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Constructions of Motherhood in Euripides' *Medea*

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Abstract

In Euripides' Medea, Medea's hesitation to kill her children in her deliberative monologue is startling in its new concern for a mother's love for her children. This paper examines how motherhood is constructed in the tragedy up to the monologue. I argue that Jason and Medea both see motherhood primarily as a familial role, albeit a role with different emphases. The Nurse, in contrast, has a primarily affective view of the mother-child relationship. The monologue brings these two views into conflict.

In the deliberative monologue of Euripides' *Medea*, Medea considers whether or not to kill her children. Euripides constructs the monologue as a conflict between Medea's desire for revenge against Jason (the husband who has abandoned her to marry the local princess) and her desire to act like a loving mother and spare her sons. Critics have long recognized that Medea's desire for revenge closely resembles the violent desires of male heroes such as Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* and Ajax in Sophocles' *Ajax*.¹ Far less attention has been paid to the other side of the tragic conflict, to Medea's role as a mother.² Perhaps this lack of attention is attributable to an ideological blindness by critics who too easily accept the naturalness of a mother's love for her children, a naturalness that Euripides' tragedy itself encourages.³ Yet, when differentiated according to the various perspectives of the play's characters, the constructions of motherhood in this play raise questions of class and the place of emotions in ethical decision-making.⁴

Most of the tragedy's plot is driven by concerns for the stability and preservation of a male-centered household (*oikos*). All of the play's elite characters work to perpetuate a household (Jason and Creon), begin a household

(Aegeus), or annihilate a household (Medea). Their concerns are explicable by reference to the tragedy's historical context. From the earliest periods of Greek history, the *oikos* was central to social and political structures throughout the Greek world (Patterson 1998:44-106; Pomeroy 1995:16-56). In Athens, the centrality of the *oikos* was particularly heightened after Pericles had a law passed in 451 B.C. that Athenian citizenship was to be granted only to children whose parents were both Athenian citizens.⁵ *Medea* was produced in 431 B.C. Pericles' law codified marriage as the institution for preserving citizens' property and codified a woman's primary civic role as the (present or future) mother of citizen children. A woman was legally a daughter, then a wife, then a mother. All authority in the household rested in its male head, the *kurios*. A nubile woman passed from the kurial authority of her father to the kurial authority of her husband. In the event of divorce, a woman returned to her father's kurial authority. In the event of a husband's death, she passed into the kurial authority of her husband's male relatives.⁶ Ancient political theory reflects the notion that family members had well-defined roles to perform. It tends to focus on adults' relations with one another rather than the relationships of parents and children.⁷ Aristotle defines the household members according to their functions: "the first and fewest possible parts of a house are master and slave, husband, and wife, father and children" (*Politics* 1253b). He describes the duties of the husband and wife in this way: "the duty of the one is to acquire, and of the other to preserve" (*Politics* 1277b). In the treatise *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon holds out the possibility that women can produce material prosperity in addition to children (3.15, 7.10-12). Even in his gender-based division of labor, though, while a woman's duties go beyond child-rearing and weaving to include ruling over the domestic slaves, she still is responsible for performing the roles of wife, mother, and slave-owner, roles he defines by the obligations specific to the context of the *oikos* (7.29-43) (see Pomeroy 1994:31-67, Scaife 1995). Both Aristotle and Xenophon mention in passing the affection that exists between parents and children (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.24; Aristotle, *Politics* 1262a-1262b, 1335a; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161b), but their primary concerns are to describe how the various members of the household best perform their functions.

