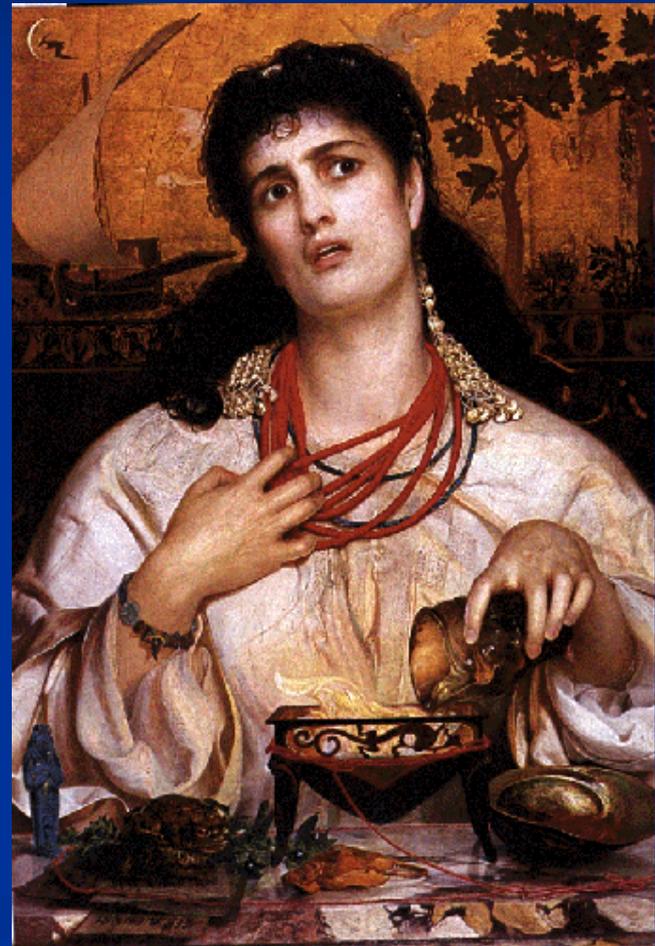


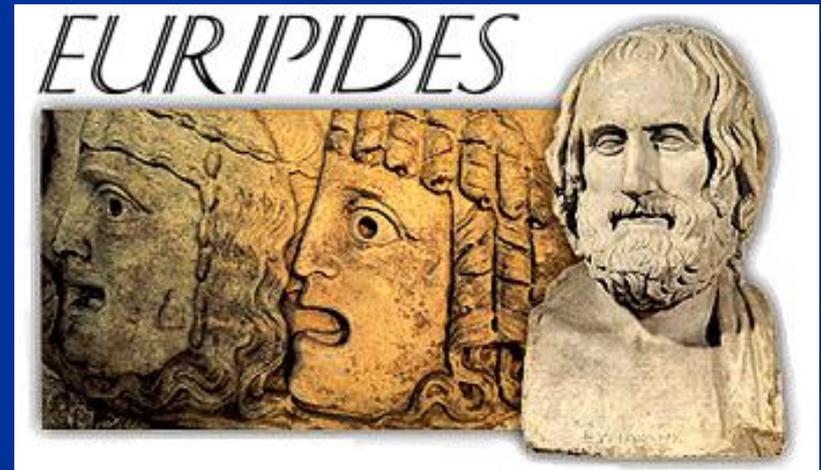
# Euripides' Medea

- The Life of Euripides
  - His Life, Death & Reputation
  - His Works
- Medea
  - Background: Jason and the Argonauts



