Medea: Maiden, Mother, Monster

A Biopoetic Analysis

by

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Abstract

The analysis of literature using evolutionary literary theory now has a scholarly record of two decades. While several archaic and classical Greek works have been interpreted with insightful and productive results using a biopoetic critical method, Classical scholars have not yet to any degree taken up the approach. This thesis aims to establish whether the characterization of Medea in three Greek texts involving three different literary genres, Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian* ode, Euripides’ tragedy *Medea*, and Apollonios’ epic the *Argonautika*, follows that predicted by the findings of evolutionary psychology.

Excerpts from the texts are compared against the relevant findings of evolutionary psychology influencing the construction and reception of narrative character and action, and considered in relation to a number of biologically and psychologically informed motivations and behaviours from among those posited by evolutionary psychologists. These include: mating strategies, attractiveness, marriage, sexuality, romantic love, jealousy, parental investment, kin relationships, infanticide, and the factors predetermining filicide - mental illness and status issues.

This analysis finds that all of these ancient writers achieve maximum audience engagement with characters and action through the integration of expected behaviour and thought with unexpected or transgressive characterization. This is successful because authors and audiences share an experience and understanding of evolved human action and psychology, above and beyond cultural experience.

In all the texts, the characterization of Medea is expanded through depiction of other conventionally gendered or transgressive male-female relationships. Where aspects of Medea’s motivation and behaviour (and those of her significant others) are in direct contravention of evolutionary prediction, this thesis argues that these inversions were intentional on the part of the authors, who, aware of audience social and literary expectation, manipulated these expectations for literary effect. While Medea’s unfeminine powers are deliberately highlighted through the depiction of Iason’s ambivalent masculinity, the wider focus of all three works suggests that while elements of Iason and Medea’s conflict lay in their self-arranged marriage, their dysfunctional relationships with kin, and their self-centred view of their children as instrumental, the heart of their struggle lies in the intrinsic and irreconcilable reproductive strategic conflict between the sexes.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: The Biopoetic Method of Analysis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Pindar’s Medea - The Maiden</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Euripides’ Medea - The Mother</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Apollonios’ Medea - The Monster</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This thesis explores the possibility that a model of literary criticism derived from evolutionary psychology might account for and explain the characterisation of the Medea of Pindar’s Fourth Pythian, Euripides’ Medea, and Apollonios of Rhodes’ Argonautika. The universal and enduring appeal of certain narrative types, characters, and themes to an audience may be explained as a result of evolutionarily selected innate mental structures, arising out of biological concerns and imperatives, particularly those centred on issues around reproduction. Authorial exploitation, manipulation, and contravention of these aspects of human nature underlie the innate fascination of Medea for audiences in ancient times and ever since. Medea has been variously characterized as an innocent maiden, a loving mother, and a murderous monster. This thesis finds that she is each, and all of these, and that a biopoetic approach illuminates interpretation of her in these aspects.

The analysis of literature using evolutionary literary theory now has a scholarly record of two decades. Several classical works have been productively interpreted in this manner. Robin Fox has applied this approach to Greek epic in “Sexual Conflict in the Epics” and “Male Bonding in the Epics and Romances”; so too has Jonathon Gottschall in his articles, “Homer’s Human Animal: Ritual Combat in the Iliad”, “An Evolutionary Perspective on Homer’s Invisible Daughters” and his full scale study, The Rape of Troy: Evolution, Violence, and the World of Homer. Homer’s Odyssey has also been the focus of Brian Boyd’s On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction, while Michelle Scalise Sugiyama has considered Oidipous through this lens in her “New Science, Old Myth: An Evolutionary Critique of the Oedipal Paradigm.”¹ The methodological approach of this thesis is indebted to these scholars, and to many others working in the field of evolutionary literary analysis: Joseph Carroll, Ellen Dissanayake, Robin Dunbar, Daniel Nettle, Marcus Nordlund, Catherine Salmon, Robert Storey, and the late Denis Dutton.