In *Medea*, both Jason and Medea, like the political theorists, view the ideal of the successfully functioning *oikos* as motivating actions under the rubric of carefully defined household roles. Jason views motherhood as a role derivative of his function as head of the household. In the play's *agōn* he expresses a wish that he himself may be happy and live a good life (*eudaimonia*, 565).⁸ The content of this good life is the successful performance of the role of a *kurios*: to be a good friend (*philos*) to his wife and children (549; cf. 459), to overcome difficult circumstances facing the family (552), to provide sufficient material prosperity that the family might live well and not in need (559-561), to raise

children “worthy of my house” (562), and to bring together the children from his two marriages into the same noble station (563-564). He determines how to act by figuring how he may best be a good husband and father, a status that entails calculating how best to advance his and his sons’ political and financial fortunes.⁹ In other words, Euripides motivates his actions by reference to his role as a husband and father. Insofar as all household activity, including the adult female’s, needs to be directed toward the father’s goals, Jason assumes a familial hierarchy in which the mother is inferior to both father and sons.¹⁰ There is no space for the reciprocity that is the hallmark of Greek notions of friendship (*philia*). There is no space for emotional attachment. Fathers, mothers and children are *philo*i to each other only in the sense that they jointly advance the household’s material prosperity.

Jason envisions a joint household encompassing an equal brotherhood between his sons by Medea and his future sons by Creon’s daughter (562-564). This will be possible only if the two mothers fade into the background. We see this way of thinking also in the question Jason poses to Medea immediately after his wish that he himself may be happy: “What need do you have of children?” (565). Many commentators and translators assume that Jason means “more children.”¹¹ After the litany of his paths to happiness, however, Jason’s question hints that Medea’s happiness is grounded not in her role as a mother but only in her role as a wife. Unlike him, she does not need children to fulfill her household role. While the content of his happiness as *kurios* is being a good *philos*, overcoming difficult circumstances, etc., the content of Medea’s happiness, on his account, is virtually null. Being Jason’s husband ought to be enough for her. Indeed, Medea’s satisfaction as a wife, he strongly implies, lies solely in good sex (569-573).¹² And even this degradation is not the truly ideal situation for Jason. He declares that females ought not to exist; “then there would not be any evil for humans” (573-575). All human evil—if we count only men as human—arises from the fact that women necessarily play the role of mother. A father’s happiness would best come about if a mother were unnecessary to the family. Since there is no acknowledgement of the reciprocity traditionally demanded by *philia*, the mother is a hindrance rather than a helpmate. For this reason Jason can interpret Medea’s resistance to his plans as a form of irrationality, which he repeatedly explains as emotional excess.¹³

Medea uses Jason’s construction of motherhood against him when it comes time to deceive him (870-871).¹⁴ She links her past anger to madness (873, 885) and claims that she “now has planned things better” (893). Like him, her planning is now good, from Jason’s perspective, because it is directed toward the success of Jason’s household. Good planning, she suggests, means that she ought to have been a bridesmaid at Jason’s wedding (887-888)! She ought to have utterly devalued her own position in Jason’s household. Medea’s deception confirms Jason’s conception of motherhood. The stark contrast between Jason’s

happiness as a *kurios* and the lack of value attached to motherhood brings out how thoroughly, from Jason's perspective, men and women pursue their ends based on the best performance of their familial roles. Yet Jason's consistent interpretation of Medea's actions as irrational reveals a contradiction in his perspective: mothers ought to pursue the rational goals of the *oikos*, but they are generally incapable of doing so.

Medea, up until the monologue, refuses to perform her role as mother, but her very refusal reveals that she partially shares the ethical reasoning that shapes Jason's conception of motherhood, though only partially. She rejects the content of Jason's conception of happiness.¹⁵ For her, a happy home life is not one that achieves material prosperity but one that correctly honors the reciprocal demands of *philia*. Euripides makes her perspective clear from the very beginning of the play. In the prologue, the Nurse reports to the audience that Medea complains about the "oaths" Jason has violated, the "pledge of his right hand," and the wicked "return she receives from Jason" (21-23).¹⁶ Rather than lamenting the loss of her husband's love or some other emotional violation, Medea's grievance names the aspects of marriage that require reciprocity. As Melissa Mueller has shown, the language of reciprocity runs throughout the play, especially in the *agōn* and in the scenes concerning the poisoned "gifts" Medea wickedly exchanges for Jason's goodwill (Mueller 2001). This notion of reciprocity also informs Medea's descriptions of her natal household. She repeatedly admits that she "betrayed" her home *oikos* to take on a new role in a new *oikos*, namely as Jason's wife (483, 503). She rejected her father's kurial authority and chose a husband for herself,¹⁷ in contradiction to traditional Greek marriage rituals.¹⁸ She repeats the same word used elsewhere to pick out Jason's "betrayal" of his *oikos* (17, 489).¹⁹ Her betrayal and Jason's are equally violations of the reciprocal requirements of kinship.

