

Medea from Page to Stage

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clint Mahle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Purpose of Thesis

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Ball State University Department of Theatre and Dance presented an adaptation of *Medea* by Clint Mahle, who was also the director, April 9-13, 1997. I was cast as Medea, and I decided to write a thesis that followed this world premiere production from its conception to performance. This thesis discusses the production concept and documents the research that I did in preparation for the role. A copy of the script is included, and finally, there is a response to the production from Dr. Diane Rao of the American College Theatre Festival.

Medea

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance):

Priestess
Priest #1
Priest #2
Priest #3
Priest #4
Eight Dancers
Nurse
Tutor
Boy #1
Boy #2
Chorus
Medea
Creon
Jason
Aegeus
Messenger

The set for the opening consists of a bare stage with an altar just down of center. On the altar are sacred symbols dedicated to Mother Earth. Behind the altar is a lit cyclorama. We are on holy ground. Along the walls of the house are large ritual masks which are also lit. The masks are not culturally specific but represent a world blend of different cultural elements.

The Ritual

Movement #1-The Entrance

Music.

As lights fade up, the Priestess and Priests #1 and #2 are discovered upstage of the altar surrounded by smoke. They are in ceremonial robes and masks. The Priestess gestures and the ritual begins. Two masked dancers enter from the back of the audience, reaching to them, almost touching. They remain at the back and two more dancers merge into the center of the audience. As they enter the music seems to move towards them. Once the second two dancers have taken position, four more dancers enter from the stage and two of them cross down into the audience. One of these dancers is the Chorus. Once the dancers have begun to warm the audience, the music begins to move into the second phase of the ritual.

Movement #2-Capturing the Souls

Music change.

The dancers begin capturing the souls of the audience. This is a physical gesture from the dancers in which they are gaining the trust of the audience.

FEMALE VOICE

(Surreal.)

Danger lies in our temple.

FEMALE VOICE (Cont.)

Speed the change.
 The quickening is upon you.
 Danger hides in our temple,
 Waiting for you,
 Waiting for you.
 Danger walks our temple,
 Behind you,
 Encircling your mind.

Music tempo increases as the dancers move throughout the audience.

FEMALE VOICE

Feel it,
 Teasing,
 Pulling,
 Danger lives in our temple.
 Legend born of truth,
 You are her children.

The dancers move on-stage. They present the souls to the Priestess and exit.

FEMALE VOICE

Sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss.

Movement #3-Joining the Souls

Music change, rhythmic, entrancing.

The ritual continues. The altar is moved offstage. Platform levels roll in from the wings. Animal masks float in from overhead. These masks are two bulls, a ram, a serpent, and a lamb. Fabric legs fly in. Once the stage is set, a masked woman in blood-red robes enters followed by Priests #3 and #4. She stands on the steps of the up-center platform, motionless, while everyone moves around her. The two Priests move to the right and left of her. She is the sacrifice that this ritual honors. As the music ends, every one takes position for the telling of the Quest.

Movement #4-The Quest Story Part 1

Music change.

The entire story is acted and danced by everyone. (Note: It is important that only selective and simple props and costume accessories are used for this story. Whatever the actors and dancers can create physically should be the focus.) The story is narrated by voice-over.

FEMALE VOICE

Argo, black ship of destiny, how I wished you cracked on your way to the land of Colchis. Your master, strong and proud, sailing for the Golden Fleece. Sent by his evil uncle, Pelias the usurper. Pelias, who took your father's throne and knew that death walked the path of

FEMALE VOICE (Cont.)

your quest, vowed you would not return. And so, the master sailed to the land of Colchis and was welcomed to the royal table of its king.

The woman in the blood-red robe steps down from the platform and stands opposite the master.

FEMALE VOICE

As the silver moon took its eternal flight from the golden sun, the master's heart grew full in the company of the ruler's daughter and her heart, pierced by the shaft of Love, was forever his. Thus, the seed of passion was sewn. But her father, possessor of the Fleece, was angry at the master who wished to take it. He set a trial of courage, to yoke the fire-breathed bulls, to plow the field and sow the dragon's teeth, and to reap the dreadful harvest of armed warriors that would grow from the wicked seed. Certain would be the master's death, but he agreed and returned to his ship.

Music change.

Movement #5-The Dance of Love**FEMALE VOICE**

Helpless, she who loved him could not regain her heart. Full of sorrow at her new love's fate, she wept and ran to the forest outside the palace. And that night he found her. Having heard of her powers of magic, and brimming with hope, he begged her kindness, and there, fixed his love with her own. All that she was or ever shall be was his. She gave him charms to yoke the bulls and the secret to reaping the savage crop.

Transition.

The master takes his position for the test. The dancers prepare for the contest of the bulls.

Music change.

Movement #6-The Dance of the Harvest**FEMALE VOICE**

And this he did.

The master performs a ritual making him invulnerable to the fire-breathing bulls. He wrestles them to the ground and yokes them. He then plows the field and plants the dragon's teeth. From the ground, armed warriors grow. The master's lover tosses him a rock which he in turn tosses into the midst of the warriors who then turn and kill each other.

Music change.

Movement #7-The Quest Story Part 2

FEMALE VOICE

Still unwilling to release the Golden Fleece, her father made a treacherous plan to keep the master from his prize. She came to the master in haste. They must take the Fleece and escape. When they arrived where the Fleece lay, a fearsome serpent was guarding it. She worked her magic and lulled it into a harmless sleep. They took the Fleece and as dawn was breaking set sail for home.

Music change.

Movement #8-The Dance of Pelias**FEMALE VOICE**

Hearing that his daughter had helped the master steal the Fleece, the evil king sent her brother in pursuit with a vast army. Calling on her magic, she killed her brother and his army ran back to her father afraid. Victorious, the master and his love returned with the Fleece to the court of Pelias only to find that foul deeds had been done. Pelias, that most loathsome man, had forced the master's father to kill himself and his mother had died of grief. Heartbroken, the master again turned to her for help. She promised that the sins of Pelias would be avenged. To his daughters, she promised that she would give Pelias the secret of eternal youth. He was growing old and they feared for their lives if he should die before they were married. Before them, the master's love cut up a ram, brittle with years, and she put the pieces in boiling water. She chanted a spell and from the water sprang a lamb, healthy and strong. The daughters were convinced and she gave the vicious king a draught to make him sleep. And the daughter did the deed and dropped the pieces in the boiling pot. When they turned to hear the spell, she was gone and the master was avenged.