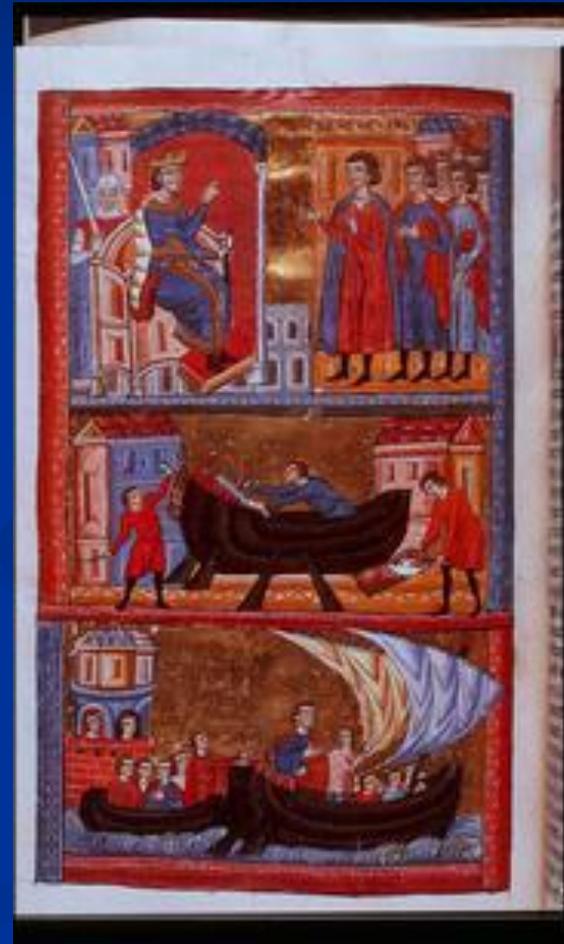
# Euripides' Life and Accomplishments

- Euripides
  - born around 484 BCE
  - from a prominent family
  - nothing reliable known about his education
  - his career began in the tragic competitions in 455 BCE in which he earned a third prize



# Medea

- The Structure of the Text
- Drama Terminology
- Characters



# Medea: Structure of the Play

- Medea is a **Tragedy**:
  - A literary work dealing with very serious and important themes, in which a dignified tragic figure meets destruction through some personal flaw or weakness.
  - Sophocles was interested in the situation that produced the **tragedy**.
  - Euripides was more fascinated with the psychology of the characters involved in **tragedy**.

# Medea: Structure of the Play

- Classic Greek Dramas had only one setting. No scenes were changed.
- Messengers would often deliver longer vivid speeches describing action that occurred off-stage.

# Medea: Structure of the Play

- Greek Drama begins with a **prologue**, a prologue usually depicts a preceding.
- The prologue is shortly followed by the an entrance of the chorus
- The chorus would often have a leader, the **choragos**. The chorus would often provide the popular opinion during on-stage debates or arguments.

# Medea



- The **chorus** was traditionally composed of fifteen actors and played the part of city elders.
- After the prologue, the play would alternate between episodes (choral odes).
- The episodes are similar to what we think of as acts (play within a play).

# Themes

1. Deceptive gifts
2. Marriage and sexual antagonism
3. Religion vs. the law
4. Female poetics:

Is Euripides a feminist? Is *Medea* about women's rights or women's wrongs?

# Some Background...



- Jason was on a quest to capture the Golden Fleece from Medea's father...for Protection
- She helps him steal it.
- In the process, they take Medea's brother and sail away.
- Medea's father (Aeetes) goes after them.
- So they cut up her brother into tiny pieces and throw overboard
- Aeetes has to stop and collect the pieces
- Thus, Jason and Medea escape

# Killing of Children: Taboo

- Killing of children in literature is a literary motif called *kindermord* (Medea or Oedipus as a baby)
- The death of children often represents the killing of some dimension of the parents



A. Feuerbach, 1829-1880: Medea. Photo ©Maicar Förlag-GML

# Modern Day Analysis (the psychology)

- ***LOS ANGELES--(BUSINESS WIRE Journal...MORE THAN 600 MOTHERS KILL THEIR CHILDREN EACH YEAR***
- **"There are six major personality profiles of mothers who kill their children," said Los Angeles psychologist Robert R. Butterworth, Ph.D.....**

1. **The Mentally Ill Mother:** A woman who may be acutely psychotic
2. **The Retaliating Mother:** A woman who is jealous of her husband and/or envious of her children
3. **The Depressed Mother:** Research shows that more than a third of the mothers Killed their children under the influence of depression.
4. **The Unwanted or Unexpected Mother:** Unwanted or unplanned children
5. **The Merciful Mother:** A sick or diseased child is killed by the mother to protect the child from pain and suffering.
6. **The Battering Mother:** In a fit of rage, they accidentally batter the child To death