Despite rejecting the content of Jason's conception of happiness, Medea largely shares the form of his ethical reasoning, namely that household roles motivate action.²⁰ This is clearest when Medea speaks of exacting revenge. For just the same reason that Jason desires to preserve the household, namely to preserve his family's power and property, Medea aims to destroy it, namely so that the aristocratic clan and its property will fall into ruin. She links the destruction of an enemy to the destruction of his "whole house" (114, 486-487, 794; cf. 468). It is necessary to destroy not only the man (or, in the case of her final revenge plan against Jason, not even the man) but also all those whose identities are derivative of his. She kills her children in order to make clear to Jason the value of the ties he ignored.²¹ She "persuades" (9) the daughters of Pelias to murder their father so that their daughterhood is tainted by their deadly act. She betrays her father, rejects his authority and murders her brother in order to marry Jason and aid his escape. Far from undervaluing the ties that bind these families,²² Medea's careful dismantling of each household demonstrates the

centrality of household roles to her perspective. Not only does *her own* role as Jason's wife motivate her destruction of Jason's enemies,²³ namely her own natal household and Pelias's household, but she overvalues kinship ties to the extent that she punishes people because of *their* kinship ties to Jason's enemies. In Jason's case, his failure to fulfill *his* role as father and as husband (partially) motivates the infanticide.²⁴

The missing component in the discussion of Medea's perspective on kinship ties is her role as mother. Although the play is filled with references to children and their importance in the household (L. Golden 1971) and although household role-based motivations are central to Medea's justification of her actions, Medea's motherhood is frequently disregarded, at least before her deliberative monologue.²⁵ Typical is Medea's first speech onstage in which she works to gain the Chorus's sympathy. She assimilates her own situation as a foreigner in a Greek city with Everywoman's situation as a foreigner in her husband's house (cf. Nugent 1993). Children appear in the speech only once, in Medea's striking declaration that she "would prefer to stand in battle three times than to give birth once" (250-251). Motherhood is reduced to a painful labor and delivery. If Medea were to mention other obligations of motherhood, it would undermine her claim that she is helpless because Jason's betrayal has left her without kin (255-258). The logic is either that Jason's household need not be preserved, that therefore she need not consider the children who would preserve it, and that therefore she can omit them from her speech, or that even with the household's disintegration Medea retains obligations as a mother, that therefore she has motivations for actions other than revenge, and that therefore she omits them from her speech in order to deny any contrary motivations. In either case, we see that Euripides shapes Medea's rhetoric to reflect the inescapability of performing a household role.²⁶ To emphasize Euripides' omission of Medea's motherhood, Medea and the children never share the stage until the boys enter to affirm Medea's feigned reconciliation with Jason (894-895). The sight of them at this point causes her to weep, a moment to which we shall return below. Euripides thus achieves a fine effect. Since household-centered motivations are her normal justifications for action, Medea consistently turns to her roles as (failed) daughter and (injured) wife when she needs to explain her actions. She mostly avoids motherhood motivations lest she display any hesitation in her revenge plans. The absence of motherhood from her discourse with the strong presence of other familial roles suggests that, if she were ever to recognize the children's salience in her life (as she will), the audience should expect her to justify her actions by her role as the mother of the household (she will not).