Music change.

Movement #9-The Dance of Happiness**FEMALE VOICE**

From there they settled in the city of Corinth. They made the oaths of marriage, built their house, and had two sons.

Enter Children in masks.

FEMALE VOICE

And happiness reigned in the master's house. He swore nothing but death would ever stand between them.

The Priestess begins to remove her robes. She is the Nurse. Everyone begins to exit except a Priest, a dancer, the master, and the woman in the blood-red robe.

NURSE

But the master betrayed his love and his own children to sleep with a royal bride, the daughter of Creon, who rules this land. She, who was his wife, invokes the promises he made, to the oaths she held in deepest trust. She calls to Heaven to witness her husband's deeds. Gaining nothing, she hides indoors.

The Priest, the master, and the new bride exit. The blood-red woman runs off up-center.

NURSE

She lies prostrate. Bowing to sorrow, she feeds on nothing but salt-filled tears. She moans for a father and the home she betrayed for a thankless husband. She holds her sons in contempt and I am afraid. Her thoughts are dangerous, cunning. Those who have crossed swords with her have found death's bitter taste. In her hate, I fear for her mind. Oh Jason, you should have taken better care of...

Movement #10

Stretched Tight

The music becomes an ominous percussive beat accenting the first word and then underscoring the scene.

FEMALE VOICE

(Within.)

Medea! You are cursed! Oh, I wish I would die!

Enter Tutor, masked, with the children, who are unmasked.

TUTOR

You there, ancient one, why are you out here alone? Has Medea sent you away?

NURSE

My heart aches for her suffering.

TUTOR

You should not leave her alone.

NURSE

She'll have no one near her, old man. The other servants have fled in fear that she might do them harm.

TUTOR

Poor woman, little she knows of her latest trouble.

NURSE

Children, go play.

The children cross to play.

NURSE

Tell me, what is it?

TUTOR

Nothing. I'm sorry I said that much. It may not even be true.

NURSE

Please, I beg you, for her sake, tell me what you know, true or not.

TUTOR

If I tell you and it's true, she should be warned, but if it is false, she'll be angry. Very well, I'll tell you what I know, but remember, I am only the parrot. You decide if she should know.

NURSE

Just tell me or I'll put out your eyes and send you packing to Colonus.

TUTOR

I was in the city near the fountain, where the old men sit stretching their tales, when I overheard one of them talking of our mistress. Fortunately, he did not see me or he might have kept quiet...

NURSE

What did he say?

TUTOR

He said that Creon is planning to banish Medea and her children. Oh, I hope it is not true.

NURSE

Though he has lost all love for their mother, Jason would never allow his children to be treated so brutally.

TUTOR

Old loves wilt in the shadows of new ones. Wake up, old woman, Jason is no longer a friend to this household.

NURSE

He is proving to be an enemy of those he once held dear.

TUTOR

Your senility betrays you. You have forgotten the premise.

NURSE

I'm not that old. What premise?

TUTOR

Man loves no one more than himself.

NURSE

Oh, that one. It's not a premise. It's fact.

MEDEA

(Within.)

Oh, God, why?

The children cross to the Nurse afraid.

NURSE

Quick, take the children inside, and keep them alone as much as you can. I have noticed her casting an evil eye at them. She will not recover until she strikes someone. Make sure it is not her innocent sons.

MEDEA

(Within.)

I want to die! Please, God, let me die!

NURSE

It will be all right. Hurry now, go inside, quickly, and leave your mother alone. Keep them out of her sight.

Music change.

Enter Chorus and dancers pouring from the house.

Movement #11-The Dance of Pain

NURSE

I fear her suffering will burst into a raging storm.

Devastation

The dancers move around the stage in painful motions as the Chorus overlooks them from the top of the up-center platform. The music underscores the scene.

MEDEA

(Within.)

Oh, you cursed sons of a hated mother! A plague on you and your father!

M: O you cursed sons of a hated mother & place on you? your father

8

NURSE

Blame not your sons. They are innocent of their father's sins. Why do you hate them? Oh, God, calm her fierce heart. It breaks in her agony. Our house is a home no more. The life is gone.

MEDEA

(Within.)

Oh! What good is living? Let me give up this hateful life! All I seek is peace!

CHORUS

Oh, God, Earth and Light, do you hear the pleas? Why should grief for a worthless husband consume life?

MEDEA

(Within.)

Dearest God, see how I am treated? The sin of the lie! Lies! All lies! Let him, his bride, all his house, die! Justice abandons me! Oh father, my country, forgive me! Dear brother, I am cursed for killing my own!

This house fills with her pain.
NURSE
Only vengeance can heal her

CHORUS

Hear the wail of pain and sorrow. The stabbing grief of misery and woe. An ill-starred marriage, love betrayed, the victim of torturous wrongs.

The pain calms.

Movement #12 - Music change.

Enter Medea.

The Chorus becomes entwined with Medea as the dancers move around her in despair.

MEDEA

Nurse, do not chastise me. I have pulled myself up. I know well what is said of a reclusive soul.

CHORUS & MEDEA

By their choice of a solitary life, they are lacking the spirit and energy of a righteous life.

MEDEA

There is no justice under Heaven. Man knows nothing of it.

CHORUS & MEDEA

A man may hate another by his looks without ever discovering the inner reality.

to C. plot

max to plot

MEDEA

And I... I am broken. I am crushed by the weight of this blow. I can't breathe. I just want to die. I need to die. The man who was my universe has become the most vile of all God's creatures.

CHORUS & MEDEA

Of all God's creatures, women are the most unhappy.

