, speak not only of individuals working through their particular issues and adventures, but also of what it means to be human and to live our lives. Myth creates an organic body of human truths, as applicable today as they were in the 5th century B.C.E. and as they will be into the next millennium. Myth presents to us the choices made by humans in difficult—sometimes impossible—situations, and our job is to understand these choices and either embrace or reject them ourselves. Myth has the ironic situation of being both true and totally unbelievable: the truth is the human component.

What initially attracted my interest to these two women was my naïve understanding that they both committed infanticide, they were both oppressed by males, that their society supported the males against them, and that the women were marginalized and isolated, which brought about their actions. After researching these characters and probing their motivations, historical contexts, and psyches, I find that the "self [attacked] by a part of the self" (Corti 62), which allows them to murder, is just the beginning of the similarities. What follows is a discussion of these works and an explanation of what a modern reader might understand from reading both pieces in tandem. The following parallels are based on my arguments, and my conclusions speak of thematic differences.

Abusive Patterns

Medea and Sethe are marginalized by their societies. Both experience horrible treatment that is legal under the systems in which they act, since both Jason and schoolteacher have law and tradition on their side. Jason has as much legal right to divorce Medea as schoolteacher has to whip Sethe or sell off her children; their societies find the actions of these men neither remarkable nor culpable. Yet both oppressors violate a higher law, which neither man can grasp; their argument and reasoning against their victims is shallow and self-serving. The societies which generate these men support their endeavors to the detriment of the women, who only have the power to reproduce. Thus, Sethe and Medea use their power against the men by killing their children.

Imbalance

Medea and Sethe define themselves through their feminine roles. Medea's society, and therefore, to a certain extent Medea herself, recognizes that the woman is nothing without the man, and when Medea is denied the "marriage bed" and her relationship to Jason, she loses any power or status she has within that society. As a result, she specifically attacks those symbolic extensions of that relationship and feminine role by killing the children, preventing Jason's marriage and potential for future progeny by killing Glauce. Medea shows that the power to create and destroy are both within her. Her role as an obedient female fails her, and she assumes the masculine, active, violent role that was modeled for her by her father and her husband.

Sethe defines herself through her nurturing role of mother, utilizing milk as a symbol of her ability to love and care for her children. The theft of that same milk marks her turning point, because she knows that she will never return to slavery, nor let one of her children suffer the indignity of ownership and dehumanization. Like Medea, she cannot fight against a system that does not recognize her as having any rights, and she reverses the nurturing mother's role by destroying what she creates.

The imbalance, manifesting in masculine and feminine extremes, gives the characters the strength to follow through with infanticide. Medea's stems from her anger over broken oaths and the indifference Jason demonstrates towards her, which allows her to subdue her maternal aspects and take up the sword. And, although she obviously loves her sons, she determines that revenge is more important than ridicule, more important than anything. Medea's maternal instinct has to be subdued and repressed in order to follow through with the murders. Sethe's love for her children, while probably no less than Medea's love for her sons, motivates her actions for them and their safety. Her distorted sense of her role as the sole protector, Halle not having made it out of slavery, frees her to make the decisions about how to keep the children from falling back into bondage at any cost. Her desire to keep them from slavery replaces all other thoughts, just as Medea's need for revenge precludes any mollifying thoughts, even infanticide. Although both women are unbalanced, they differ in their understanding of what they are doing. Medea has to suppress her motherhood to enact her revenge and through her struggle acknowledges the existence of the two aspects of her character. Sethe is unaware of any split within herself, as she does not think, she acts. She is a mother protecting her young by attacking the attacker with no hesitation or internal discussion: she is pure

impulse. Killing the children is possible only because she had every intention of joining them by killing herself. In the few brief moments both characters have between decision and action, one of them puts aside the role of mother, and the other becomes even *more* of a mother than she had been before.

Role Models

Medea and Sethe are both without mothers and without a strong feminine influence in their youth. Medea turns to her father as a model for her actions and behaviors; he is ruthless and tyrannical in his treatment of others. We watch her assume the characteristics of the Classic hero who fears ridicule and will destroy his enemies at all costs. Sethe, also without feminine guidance, has no models which might have taught her moderation and balance. She never learns, therefore, where her children stop and her own self begins. Her understanding of motherhood is based on what she thinks she could have been to her own mother, had she the chance to be a daughter to her, and the result drives her to be the ideal mother who has "milk enough for all" (198).

Success in Failure

Although Medea "succeeds" in destroying Jason and Creon, in essence annihilating them through her actions. She has not achieved complete success. The loss of her children, which she sees as the most harmful injury to Jason, requires the loss of her most precious possessions. And to create such devastation, she has to reject her femininity to become heroic which, for her world, means following the *male* heroic code. When we look to the classical period at the heroic males available, they show the same

restless pattern Medea will continue as she reaches Athens and then eventually returns to Colchis. She will never be at peace, and her reputation will always follow her. Medea loses part of her humanity, manifest through her femininity and motherhood, which she needs to subdue in order to carry out the murders. Yet, by 5th century Athenian standards, she does succeed in destroying her enemy, and the assistance of the god at the end validates her success.