Euripides counters Jason's and Medea's "normal" view of household-centered motivations with the wholly different perspective of the Nurse. Although she is not immune to using political language to describe the disintegrating household (cf. Mastronarde 2002:*ad* 15), she shows little concern

for the preservation of the aristocratic clan to which she belongs as a slave nor does she show understanding of what motivates those concerned for the household. When Medea wishes that the “whole house may fall” (112-114), the Nurse fails to understand that Medea threatens the children because their survival would guarantee the survival of Jason’s household.²⁷ Instead, she zeroes in on the emotions Medea expresses toward the children and asks how she can hate them when they are innocent of their father’s crimes (116-117). Even before this, Euripides has the Nurse make a surprising leap in logic that reveals her perspective. She first reports how Medea laments that she “betrayed” her natal home (28-35). She next says, “And she hates the children and does not take pleasure in seeing them” (36). Euripides’ juxtaposition of Medea’s act of betrayal and her hatred for her husband’s children suggests that the Nurse finds explanation for Medea’s action in her penchant for hating her kin, rather than in her desire to slough off the role of mother to play the aggrieved wife just as she jettisoned the role of daughter to play Jason’s wife. In both passages, faced with Medea’s bad treatment of the children, the Nurse interprets her mistress’s actions as motivated by (inappropriate) emotion. Her words reveal a perspective in which the relationship between a mother and her children—as well as between a father and his children—is primarily an affective relationship. Unlike Jason’s view that emotions detract from correct performance of roles, the Nurse treats emotions as definitional of relationships. A mother is someone who has a particular emotional attitude, namely love, toward her children. The sight of children ought to cause their mother pleasure. That Medea fails to feel love and experience pleasure signals, from the Nurse’s perspective, her failure as a mother and, worse, a threat to the children. This might suggest a natural connection between motherhood and love for children, and so the Nurse generally acts. But it is not so simple. The dominant attitude of Jason and Medea shows that the more typical definition motherhood in the world of the tragedy is an *oikos*-centered role. A mother may love her children; as we have already noted, that is a cliché in Greek literature (see n. 3) and Medea relies on it to deceive Creon. It is, however, at least in this play, normally not a mother’s love that motivates her care for her children, but her obligation to perform the role expected of her in the household. The Nurse’s perspective is the one that calls out for explanation.

Euripides suggests an explanation when he has the Nurse identify a reason—though hardly justification—for Medea’s failures. “Tyrants,” she says immediately after asking why Medea hates the children, “alter their angry emotions with difficulty because they are ruled in few things but rule in many things” (119-121). She faults the propertied elite for allowing their anxiety about power to direct their emotions rather than allowing emotions to guide their actions. She associates the latter with “living on equal terms” (122) and “moderation” (125), which is “the best thing for mortals by far” (126-127). The

rejection of tyranny and promotion of moderation is a commonplace in Greek literature,²⁸ but the Nurse puts it to an uncommon use here. Elsewhere, the rhetorical move is used to persuade a wrongdoer to let go of evil ambitions or desires for great wealth. The Nurse, in contrast, uses the trope to urge Medea to adopt more appropriate emotions. The life guided by emotions, on her view, is egalitarian insofar as all people experience emotions, and it is moderate (one of the highest terms of commendation in popular and theoretical Greek morality outside of epic poetry)²⁹ insofar as it enables one to react appropriately in any situation without going to immoral extremes. Clearly if emotions are named as reliable guides to a good life, they are not conceived as irrational impulses that cause one to wander from the good life, but rather rational guides to what is and is not valuable and salient in one's life. This reading coheres with recent work in ancient and modern philosophy, which finds rational, evaluative content in human emotions.³⁰ The elite, on the Nurse's view, become so single-minded in their desire to rule that they direct their emotions at inappropriate objects or they direct inappropriate emotions at correct objects. They fail to alter emotions according to the complexities of a situation. In Medea's case, her focus on manipulating authority in the household causes her incorrectly to hate her children and therefore willingly to objectify them as pawns in her power game rather than (as is more appropriate) to treat her children as objects of love.