MEDEA

Husbands become the tyrants of our bodies.

CHORUS

When a husband grows tired and bored, he leaves his house to release his gross desires. It is said that a woman's life is safe at home while men must fight in wars.

MEDEA

Music #
No! I would rather suffer the scars of war than to bear a single child and yet there are two sons to glorify his name. I have been sinned against and there is nowhere to go for help. Old friend, most loyal friend, I ask one promise of you. If I find a way to punish him, lock it in your heart. Your silence assures me.

Music change.

Enter Creon with attendants, all in masks.

NURSE

Mistress, Creon is here.

Movement #13

Fear and Dignity

CREON

Medea, I will not soften the words of my business. I proclaim that you are banished from my lands, you and your sons. I shall not leave until I have seen you cast out. I am absolute on this.

MEDEA

My enemies stab me from all sides. Into what harbor may I be safe?

(The dancers begin to stalk Creon.)

Why, Creon?

CREON

I will not hide behind the shadow of words. I am afraid. Afraid you will harm my only child. I have heard of your threats to injure my daughter, her husband, and myself.

(The dancers begin to move around Creon.)

CREON (Cont.)

Your magic is possessed of evil knowledge. Better to be hateful to your eyes, now, than to regret it later.

MEDEA

Why do you set me as your superior? Because I know something you do not? You are the ruler here. Fear not. You have not wronged me. You only sought the best match for your daughter. It is my husband that I hate, not you.

CREON

He is no longer your husband.

Music change.

The dancers become agitated.

MEDEA

And I do not begrudge you for it. I beg you, do not exile me and his children. Though defiled, I will submit in peace.

CREON

(Breaking away from the unseen force of his discomfort.)

Comforting words. Words. How much easier it is to guard against the hot-tempered foe than the silent fox. No, my resolve is fixed. In spite of your skillful words, you will not stay to hate us.

MEDEA

go to knee
Please, I beg you.

CREON

Your words are wasted. I will not be persuaded.

MEDEA

Have respect for his children.

CREON

I love them less than my own.

The dancers despair.

MEDEA

Oh, Colchis, my forsaken home!

CREON

Beside my daughter my country, too, is my dearest love.

The dancers move in on Creon.

MEDEA
The loves of men are evil.

CREON
Depends on the circumstances.

The dancers stop, then begin again with sharp piercing movements.

MEDEA
Oh God, remember the man who breeds this crime!

CREON
Be gone, conceited woman. With your exile goes my pains.

MEDEA
No, please, no. I'm begging...

CREON
You are hell-bent in your wickedness. You beg yet your eyes are like daggers.

The dancers retreat behind Medea.

MEDEA
It is my pain you feel.

CREON
Then release your ~~hand~~ grasp.

MEDEA
My lord, I will go. But please, give me one day, one day to plan and provide for the children. Since their father prefers not to bother, pity them. You are a loving father. They are innocent of my misfortune.

CREON
I am not heartless. Mercy is not forgotten. One day I give you, one day. But fear this, woman, if the morning sun discovers you in my country, you die.

Music change.

Exit Creon with attendants.

Movement #14-The Dance of the Tempest

Handwritten notes:
get to C,
grab
on knee

Handwritten notes:
V. 14
14.1

Handwritten notes:
P
A
R

JASON

Many hardships come with exile and, though you hate me, I would never...

The dancers move seductively on Jason yet their movements are tinged with masochism.

MEDEA

Oh Jason, if you were childless, your new love would make sense to me. But now, where do I turn? Home to my father, my betrayed country? Or should I seek help from the broken daughters of Pelias? A royal celebration they would give me. All I did was murder their father. My enemies were made for your glory. Don't let the poets remember you as a heartless monster who forced his children, and the woman who saved his life, to wander the earth as wretched beggars.

JASON

Since you wish to remind me of what you have done, let me tell you who I think I owe my favor. Love. She struck you to deliver me.

CHORUS

Oh God, why have you given mortals the ability to tell pure gold from false, yet you hide the black hearts of men.

Throughout Jason's speech, the dancers begin to retreat one by one.

JASON

It was Love that moved you and it is to Love that I sing my praises. You were the instrument through which she worked and, by helping me, she has given you much more than you deserve. You have been given a civilized home instead of living with barbarians. Law and justice rule here not war. Here your wisdom is known. Here has been your fame. Had you not come here, with me, no one would ever have heard your name. As for this new marriage, the sensibility is threefold. First, it is wise. Second, it is right. Third, it is of the great benefit to you and my sons. Remember that I, too, was an exile. What better advantage could there be than to have a royal bride? Medea, never believe that I grew tired of your beauty or your charms. No, this marriage was to raise you and the children still further. It is my purpose to make great the sons I have through the sons I will have. It could have been done had jealousy not stolen your heart.

The Chorus moves to Jason.

CHORUS

Traitor. Assassin.

MEDEA

Words, wonderful, beautiful, brilliant, words. I have only one word for you, Jason: truth. You should have told me your plans.

JASON

And had I told you, I am certain I would not have been able to restrain your enthusiasm.

The Chorus circles Jason. The dancers begin pulsating with violent energy building slowly.

MEDEA

No, it was a fresh wife you wanted.

JASON

It was to establish my family, our sons.

MEDEA

Your Heaven is my Hell.

JASON

That was your choice.

MEDEA

What have I done? Did I marry someone else?

JASON

You made threats. You cursed Creon.

MEDEA

And I curse you and your house.

JASON

Enough! This discussion is over. Whatever help you need in your exile, I will give it. I have friends who will give you shelter.

MEDEA

I want nothing from you! Go! Leave me! Go back to your fresh young bride. She pines away for you.

JASON

As God is my witness, I am willing to do what is right. Only your pride feeds your suffering now.

Unable to contain the energy, the dancers burst toward Jason.

Music change.

Dance #16-The Dance of Rage

MEDEA

Go!