Sethe, too, succeeds in keeping her children from schoolteacher, but at too great a cost. Her ability to kill the children stems from her intense love for them, and in a tremendous ironic twist, she kills them to keep them from being killed. Despite what schoolteacher thinks, she does not give up her humanity to do this: she is more sympathetic to us than Medea, for we see her eighteen years of resulting suffering. By killing Beloved, Sethe rejects not only schoolteacher, but all he represents; her real enemy is the institution of slavery. Sethe has only one tool to fight against such oppression.

Agency

That both women are agents of their own destinies contrasts with the men who try to control them. Both Jason and schoolteacher assume passive roles in the face of the changes in the women: after the murders, both men are powerless to act or understand; both focus on their own losses and reject the women. Paul D, having experienced horrific suffering at the hands of slavers, may understand what motivated Sethe, but he rejects her none-the-less, for he himself has not healed from slavery's vestiges sufficiently to assist her. Additionally, in acting as they do, both women know they will suffer pain and loss

from their decisions; Medea knows how much she will suffer through the loss of the children, and Sethe plans to kill herself and join her children in death, but neither women shies away from such pain, knowing in her heart that she has made the best—the only—choice.

Isolation vs. Community

The community of women surrounding Sethe and Medea follow a pattern of supporting the women initially, and then withdrawing that support when both kill. The chorus of the *Medea,* limited by its structural function, struggles with the decision to act, finally rejecting their impulses to help the children because of a former promise made to Medea and by their assumption of Medea's inability to follow through with killing the children. Sethe's community, at the moment of the murder specifically represented by Stamp Paid and Baby Suggs, stands frozen as Sethe drives her children into the woodshed to kill them. The larger community, reacting afterwards to Sethe's pride, eschew the woman and her family, creating an isolation from which Sethe cannot easily recover.

Both women work alone, their isolation forcing them to rely on themselves and their wits, yet both have someone show up to help—Aegeus in *Medea,* and Amy Denver and Paul D, in *Beloved*. This isolation is repeated with Denver only temporarily, as she realizes the she cannot survive without help, and even Baby Suggs assists her from beyond the grave to get her to step into the road and ask for help.

Fear of Ridicule / Hubris

Fear of and for their reputations also drives these two women to act or not. Medea's fear of ridicule moves her throughout her myth, from *Argonautica* to *Medea*. This avoidance of mockery has been discussed as a characteristic of the heroic code, which Medea embraces, having no other models to follow. She speaks of this to the chorus, and the Corinthian community is manipulated by Medea for her own ends. She uses them in her plan, knowing that she can appeal to their sense of sympathy and their status as women. This expectation is the primary reason she makes her plans to kill the children at 1078. After killing them, she revels in Jason's suffering.

In contrast, Sethe's sense of how others perceive her is a little different, as they *have* rejected her, and as a result, she feels she has only herself to rely on. The community, like Paul D, can understand why she did what she did: what they cannot understand is her pride. That she does not cry or bow her head speaks of her feelings of accomplishment for her success in keeping the children from schoolteacher. Her pride and aloofness strikes the community as excessive, and they continue their rejection of her, which, in turn, creates more problems for her.

Thematic Differences

In the end, Medea does not leave the audience hopeful or expectant. We understand what she has done and will go on from Corinth to do, and her future is one of fear, isolation, and repeated patterns of killing and running away. By contrast, Sethe has hope for healing and overcoming some of her suffering under slavery. She can look

towards a future with Paul D, and Denver, as a representation of that future, gives the readers hope that characters can overcome their pasts to move into a better future.

What do we gain when we look at the ancient story and the modern? And why read them side-by-side? In the ancient world, myths were created to fulfill a need or explain behavior: we feel discomfort with the "need" to explain why a woman would kill her own children. The ancient myth of Medea does not speak of a woman's desire to kill her offspring, but shows her need to be recognized, to have rights, to control. By killing the children, horrific in any society and at any time, Medea forces us to understand that women do have power, and that the power they have to create—which is miraculous and desirable—has its shadow: the ability to destroy that which they create. This ancient-world need, met in the play and in the myth of Medea, is as relevant today as it was in the 5th century B.C.E.

Beloved, by contrast, is not myth, but mythic fiction based on history. The historical truth of Margaret Garner's killing her child to prevent her from returning to slavery cannot be denied. And the need is the same, from the ancient world to the historical one, from the realms of myth to the world of fact. A myth informs its own present and the myth's future, since myths present us with truths that are timeless. By re-enacting the myth in *Beloved*, Sethe's fictionalized actions of Margaret Garner's murder of her daughter validate the need for and the truth of the myth; Morrison adds the psychological understand of myths' path to healing. Myth informs the truth of these mothers' actions, thereby closing the circle and reminding us that the distance between our world and the mythic one is not so great.

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