The play thus sets up a contrast between the Nurse's affective understanding and the performance-based understanding of Jason and Medea. The two views clash as Medea puts her plan into motion. As the children come onto stage for the first time since the prologue, Medea begins to weep (899-903). She looks upon the "dear (*philos*) arm" of one of her sons (902). She confesses that she is "full of fear" (903) and later that "pity" overcomes her (930-931). For the first time in the play, she experiences emotions the Nurse would call appropriate and, more importantly, for the first time we see her emotions reshaping her actions, albeit unintentionally.³¹ When the Tutor announces that the boys' exile has been reprieved, Medea weeps again (1005). This time, her tears bring to the fore the conflict, simmering since the prologue, between being motivated by affective relationships and being motivated by role-based relationships.³² As Medea approaches the moment when she will exercise her greatest power, Euripides reintroduces the possibility that one may be guided by one's emotions, a position the play has associated with those who lack power. Medea's emotions here are not irrational impulses. The tears indicate that Medea now experiences the children as objects of love and pity, rather than as pawns in her revenge plans. As objects of her love, she determines that they are valuable to her and worthy of being saved. Her household-based reasoning (and her single-mindedness toward revenge) could never have reached this conclusion.³³ The tears thus query the limitations of Jason's and Medea's elite conception of family.

Medea herself acknowledges this meaning of her tears and emotions by entering upon her great deliberative monologue. If the emotions had no rational content, if they did not signal that the children had a newly valuable place in Medea's ethical makeup, there would be no point to the monologue. The function of the monologue is to provide space to revise Medea's conception of motherhood and what it requires from her new perspective. What it requires is that she love the children and therefore preserve their lives. She does not dismiss the claims of revenge entirely nor the household roles that motivated her revenge, but the monologue indicates the new obligation of accounting for her children as beloved.³⁴ Their safety is not to be. After her vacillation whether to carry out her revenge, after she comes to see the children as rightful objects of love with their "most beloved hand" and "most beloved mouth, and shape, and noble face" (1071-1072), after she grasps her child's right hand in her own (the same gesture she performed with Jason when she betrayed her father and chose her own husband, but a gesture now signifying love rather than the adoption of a familial role)³⁵ after all her anguish, she concludes that their deaths are inevitable because the revenge plan is already in motion. The motivations of the heroic code and her desire to see Jason's household destroyed cannot be overruled. There is little consolation in the fact that Medea goes off to murder the children as their newly loving mother. The limitations of the aristocratic attention to the household's proper roles have created the conditions for the children's death. Newfound appreciation for the low-class, even servile, regard for the place of affective relationships in the family cannot save them.

Notes

¹ See especially Knox 1977, but also Bacalexi 1999, Bongie 1977, Gellie 1988, Schmidt 1997.

² Visser (1986) and Rabinowitz (1993:125-154) touch on Medea's role of mother but do not consider explicitly what it entails. Vester (2004) does not discuss *Medea*, but her studies of motherhood in *Andromache* and *Ion* are instructive for the ideological work Euripidean tragedy performs. Scharffenberger (1999) is an excellent study of the ideological work done by the pervasive male heroic code in *Medea*.

³ For example, when Medea breaks down in tears, she explains to Jason that a woman "is naturally prone to tears" when she faces losing her children (925-931). (All translations from Greek texts are my own.) As much as it is absent from most of this play, a mother's love for her children is mentioned so often as to become cliché in Greek lawcourt speeches, philosophical treatises, scientific accounts of procreation, comedy, funeral dedications, and elsewhere in tragedy. See M. Golden (1990:97-100) for a collection and analysis of the many relevant texts.

⁴ With the phrase "ethical decision-making" I mean to pick out a particular type of rational justification for action based in agents' determination of how they may best

pursue what is valued or good in their lives, especially within the interpersonal, socio-cultural roles and practices that are central to their lives. On such ethical reasoning in archaic and classical Greek literature, see Gill (1996, especially 62-68).

⁵ Nagle (2006:1-30) stresses the interconnections of *oikos* and *polis* throughout the archaic and classical periods of Greek history. Their interconnectedness is prominent in *Medea* also, for example, in Medea's lament that she is not only "deserted" by kin but "without a city" (255), but space does not permit me to pursue this issue here. Visser (1986) and Rehm (1994:97-109) are among those who read *Medea* in the light of Athenian law.

⁶ On the legal complexities of Athenian marriage, including a man's rights as *kurios*, see Harrison 1968:1-60. For a woman's relationships to her male protectors in the context of tragedy, see Rabinowitz 1993:4-8.