Medea: big rage
Det up @ PR - blind rage

CHORUS

Love drowns one in a bottomless sea invoking disgraceful and dishonorable men. ~~But~~, if love comes in moderation, it is the most enlightened gift from Heaven.

MEDEA

Betrayal in love is the harshest form of treachery. ~~Loss of country, loss of home in the name of love for a snake who sucks the heart dry.~~ *xL*

CHORUS

Beware.

*His heart is mine. It is mine
mine mine mine! His heart is mine!*
go back to step

MEDEA

Beware such self-named friends.

top step

The rage begins to subside.

Movement #17

*step to end plot
sitting center*

Playful Friends

Enter Aegeus, masked.

AEGEUS

Hello, my friend.

Medea and the dancers go to Aegeus. The Chorus stops short. The dancers begin caressing Aegeus.

MEDEA

Oh, Aegeus.

AEGEUS

May God touch your heart with health and happiness.

MEDEA

What brings you here?

AEGEUS

I have been to the ancient oracle.

MEDEA

And what took you to the crossroads of the world?

AEGEUS

Children, Medea. I was asking how I might have children.

MEDEA

By Heaven, you are childless still?

AEGEUS

By Heaven, I fear.

MEDEA

Have you married?

AEGEUS

Yes, I have.

MEDEA

Tell me, what did the oracle say?

AEGEUS

The words were too subtle for me to understand.

MEDEA

Are you allowed to tell me?

AEGEUS

Oh yes, I'm sure it would be all right.

MEDEA

Then speak.

AEGEUS

The cock should not crow...

MEDEA

Till when? Tell me.

AEGEUS

Till he returns to the land of his father.

MEDEA

Oh Aegeus, dear, dear Aegeus, how simple.

Medea whispers to Aegeus.

AEGEUS

Ha! You are so dear. Sometimes man digs to deep for that which lays on the surface.

The Chorus embraces Medea.

MEDEA

Amen.

AEGEUS

I've missed you. I feel good when you are around. But why such sad eyes? What is happening with you?

The dancers begin to move away from Aegeus.

MEDEA

Aegeus, my husband has become the most vile creature in all the world.

AEGEUS

Why, for what reason?

MEDEA

No reason. He wrongs me unjustly.

AEGEUS

What has he done?

MEDEA

He has taken another wife and abandons me and his children.

AEGEUS

This is most shameful! Arrogant!

MEDEA

He despises this house.

AEGEUS

Is he in love? Has he grown tired of your caress?

MEDEA

He has found a glorious passion. He betrays us.

AEGEUS

Then let him go. There are others who would gladly die for you.

MEDEA

He fell in love with the idea of begetting a royal family.

AEGEUS

Who made this match?

MEDEA

Creon.

AEGEUS

Oh, sweet Medea, I understand your resentment.

MEDEA

I am lost, and to add to my pain, Creon has exiled me.

AEGEUS

Does Jason allow this?

MEDEA

Oh, he'll tolerate it.

(The dancers move to Aegeus.)

Please, you are my friend. Help me. Help my children. Give us shelter. For this I will end your childless life. You will beget heirs of greatness. I have the knowledge. I know the magic.

AEGEUS

I will do this for you. But I must tell you, you must come to me yourself if I am to be your champion. I can not take you away and share your blame in the eyes of my host. Do you understand?

MEDEA

Yes, oh yes, but will you pledge an oath to this?

AEGEUS

Don't you trust me?

MEDEA

Yes, I do, but I also understand diplomacy. I have no power or influence. Both the houses of Creon and Pelias are my enemies. With a sacred oath, you would never be convinced to hand me over. You are pious, a man of the oracle. In spite of their wealth, they could never defeat the house of Aegeus.

AEGEUS

You are most careful, my friend.

MEDEA

I am learning.

AEGEUS

Besides, it will give me an excuse if need be. Go ahead, declare the oath.

MEDEA

Swear by Earth and Sun, by all of Heaven, swear by God...

AEGEUS

To do what? Speak it.

MEDEA

To never banish me from your land and to never give me over to an enemy for as long you shall live.

AEGEUS

I swear it.

MEDEA

Good enough! And if you break this oath, what punishment?

AEGEUS

The usual for such sanctimonious and irreverent fools.
(Medea and dancers embrace Aegeus.)

Music change.

Movement #18-The Dance of Joy

AEGEUS

Now, I must be off to my ancestral home.

MEDEA

You shall be most blessed, my friend. You have fixed a pleasant future for me and my sons. ~~██████████~~ I shall arrive soon, when I have finished here. Farewell.

AEGEUS

Good bye, sweet one.

Aegeus exits.

Movement #19: *part 2 follow his exit*

The Scheme

MEDEA

Oh, the justice of God! Now comes the time for my enemies to pay. Now I have sanctuary. Now I will kill his bride. Gifts I will give her. I have poisoned gifts of such power that a mere touch will bring agonizing death. Nurse!

Enter Nurse.

NURSE
Yes, mistress?

MEDEA
Bring Jason to me.

Exit Nurse.

MEDEA
I must work a way for her to accept my gifts. The children, they will take them. I shall have my revenge.

CHORUS
The children, what of them? They will be laughed at, ridiculed, even killed at the hands of your enemies. Dragged through the streets. Torn by the claws of mobs. Abused and left to rot unburied. What of the children?

MEDEA
I shall take them with me.

CHORUS
And when Aegeus drifts to the shadow lands? Who will be their protector? Pursued all their lives by the enemies you have made.

Music change.

The Dance of Joy begins to subside. Medea struggles against it. The joy is turning into something tainted.

MEDEA
What can life offer them? No father, no home, outcasts. My folly was leaving my country, swayed by the words of a man. Indeed, love is blind. There is but one course. When I am done, this man shall never feel the warm breath of his children again. The sun will no longer shine on their tender faces. He will never have the children he desires. When he dies, his house dies. And his wife, she will die the way she deserves.

CHORUS
The vengeance is just, but kill the children?

MEDEA
It is the only way.

CHORUS

Flesh of your flesh?

MEDEA

In that way, he will suffer most.