# Interpretations: Ambiguous *Medea*

## 1. Medea as witch?

- Poison that brings life and death
- Chariot of Helios

## 2. How is Medea a “hero” in this play? Characteristics? (Note Greek definition of a hero on p. 1003)

- Central figure of the play like Oedipus
- Exhibits countless heroic characteristics: daring, rashness, resolve, eloquence, inspires fear, etc.
- Like heroes, she is concerned with her glory and being treated unjustly or with disrespect (Achilles), especially being the object of laughter
- She is a help to her friends (e.g., Aegeus), dangerous to her foes
- Deceit and cunning over brute strength (Heracles)
- Confident that the gods are on her side vs. Jason
- She prevails (cf. Oedipus: he too prevails in a way but is still blind)

### 3. How is Medea characterized as a god?

- "This is the gods' and my deed": sees herself as the gods' instrument and associate!
- Her farewell on the chariot of Helios = deus ex machina (reserved for gods only!); gives prophecy like god
- Cult in Corinth and Athens
- She's not even punished in the afterlife but marries Achilles there! Why would he be a fitting mate?

## 4. How is Medea a beast?



- Savage, a lioness, tigress and Scylla
- Aristotle: anyone who cannot live in a partnership is either a god or beast.
  - Other characters we've read about that fit this definition?

# Reversal of Order in *Medea*

## ■ Marriage:

- Medea is from a far off place. Jason should marry a princess in the first place. To the people she's merely a concubine.

## ■ Love

- Everything love touches causes death

## ■ Children

- The innocent die here/not the evil
- The natural order of justice is reversed
- Children are agents of death

## ■ Medea

- Mother kills her children. Kids die then parents...

## ■ The Princess

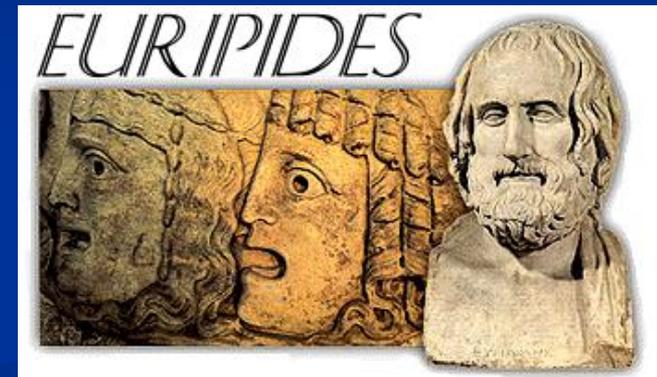
- Innocence dies an awful death

## ■ Creon (not the same character from Oedipus)

- Tries to save daughter, yet dies.

## ■ Aegeus

- Can't have children, even though he's married



# Question...

- What Euripides doing in this play with the notion of sexism? (p. 1010-11; 1019)

# Discussion

- With which character is Euripides the most sympathetic? Is she a hero or a villain?
- While he makes Medea the most affected of the two main figures, he also turns her into a sorceress and murderer (not just any murder...but of her children)
- On the other hand, Jason, who has acted wrongly, tries to defend himself. Does Euripides try to portray Jason as fairly as possible?

# Discussion

- Much of *Medea* is concerned with oratory and being clever at speaking. During the same period of time, a group of philosophers known as the Sophists (who were not from Athens) offered lessons in how to speak cleverly.
- In Athenian legal system, where one could be constantly sued by any Athenian citizen, it was useful to know how to speak cleverly.
- *What tricks of speech are used by Medea and Jason? How can we tell that they are involved in an oratorical contest? (pp. 1018-21)*

# Discussion...



- The nurse shows some understanding of the character of Medea before we even meet her. While speaking to the children, she warns them of Medea's nature (p. 1007)
- How does this affect our initial impression of Medea?
- Is she pitiable when we first meet her?
- How about at the end of the play?
- What makes her pitiable?

# What's missing in this play??

- Beyond the murder, the gore, the revenge, the anger, and the infidelity, what's missing in this play? Why is the ending so unsatisfactory?
- Much like our discussion of Oedipus, we need a SAVIOR to make things right (to bring Justice), but we're not provided with one!
- No real divine justice?

- Finally, based on this text, what is bothering Euripides concerning Athenian culture?