⁷ Recent scholarship on ancient family history likewise tends to pass over adults' relations with children, primarily because of lack of evidence in legal and political texts. The major exception is M. Golden 1990, whose chapter on parenthood (80-114) argues forcefully against the modern misconception that ancient Greek parents did not experience a deep emotional bond with their children. Another exception is Demand 1994, but the "motherhood" in her title refers only to parturition. When modern scholarship does discuss parents and children, it is often from the perspective of inheritance law. See, e.g., Patterson 1998:70-106.

⁸ *Eudaimonia* is one of the commonly used terms in Greek literature—both in poetry and in philosophical literature—to pick out the ethically good or complete life. See McDonald 1978 for a survey of the use of *eudaimonia* and other "happiness" terms in Euripides and earlier poetry.

⁹ As several scholars have noted, Jason displays an understanding of "living well" limited to material prosperity. See Fartzoff 1996:159-162, McDonald 1978:46-47, Mueller 2001:476-482. The women and children in his life are, like wealth, instruments for achieving his goal of performing the role of *kurios* well. This is true even of his future family. When he says that he will benefit his present children by means of his future children (566), he uses the dative case, a grammatical form normally reserved for inanimate objects. See Harrauer 2000:39: even Creon's daughter is "nichts anderes . . . als das Mittel zur Erreichung seines Lebensziels." On both Jason's and Medea's corruption of friendship (*philia*) bonds, see Schein 1990.

¹⁰ Cf. 448-450, where Jason blames Medea for not "lightly bearing the plans of your superiors." "Plans" (*bouleumata*, with the cognate verb *bouleuein*) is a frequent lexical choice throughout the play to pick out Jason's claim to rational superiority and to name Medea's mimicking of Jason's way of thinking. See 449, 567, 874, 886 (Jason); 317, 372, 402, 769, 772, 893, 1079 (Medea). Medea's dismissal of her own infanticide "plans" (1044, 1048) is thus marked as a dismissal of Jason's way of thinking.

¹¹ The translations of David Kovacs and Philip Vellacott give "more children," while Rex Warner and Diane Arnson Svarlien translate simply "children." Mastronarde (2002:ad 565) suggests that the audience might hear an ominous foreshadowing that Medea does not even need her present children.

¹² Critics who find Medea's primary motivation for revenge in her sexual jealousy too quickly follow Jason's misogyny here. See, most recently, McHardy 2008:61-63, who in fact cites these lines (spoken by Jason) as evidence of Medea's jealousy. For further criticism of such readings, see Burnett 1998:194.

¹³ Jason's first sentence in the play chastises Medea for her "harsh anger" (447) and calls it "an impossible evil." The word for "impossible," *amēchanon*, derives from *mēchanē*, a "device" or "plan," a synonym of *bouleuma* (see n. 10 above for the

importance of Jason's "plans" to his perspective). Medea's anger is irrational insofar as it is an evil that disrupts Jason's plans. Jason interprets almost all of Medea's actions, past and present, whether they benefit him or not, as motivated by irrational emotions. See also 463, 530, 568-570.

¹⁴ As Foley (2001:247) shows, in this scene Medea most fully comes to resemble Jason: "Although she is in full control of her reason throughout, Medea never elsewhere indulges in such bloodless decision making; indeed, she aims in her revenge precisely to make Jason feel the emotions he once rejected." Foley refers to Medea's mimicking of Jason's mode of ethical reasoning as "playacting." On Medea as an actor—a point usefully highlighted by Michael Walton when I presented this paper—see also Zerba 2002. As I bring out in the next paragraph, the point for our purposes is that, whether she considers reciprocity or whether she imitates Jason's cold logic, she begins from the same ethical structures about familial roles in the household. See also the scholarship cited in n. 20.

¹⁵ Cf. her own sarcastic use of *eudaimonia* at 598-599.

¹⁶ The Nurse also introduces the motif that Medea is "dishonored" (20), another important motivation for Medea's revenge. This refers to the male heroic code Medea adheres to. See the literature cited in n. 1. The heroic code, which requires one to be good to one's friends (*philoî*) and bad to one's enemies, coincides very well with Medea's expectation of reciprocal kindness from one's *philoî*.