CHORUS

You will be the saddest and most despised woman in all the world.

MEDEA

So be it. No more words. It will be the final sacrifice.

The Chorus begins moving around and against Medea as if to push the thought out of her body.

CHORUS

Will the sacred people of Aegeus receive such a murderess? Can you look the boys in the eyes and kill them, so innocent and helpless? When they beg and plead and weep for mercy, will you dip your hands in their blood?

Medea resists. Her joy becoming disturbed.
Enter Jason with Nurse.

Movement #20-Music underscoring.

CHORUS
Their eyes. Will you crush their souls? Where is your heart? Where is your soul? Will you weep?
MEDEA
I must be strong. Resist.

The Sacrifice *Chorus Resist.*

JASON

Medea, I am here as you asked. Although you hate me, I will not refuse to help you.

Medea and the dancers go to Jason. The Chorus continues to assault Medea and her thoughts.

MEDEA - Resist. Chorus Strength. Courage. Resist.

MEDEA

Oh Jason, please forgive me. With all your love, please forgive my temper. I have come to my senses. What you do is best for us all. I have reasoned it out. How can I be so hateful when God has blessed me with your marriage? I have been a fool to resent such a match. Please forgive me. I am a woman after all and given over to passionate emotion. Please pardon my childishness.

JASON

I am glad you have listened to reason.

(uc)MEDEA

Children, children! Come out and see your father! Reason is all I see.

Enter children.

Medea's plea

face u CS

medea x to chorus

cc 11 of

MEDEA

Go to him. It has been too long. Our feud is done.

The Chorus moves to Medea trying to get back inside her.

CHORUS

(Whispering in Medea's ear.)

Will they kiss so in the afterlife?

JASON

The past I forgive. It was only your woman's nature. As for you, my sons, I have not forgotten you. All that I ask is that you grow up big and strong. Leave the rest to me. Through your mother's wisdom, I may yet hold your safety. My I see you grow, healthy and wise, men among men. Medea, what is wrong? Why the tears?

MEDEA

Nothing, just the joy of our children.

JASON

You weep over such joy?

MEDEA

Also a woman's nature.

JASON

Cheer up, woman, I will see to their future.

MEDEA

Jason, I know I must leave. You and Creon need not be reminded of me, but please, keep the children. Raise them in your house. Ask Creon to let them have their father. They are no threat to him. It is through their fathers that children live, not their mothers.

JASON

You are wise. Perhaps he will listen.

MEDEA

Maybe your wife can also speak for them.

JASON

I may persuade her.

MEDEA

Being that we are of the same sex, allow me to add my part, for I am apt to know the way to her heart.

JASON

And what could that be?

MEDEA

Let me send a peace offering with your children. Nurse, will you bring ~~them~~ the gifts?

The Nurse exits.

MEDEA

I have a beautiful robe and a headdress of finest gold. Perhaps they will soften the heart of your wife to the cause of your sons.

The Nurse enters with boxes.

MEDEA

Here, children, give these to your new mother.

JASON

Why be so rash? You can use these more than she. You don't believe she lacks such things?

MEDEA

Please, your children's lives are in these. They say much more than any words. ~~They mean nothing to me if they save your children!~~

JASON

You may be right.

MEDEA

You are most gracious. Go now, children. Present these into the hands of our new mistress. Let no other take them from you. Coming straight from your hands, she will see your smiles and innocence and will be able to do nothing but love you. Now hurry and return with the news I long to hear.

JASON

Come, my beautiful sons.

Music change.

Exit Jason with children and Nurse.

Movement #21-Dance of Ecstasy

The dancers have been pushed aside, leaving Medea alone with the Chorus.

*counter X
J3 CS CS*

*go to steps to
Plot 2, Enter*

ADS off plot 1

CHORUS

All hope is dead. The unknowing children fed into the jaws of Death. The wife will wrap herself in its blackness and it will crush her in its claws. And the master, the master of sorrow and pain, he is killing all that is dear to him and knows not how happiness slips his grasp. Vengeance is blind, destroying all it touches.

Medea sit 3 steps move after 2 sit

Medea is left sitting up-center, in thought, as the Chorus moves away. The dancers become a forest.

Music change.

Movement #22-The Dance of Remembrance (Jason and Chorus reprise The Dance of Love)

*Time passing.

The dance is interrupted by the call of the Nurse.

UC

Movement #23

Alienation

kid save DC

NURSE

Mistress!



Enter Nurse with children. The children are wearing masks.



Music change.

NURSE

Your children's fortune is assured. Jason's wife has accepted them into her home. It was your gifts that made the difference. With joy she took them and is at peace with you and your sons.

MEDEA

Oh, I am plagued!

NURSE

Is this bad news? Your sons have a home.

MEDEA

But not my home! Look at them!

NURSE

They are beautiful happy children. Have courage. One day they will bring you back. Be patient.

MEDEA

I shall. Now go inside and prepare their beds. It is late and they must be tired.

Exit Nurse.

The dancers become apprehensive in their movements as Medea approaches the children.

MEDEA

Oh my children. You are safe while I am forced into another strange land.

(Removing the children's masks. The dancers embrace them.)

I shall never see you grow. Alone I must endure my pain and grief.

The Chorus moves above.

CHORUS

Look at their smiles, at their bright faces. Must their flame be extinguished? Their eyes should see life.

MEDEA

No! I will not be mocked by my enemies. I must do it. Their innocence will mean nothing to a vengeful mob breaking down our doors. I can not be swayed by your soft sweet faces.

CHORUS

They may still bring you joy though you live apart.

MEDEA

No! I will not leave my children to be abused. My enemies will not have their way with them. If they are to be slain, I must do it. I gave them life and I shall. Come children, hold your mother.

CHORUS

Sweet faces, soft skin, delicate breath.

MEDEA

You shall be happy, my babies.

CHORUS

Sparkling eyes, tender lips, radiant hair.

MEDEA

But not here. Go away. I can't bear it. Go!

The children exit. Medea holds their masks.