As some Classical scholars of Greek myth and society have noted, analysis of the characterization of women in Greek literature is necessarily complicated. It is, as Barry Powell states, “difficult to form an accurate picture of the lives of women. Almost all literary sources were composed by male authors who often present a biased, unsympathetic, and

contradictory picture of the opposite sex.”\textsuperscript{2} Sue Blundell, however, while aware of this situation, affirms that “they nevertheless have something to tell us about the reality of women’s lives during a significant period in Europe’s past.”\textsuperscript{3} There has been some discussion in classical scholarship concerning the tension between a purely cultural attribution of gendered behaviour, and the evidence of inherited disposition. Powell warns against the ideological polarization of nurture and nature: “We cannot be mechanical, however, in separating biologically determined patterns of behaviour from culturally determined ones; such explanations sometimes assume that all gender differences, justified by myth, are conventional, which is not likely. Such criticism must also work with literary material generated by and for males, never by females themselves.”\textsuperscript{4}

Lin Foxhall also observes the necessity of both cultural and biological construction of gender: “The notion that essential categorical difference between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ exists [grounded in physique] … is universal, embedded in all human languages and cultures. What is plainly culturally specific is the infinitely complex elaboration of essential categorical difference”.\textsuperscript{5} And, as David Schaps argues, “the structure of gender in Greece was the product of natural sex differences and historical developments and Greek culture… The patriarchal household was an inheritance from the past”.\textsuperscript{6}

Despite these observations, while scholars such as Fox, Sugiyama, Boyd, and Gottschall have interpreted archaic and classical Greek literature using an evolutionary literary critical method with insightful and productive results, as previously stated, Classical scholars have not yet taken up the approach to any significant degree.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{2} Powell 2002:44, 161-2. So, too, Dowden (1995:44) cautions that literary myth itself is “not a medium of historical record for times beyond our grasp.”
\textsuperscript{3} Blundell 1995:10-11.
\textsuperscript{4} Powell 2002:44.
\textsuperscript{5} Foxhall 1998b:5.
\textsuperscript{6} Schaps 1998:183. Social scientist Goldstein (2001:2) also argues against a purely social construction of gender: “sex-gender discourse constructs a false dichotomy between biology and culture, which are, in fact, highly interdependent… Biology provides diverse potentials, and cultures limit, select, and channel them.”
\textsuperscript{7} Walter Burkert’s style of literary interpretation based on sociobiology, apparently conceived independently from the wider evolutionary literary movement, is the exception to this situation. His 1996 thesis, \textit{Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions}, as an alternative to cultural isolationism proposes “that there are phenomena common to all human civilizations, \textit{universalia} of anthropology; they may be but need not be called characteristics of human nature” (1996:3). He (1996:33) argues that religion was one of these universal phenomena: “The impetus of biological survival appears internalized in the codes of religion.” Burkert’s discussion was in general limited to the underlying importance of hunting in human ritual. He (1996:73) also observes, however, the parallel ‘maiden’s quest’ pattern of narrative as deriving from “the natural, biological life cycle of women in transition from childhood to adulthood”. In his view, the important narrative parallels are
The aim of this thesis is to establish whether the characterization of Medea follows that predicted by the findings of evolutionary psychology. Where aspects of Medea’s motivation and behaviour (and those of her significant others) are in direct contravention of those findings, this thesis argues that these inversions were intentional on the part of the authors, who, aware of audience social and literary expectation, manipulated these expectations for literary effect. Relevant excerpts from the ancient Greek texts will be compared against the findings of evolutionary psychology, and discussed as to their relationship to the predicted motivation and behaviour.

Chapter 1 introduces evolutionary literary criticism, and summarizes the reasoning literary scholars have given for their espousal of the method. Principles of evolution structuring evolutionary psychology are then outlined, as a working understanding of the relevant evolutionary paradigms is essential to the method. Chapter 1 concludes with the findings of evolutionary psychology relevant to the analysis of the character and actions of Medea: mating strategies, marriage, romantic love, jealousy, parental investment, kin relationships, and infanticide.

Chapter 2 examines the text of Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian* against the predictions of evolutionary psychology. The *Fourth Pythian* is a 299-line lyric poem of the early fifth century. Medea’s role in the poem is small but significant, especially in terms of her later depiction. The poem deals principally with aspects of mating strategy and marriage.

Chapter 3 examines the text of Euripides’ *Medea* against the predictions of evolutionary psychology. The *Medea* is a 1419-line tragedy produced some thirty years after Pindar’s ode, c. 431 BCE. Medea’s role in the drama is central, and the play presents abundant material evidencing mating strategies, marriage, jealousy, parental investment, kin relationships, infanticide (or, more properly, filicide), and status issues.

Chapter 4 examines the text of Apollonios of Rhodes’ *Argonautika* against the same predictions. The *Argonautika* is a four-book epic heroic quest poem of the third century BCE. Principal concerns of the epic associated with evolutionarily selected motivation and behaviour are mating strategies, attractiveness criteria, male sexual opportunism, romantic love, marriage, sexuality, jealousy, kin relationships, and infanticide as a result of mental imbalance.