¹⁷ Rabinowitz (1993:138-139) shows how Medea's self-determination undermines not only her natal family structure but is also a threat to Jason's household and the institution of marriage itself. Visser (1986) explores the tragedy's dynamic of natal family *versus* conjugal family to show how Medea undermines traditional notions of marriage. See also McDermott 1989:81-93.

¹⁸ For a description of the traditional wedding at Athens, particularly the ritual of *enguê* (betrothal), see Oakley and Sinos 1993:9-10; in the context of Athenian tragedy, see Rehm 1994:11-29.

¹⁹ After the infanticide, Jason also calls Medea a "betrayal of your father and the land which reared you" (1332). The contrast between Colchis as the nourishing mother of Medea and Medea as the murdering mother of her children is particularly sharp and brings out the fact that Medea has failed in her roles as daughter and mother by betraying her homeland and her children.

²⁰ Many scholars have commented that Medea gradually comes to resemble Jason, especially in his male values, as she seeks to take vengeance on him. See, e.g., Boedeker 1997:144-146, Foley 2001:264-266, Rehm 1989:105-110. For further bibliography, see Boedeker 1997:144nn.56-57. In the respect being described here, however, Medea shares Jason's perspective from the beginning. Williamson (1990) argues for just the opposite interpretation of Medea's association with the *oikos*, namely that Medea radically dissociates herself from the *oikos* in order to destroy it.

²¹ Even after the murders, Euripides makes Jason slow to learn. At 1347, he laments that he will not "profit" from his new marriage. At 1397, he calls out, "O dearest (*philtata*) children!" and Medea corrects him that the children were dearest "to their mother but not to you," a line that turns on Jason's limited and Medea's richer understanding of *philia*. At 1403, Jason states a desire to "touch the soft flesh of the children," in a line that echoes Medea's monologue (1075), where she too, as we shall see, reformed her attitude toward the children. The effect seems to be that at the very end of the play, Jason deepens his valuation of kinship.

²² Thus one of the anonymous referees of this paper argues.

²³ Euripides notably never has Medea comment on her motivation for marrying Jason. The Nurse (8) and Jason (530) pointedly say that Medea was motivated by love. As I am arguing, the Nurse and Jason each have a place for love and other emotions in their perspective on human motivation. It is not that Medea does not experience emotions, but Euripides does not present these emotions as motivations that move Medea to action. Instead, he concentrates on Medea's adherence to the male heroic code and to the proper reciprocity in social roles. One passage that might suggest otherwise is 506-508, where Medea says that she cannot return to her father's house since "I have made enemies of my loved ones (*philoî*) at home. . . . When I showed favor (*charis*) to you, I held them as hostile." Her description of her natal family as *philoî* may have overtones of regret-laden affection, but the point of the passage is that Medea has badly reversed the roles of who ought to be friends and who ought to be enemies under the heroic code. (See n. 16.) She uses the word *philoî* to emphasize not her love for her family but her obligations toward them as her "friends."

²⁴ In the overall characterization of Medea, Jason's failure as a father is a minor motivation, but one that shows particularly well how her motivations are shaped by anxieties about the household. On the other hand, his failure as husband is a major motivation. (See, most forcefully, Medea's first speech to the Chorus, where she portrays herself not as a woman in love, now scorned, but as a woman abandoned by the man who failed to play his correct role in their marriage.) See Burnett 1998:194-96, on the appropriateness of Jason's punishment for one who has become an enemy to his own household. On the complexities of Medea's motivations, see *inter alia* Bevegne 1997, Easterling 1977, Foley 2001:243-271.

²⁵ Manuwald (1983:33-34) suggests another plausible reason why Medea rarely mentions the children: Euripides constructs the tragedy to lead the audience to believe that the Nurse's initial fears for the children's safety are unfounded. Only when Medea announces her intentions to kill them do we realize the Nurse's prescience, and our being misled. McDemott (1989:37) has a similar argument. The plot-based and character-centered motivations of Medea's silence about motherhood are not mutually exclusive. This trait of the text is significantly overdetermined.