MEDEA

Is there ~~There is~~ no one more sorrowful than a parent who buries a child?

Music change.

hang onto masks
Movement #24-Messenger's Score Part 1

Enter Messenger.

Emptiness Grows

no eye contact

MEDEA

My sorrows are doubled.

MESSENGER

rise Your sorrows are just beginning.

MEDEA

turn to him
Why? What has happened.

MESSENGER

I came here with the hope of your innocence, but I see it in your face. I can smell it.

MEDEA

turn out
What is it you see?

MESSENGER

Sin, vile, the black stench of sin.

MEDEA

Tell me the woman is dead.

MESSENGER

And her father.

MEDEA

How did they die? In agony, I hope.

MESSENGER

Once you hear, you will regret what you have brought upon your house.

MEDEA

I doubt it. Now, ~~peak~~ speak my pleasure.

Music change.

Movement #25-Messenger's Score Part 2

MESSENGER

What I have to tell will strike terror in the hearts of honest men. When the servants of that ill-starred house saw your children enter with their father, our hearts filled and we wept with joy. We had all prayed that your suffering would end and happiness might visit your house from Heaven. Quickly, word spread throughout the hall that you had ended your feud with our master, and we fell upon the children with kisses of love. I, in high spirit and good cheer, led the little darlings to our lady's chambers. At first, she did not see the boys.

MESSENGER (Cont.)

All she saw was her husband, tall and proud. I don't think she breathed, so intent was her gaze upon him. But then one of the boys asked, "Is she our new mother?" When the princess heard this, her eyes filled with jealousy and she turned in anger. The master tried to calm her rage. He pleaded with her not to hate them, to consider them her own. He assured her what fine brothers they would be to their own children. He then begged her to ask her father to allow them to stay. He reminded his wife of their innocence and that they should not be punished for their mother's hostility. Then she turned to them and when she saw your gifts, she could not refuse him. Those horrid gifts bestowed by soft and tender faces. The smiling princess bent and kissed each of the boys and promised to persuade her father to pardon them, and she happily agreed to love them as her own. Rejoicing, the master sent them back to you with word of their reprieve and to allow a final night with their mother. With much singing and dancing, the servants set about preparing a place for hem to stay. The light of Fortune had lifted us up. Smiling, the princess cradled the robes, holding their softness close and losing her face in their scent. She put them on, smiling, and then placed the golden headdress upon her shining head. She then began to arrange herself before a large mirror, smiling at the newfound beauty you had given her. Filled with joy, she tenderly stepped to and fro, letting out a youthful giggle as she gazed at her reflection.

Music change.

Movement #26-Messenger's Score Part 3*

MESSENGER

But then came a sight to strike terror in the bravest of men's hearts. Suddenly, her smile faded as all the color flushed from her face. Her eyes filled with incomprehension. Then she began to shake, slightly at first. Her legs grew weak and had it not been for a nearby chair, she would have fallen. Suddenly the tremors turned into convulsions. Servants came running, hearing her gagging spasms, only to be greeted with the princess bent back in her chair, a white foam pouring from her mouth, her eyes glazed, seeing nothing. Immediately, a servant ran to the royal palace, another to the husband. Wails and cries echoed through the halls. Hardly had the servants gone, when suddenly the unblessed girl lurched forward, eyes closed, and gave such a moan that I fell to my knees in terror. The wretched girl tried to raise herself but her miserable pain was not yet through. The golden headdress began to glow and a stream of fiery destruction engulfed her head. At the same time, the robes began eating into her flesh. All on fire, she began to run, shaking her head in a frenzied blindness, back and forth, trying to lose the crown. But it would not come off. The more she shook, the hotter the fire burned. Conquered by agony, she fell to the floor, her screams turning to whimpers. The robes eating into what was once soft white skin, and then silence. I am cursed the rest of my days from the memory. No one but her father could have known her. I could not tell where her eyes should have been. Burnt flesh melted from her bones, like the amber blood of the pine, as the poison continued its cursed work. No one would touch her, fearing they, too, would find the same tortured end. A terror stricken silence fell upon us.

Music change.

Movement #27-Messenger's Score Part 4 & The Dance of the Shadows

The dancers slowly recede from Medea. They drift away with dark bat-like movements.

MESSENGER

Then her father, the most unfortunate man, rushed in. Unaware of the fiery plague that had befallen his daughter, he threw himself upon the body. Moaning, he folded his only child in his arms and wailed. Lost, he swayed back and forth, crying and groaning. Then, through hot tears, he smiled, saying, "My sweet, tis but a dream." Over and over. Then, to himself, "Wake up, the morning meal awaits." But he knew. He was awake. We all were awake and never again would she taste the morning fruit or wine or feel the cool morning air brush her once beautiful cheek. Then, shaking, he tried to rise, but could not move. He began to pull, then struggled, but he could not work himself free of those torturous robes. Violently, he pulled, tearing the flesh from his body. Then, abruptly, he stopped. He looked at me with smiling eyes. My heart froze for in those eyes was the knowledge of death when all truth is revealed. And then he sank, down, and embraced his child. Side by side they laid, cursed father, ill-fated child. No more pain. I weep for our lives, Medea. We are the shadow dancers. Happiness fades. Blown by the breath of Fate, we are the shadows.

The dancers have knelt at different levels around Medea. They pulsate with winged arm movements to the rhythm of the music. Only the Chorus remains at Medea's side.

Messenger exits.

Music change.

Movement #28-The Dance of Decision

CHORUS

Fate has blown a hot breath on the house of Creon. Now is the time for the shade of Jason to fade.

Medea and the Chorus exit up-center. As they leave, a scrim flies in behind them and they disappear.

Music change.

The dancers begin to move.

Movement #29-The Dance of Dreams

Hollow

Medea and the Chorus are revealed with the children behind the scrim.

FIRST CHILD

Hello, maman. What's wrong?

MEDEA

Nothing, my love.

SECOND CHILD

Why are you crying?

MEDEA

I'm sorry to see you leave.

FIRST CHILD

You can come and visit.

MEDEA

No, I can't.

SECOND CHILD

Then we'll come and see you. *at cost*

MEDEA

Oh, my dear ones. Here, drink, it is time to sleep.

They drink. *get water give*

A heartbeat sound starts and then begins to slow. *it's to be*

send them to bed

MEDEA

Sleep, my sweet ones, rest for your journey.

FIRST CHILD

Maman, I don't feel well.

MEDEA

Close your eyes. It will pass.

SECOND CHILD

Goodnight, ~~maman~~.

MEDEA

Goodnight, my love.

FIRST CHILD

I love you.

CHORUS

Listen to the hearts of the innocent.

Lights fade as the heartbeat becomes slower. After the lights fade to black, the heartbeat is heard stopping.

Movement #30 - Music change to a low fast rhythmic drum.

Jason's voice is heard.

2nd step
3rd step
JASON
Where is she?!

As lights fade up, the Nurse is revealed sitting alone.
Jason enters.

JASON
Why do you sit there doing nothing? Where are my children?

NURSE
You depraved, sad man. You know nothing of your sorrow.

JASON
What, is she waiting to kill me, too? I don't care. It's the children I'm here to save.

NURSE
You need not worry. She has seen to it.

The Nurse exits.

JASON
Where is she? Her punishment is mine!

Medea appears behind the scrim with the bodies of the children. The dancers begin to move tauntingly towards Jason.

Di AD
MEDEA
What is all this noise? Are you searching for your children? Here they are!

JASON
Oh, you vile, wretched demon! You most hated creature under God's Heaven! Still you have sight to see the sun? I will extinguish that light myself. With these bare hands, I will tear out your black heart.

Jason is stopped by the scrim.

MEDEA
You may speak but you will never touch.

JASON

You are possessed of evil. I see it now. You betrayed your father and home, killed your brother, and now, my sons. I can see it in your eyes. You are a shameless bloodsucker.

MEDEA

Words seem to be failing you, Jason. You know what you have done. Did you think your happiness would be born from my pain? And Creon, where are his words? Did you think his casting me out would go unanswered? You are a fool and so was I for ever loving you.

JASON

Oh, my children, what an evil mother I have brought on you.

MEDEA

It was your father who brought death on you.

JASON

It was not my hand that killed them.

MEDEA

No, it was your ambition, your lust. I was satisfied with you, but you had to have more.

JASON

You murdered your children because of rejected love?

MEDEA

That is no small hurt to a woman.

JASON

Only to vicious women.

MEDEA

Your children are dead. That stings you?

JASON

No! They live to heap curses on your foul head!

MEDEA

God knows where this began.

JASON

God knows your vile rotten heart.

MEDEA

Enough. I am through with your thin veiled words.

JASON

Then I say this. I care not where you go, or what you do from here. Allow me to bury the bodies of my sons.

MEDEA

No, it will be their mother who buries them, in a place they will not be violated.

JASON

Their curses will slay you.

MEDEA

God does not listen to liars.

JASON

Nor killers.

MEDEA

The rest of my life will serve as atonement. Now go, go bury your wife.

The drum begins to slowly decrease in rhythm. The dancers slowly begin to move in on Jason.

JASON

Oh, my sons, my children.

MEDEA

If you think your pain is great now, wait till you grow old.

JASON

Let me kiss them one last time.

MEDEA

Only now you miss them?

JASON

Let me touch them.

MEDEA

No, you took your chances and you lost. Live long, Jason.

Medea and the children fade away. The scrim flies out and the Chorus is revealed as the dancers begin to close in on Jason.

JASON

Oh God, answer my prayer. Curse her. She killed my sons. My children!

The dancers fall on Jason as the Chorus watches.

Fade to black.

Music change.

Movement #31-The Dance of Catharsis (Returning the Souls)

Everyone returns except Medea, Jason, the Chorus, and the children. The Priestess and her Priests enter from up-center and move to center stage. As they step off the up-center platform, the set begins to disappear. Two dancers bring the altar back. The Priestess returns the souls to the dancers who in turn move back into the audience, in the same manner as they entered, and return the souls to their owners. Jason enters, crosses to the Priestess, removes his mask, and pays homage. Everyone onstage and the dancers in the audience remove their masks. The Priestess, Priests, and Jason split center revealing Medea and the Chorus with the children. Everyone turns and kneels to them and the lights fade.

Exit music.

The Concept

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The inspiration for this adaptation was Geraldo Rivera, oddly enough. Clint Mahle, our director, was reading yet another adaptation of *Medea* in hopes that he would find a version that he would like to direct, when he looked up at the television and saw that Geraldo Rivera was doing a show entitled, "Mothers Who Kill Their Children". Mahle put down the script and began to watch, and evidently both the audience and the host were more confused at the end of the show than they were at the beginning. After watching, Mahle began to wonder what would drive a mother to kill her children, and the idea for this adaptation was born. He felt that Euripides had been unfair to Medea because all of the sacrifices that she made for Jason are never mentioned in the play. He felt that the play told only one side of the story. He wanted to tell the entire story to the audience, and see if it was possible for Medea to appear as a sympathetic character rather than a heartless monster.

The guiding force of this production was the music, which was selected while the script was being written. The music is an interesting combination of many cultural influences that reinforce the idea that the theme of *Medea* is universal. Many of the scenes came out of Clint's reaction to the music. Every scene throughout the play was underscored by music until the children died. The final scene of confrontation between Jason and Medea after the children's deaths was not underscored, which added to the audience's sense of loss.

The basis for his production concept was Peter Brook's ideas

from his chapter on the Holy Theatre from his book *The Empty Space*. Brook's ideas inspired the ritual at the beginning, which presented Medea and her children as sacrifices.

Antonin Artaud's chapter on the Theater of Cruelty from his book *The Theater and its Double*, inspired the dancers's relationship to the audience at the beginning of the show. The dancers invaded that comfortable personal space in a darkened theatre which audiences are accustomed to, and forced them to take a more active role in the play.