²⁶ Medea's pattern of undervaluing her motherhood for her immediate rhetorical purpose continues in later scenes. She pleads with Creon to grant her a day's reprieve so that she may "devise resources for my children since their father prefers not to" (342-343). The audience, however, must doubt her motivation when she confesses to the Chorus moments later that she was only "flattering" Creon to bring about her vengeance (368-369). She elsewhere agrees with the Chorus that she will be most wretched when she kills the children (818-819), and she briefly shows recognition of her immorality when she uses a strong moral superlative, "most impious" (796), to censure it. Her impiety lies in her failing to fulfill her mother's obligation to raise the children who are her closest kin (*philtatoi*, 795). Even here, although most moral instincts would lead us to believe in Medea's regret, it may be right to wonder how much she is working to hold the Chorus's sympathy, by acquiescing to their moral instincts, as she proposes her horrific revenge.

²⁷ Manuwald (2005:521-523) also sees that in the prologue Medea acts not out of anger toward the children but out of desire to destroy Jason's household, but he does not tease out the implications of why the Nurse attributes violent hatred to Medea.

²⁸ Numerous parallels are cited by Mastronarde 1994:ad 549.

²⁹ On the importance of moderation (*sôphrosunê*), figured as the control of appetites, in Athenian ideology, see Davidson 1997.

³⁰ See Ben-Ze'ev 2000, Konstan 2006, Nussbaum 2001. Konstan writes, "The

Greeks did not conceive of emotions as internal states of excitation. Rather, the emotions are elicited by our interpretation of the words, acts, and intentions of others, each in its characteristic way. . . . one consequence of this approach is that it is possible to alter people's emotions by changing their way of construing the precipitating event" (2006:xii). It is particularly important to interpret emotions correctly in this play, in which Medea's ethical conflict has so often been read as a conflict between reason and passion. For bibliography and refutation of this reading, see Foley 2001:243-71.

³¹ The possibility of unintentional but rational emotions may intuitively seem like faulty logic, but on the evaluative view of emotions it is not. To put the case too briefly, emotions pick out what is salient in one's life according to one's moral values. As correct judgments of what is morally valuable, emotions are rational. They may arise, however, as anyone who has experienced emotions can testify, without an agent's deliberate decision, i.e. unintentionally. How emotions arise in a person is a philosophical issue far beyond the literary concerns of this paper. See the philosophers cited in the previous note for very full discussion, and see the next note on the questions of literary characterization raised by Medea's tears.

³² From the perspective of characterization, Medea's tears present a problem. They indicate the sudden irruption of an unmotivated emotion, and interpreters must invent characteristics of Medea to explain the new emotions. The question of how and when Medea develops the idea for infanticide is a similar problem in this play. There is no reason based in Medea's characterization why she should announce the infanticide plan immediately after Aegeus's exit. Gibert (1995) has shown that Athenian tragedians had a range of options for motivating actions, from character-centered motivations (which have been the main subject of this paper) to motif-centered motivations. He uses the infanticide problem as an example: "I submit that these occurrences of the 'child motif' (including Aegeus' affliction) move Medea to her new plan. The strategy of the text keeps loss of children before our eyes, and the solution to the old puzzle is to cross the boundary of the individual character's consciousness and accept Medea's plan as the final goal of this strategy. Her presumed mental activity is simply not the center of gravity as we watch this development take place" (1995:53-54). I, in turn, submit that Medea's tears are caused by the text's strategy to bring different constructions of motherhood into conflict.

³³ Gill (1996:217-221) interprets Medea's conflict along similar but ultimately incompatible lines. He recognizes only one conception of *philia*, namely a reciprocal relationship. Therefore Medea's conflict is a negotiation between dealing with "Jason's breach of the fundamental principles of *philia*, and the more standard claims on her *philia* represented by the children" (217). My argument is that, while Jason does violate the norms of *philia*, the claims represented by the children—based on affective relationships that are not necessarily reciprocal—are not standard in the world of the tragedy.

³⁴ On the ethical conflict and decision-making in Medea's monologue and the admittedly controversial interpretation summarized in this paragraph, see Given (forthcoming).

³⁵ On the symbolism of the hand, especially Medea's hand, see Flory 1978.

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