Bertolt Brecht's ideas on alienation devices, many of which are recorded in *Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook*, also took a key role in our production. We conveyed to the audience that we knew we were actors playing these roles, and not really Medea, Jason, or any other character. The mask work that we did and the changing of some of the costumes on stage helped us to translate that idea to the audience. When an audience knows that the actors realize that they are indeed actors, a play is no longer realistic and the audience is forced to think about what is happening, which is what Brecht intended.

Much of the staging was influenced by Japanese *Kabuki* theatre. Mahle's addition of the story of the quest for the Golden Fleece was done in this style. A narrator told the entire story, while the other actors and dancers did the action that she was describing. The narrator was the only person on stage who spoke for several minutes. This is typical of *Kabuki* theatre.

Our goal was to combine all of these influences into one cohesive unit so that the audience would not be able to identify one particular influence. Our hope was that the audience would react not only intellectually as Brecht intended, but emotionally as well.

Mahle made some other changes that distinguish our production from the Euripides version and other adaptations. At the beginning, the story of the quest for the Golden Fleece was added to give the audience a sense of the sacrifices Medea had made for Jason. Also, the Chorus took a different role from what it is traditionally given. The only person who spoke was Brooks Buffington, and the Chorus became in essence a bifurcation of Medea. The Chorus represented the rational and logical side of Medea, while Medea was ruled by her passions. The final major change that was made that gave our production an original flair was the addition of dancers. There were eight dancers that assisted in telling the story of the quest for the Golden Fleece, then their role changed. They became a manifestation of Medea's emotion. They were divided into pairs which represented fear, rage, jealousy, and love. None of the characters, including Medea, acknowledged their physical presence, but all of the characters reacted to them as feelings received from Medea. I also reacted to them as they moved about me, and it was important for the audience to see that their action was motivated by my internal reactions. So, in essence there were ten people who played Medea!

After talking with Mahle about the production concept, I set out to acquaint myself with all of his inspirations. I researched Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Bertolt Brecht, *Kabuki* theatre, Greek dramatic conventions, past productions of *Medea* in America, and finally, the Medea myth.

I was not entirely certain how helpful all of this information might be or how it was going to fit into the production. As I went through these books, I picked quotes that I thought might be helpful based on my understanding of the production concept. I made notes throughout my research period from November 1996 to January 1997, and referred to them throughout the rehearsal process. What follows are my notes, along with short paragraphs at the end of each section that explains how the information was helpful or not so helpful.

Artaud - The Theater of Cruelty 38
from The Theater and its Double

p. 84 At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart.

p. 85 Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt.

p. 85 Theatre of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets.

p. 85 We want to make out of the theatre a believable reality which gives the heart and the senses that kind of concrete bite which all true sensation requires. In the same way that our dreams have an effect upon us and reality has an effect upon our dreams, so we believe that the images of thought can be identified with a dream which will be efficacious to the degree that it can be projected with the necessary violence. And the public will believe in the theatre's dreams on condition that it take them for true dreams and not for a servile copy of reality; on condition that they allow the public to liberate within itself the magical liberties of dreams which it can only recognize when

they are imprinted with terror and cruelty.

Hence this appeal to cruelty and terror, though on a vast scale, whose range probes our entire vitality, confronts us with all our possibilities.

It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators.

p. 86 Practically speaking, we want to resuscitate an idea of total spectacle by which the theatre would recover from the cinema, the music hall, the circus, and from life itself what has always belonged to it. The separation between the analytic theatre and the plastic world seems to us a stupidity. One does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence, especially in a domain where the endlessly renewed fatigue of the organs requires intense and sudden shocks to revive our understanding.

p. 87 The first spectacle of the Theatre of Cruelty will turn upon the preoccupations of the great mass of men, preoccupations much more pressing and disquieting than those of any individual whatsoever.

p. 89 Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought.

p. 90 The question, then, for the theatre, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression, in order to rescue it from its servitude to psychology and "human interest."

p. 91 But by an altogether Oriental means of expression, this objective and concrete language of the theatre can fascinate and ensnare the organs. It flows into the sensibility. Abandoning Occidental usages of speech, it turns words into incantation. It extends the voice. It utilizes the vibrations and qualities of the voice. It wildly tramples rhythms underfoot. It pile-drives sounds. It seeks to exalt, to benumb, to charm, to arrest the sensibility. It liberates a new lyricism of gesture which, by its precipitation or its amplitude in the air, ends by surpassing the lyricism of words. It ultimately breaks away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms.

p. 92 It is a question then of making the theatre, in the proper

sense of the word, a function; something as localized and as precise as the circulation of the blood in the arteries or the apparently chaotic development of dream images in the brain, and this is to be accomplished by a thorough involvement, a genuine enslavement of the attention.

p. 93 Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element, perceptible to all.

p. 94 It is not a question of suppressing the spoken language, but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams.

p. 97 Masks, objects of strange proportions will appear with the same sanction as verbal images, will enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression - with the corollary that all objects requiring a stereotyped physical representation will be discarded or disguised.

p. 98 There is an idea of integral spectacles which must be regenerated. The problem is to make space speak, to feed and furnish it; like mines laid in a wall of rock which all of a sudden turns into geysers and bouquets of stone.

p. 99 Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of

degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.

p. 122 The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood.

p. 122 The Theatre of Cruelty will choose subjects and themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch.

p. 124 We shall renounce the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer.

This information was very helpful. It was not easy reading, because Artaud was legally insane, and his writing tends to be rather fragmented and wanders from the point. However, struggling through this book was well worth the effort. For example, on pages 89, 91, and 94, to summarize the basic ideas, he says that language itself is not sacred, and the text is not the basis of a production. This was helpful because our adaptation was anything but "talky". It relied upon visual elements, particularly dance and the use of masks, which Artaud referred to on page 97. As Artaud said on page 124, "We shall

renounce the theatrical superstition of the text..." As an actor, this helped me to understand why much of the language that had become synonymous in my mind with *Medea* had been cut. I came to understand the importance of silence and to rely on its power.