The thesis concludes with an evaluation of how the characterization of Medea in

“seclusion, sexual encounter, and childbirth [which] is no coincidence; the biological foundation of culture… could hardly be more obvious.”
these three texts both follows and contravenes the predictions of evolutionary literary theory.
Chapter One: The Biopoetic Method of Analysis

The application of evolutionary psychology to literary criticism is a comparatively new field of study, particularly within Classics, with the potential to open up new ways of understanding the stories that the ancient Greeks chose to relate.

Evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby succinctly outline the relevance of the Darwinian paradigm to culture: “Once one realizes that psychology is a branch of biology, inferential tools developed in biology – its theories, principles, and observations – can be used to understand psychology.”¹ In their view, principles of evolutionary biology explain both successful and apparently ‘dysfunctional’ human social and sexual relationships.² They further observe that the phenomenon of cross-cultural, universal human preoccupation with the imagined worlds of narrative fiction leads them to the conclusion that that the disposition to such cultural preoccupation must be the result of specialized and evolved cognitive mechanisms.³ Echoing Aristotle’s conception of katharsis, they have found that humans respond psychologically to the characters and events in fictional worlds in the same manner as to those in reality, “engag[ing] emotion systems while disengaging action systems.”⁴ The universal human propensity for and pleasure in narrative is evolutionarily selected because narrative reflects our reality and may be used to safely explore perilous social complexities.⁵

⁵ Scalise Sugiyama (2001a:233-5, 242, 235) believes that Paleolithic humans who inherited a proficiency in narrative production and engagement enjoyed a reproductive advantage. Dutton (2009:110, 117, 119) argues that stories provided low-risk surrogate experiences and provided models for social behavior, addressing peculiarly human concerns about desires, emotions, calculations, struggles, frustrations, and pleasures; through story, the innate human capacity for empathy, the necessary precursor to social relations, was developed in the Paleolithic human mind. Boyd (1998:13) also suggests that the various features of narrative - disguise, deception, dramatic irony, embedded tales, and awareness of character thought - are probably cognitive preparation for the complexities of human social being. He (2009b:15, 168) defines all art, as ‘cognitive play with pattern... engaging and rewarding attention’; the command of others’ attention, through competency
Evolutionary literary criticism, or biopoetics, holds that because humans universally share innate feelings and motivations, “Literature commonly depicts human nature [and] satisfies the needs of human nature.” This is in large part because “literary characters have human beliefs, desires, emotions, and perceptions.” Similarly, while evolutionary psychology can illuminate literary study, the elements of fiction can contribute to better understanding of human nature, as one literary scholar notes: “all literary criticism is in one way or another psychological criticism, and, in a fundamental way literary study is the study of human cognition.” Other literary scholars, in agreement with Tooby and Cosmides, point to the correspondence between character and real life issues, suggesting, for example, “that characters are believable insofar as they behave in concert with biological expectation, and that evolutionary considerations serve as a powerful, unconscious touchstone for such expectations.” A growing number of scholars of literature have embraced biopoetic criticism, in response to the perceived obsolescence of the cultural constructionism of the last decades of the twentieth century. Their observations are worth reviewing here.

Aesthetics scholar Dissanayake disputes the then prevalent philosophical paradigm, in which the minds of humans are ‘tabula rasa’. She also deplores the contemporary postmodern position that Darwinism is essentially “dangerous, reductionist, opposed to beauty, peace, and the human scale.” Nor does she agree with the view that findings of universals of an evolved human nature “necessarily derive from exploitative ideological or political agendas.” She argues that, in contrast with the postmodern position that cultural artifacts are entirely contingent, “The reasons that we find a work accessible, striking, resonant, and satisfying are biologically endowed as well as culturally acquired; they are not merely a matter of playful and shifting interpretations.”

Anthropologist Fox’s analysis of archetypal male behaviour in ancient epic also argues for a “a sociobiology of literature.” Aside from the Iliad, Fox identified consistent patterns of male conflict over fertile women in Roman, Nordic, and Celtic epic, Old Testament narrative, Persian fable, the Hindu Rig Veda, the Finnish Kalavela, and the

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6 Carroll 2006a:19.  
7 Scalise Sugiyma 2001b:121.  
8 Barash and Barash 2002:B7.  
11 Dissanayake 1995:75.  
Japanese *Tale of Genji*. He found, in his study of the constant conflict between males for sexual access for fertile females, “that the resources of myth and literature are a rich mine of information for the enduring obsessions of the evolved hominid.”

Narratologist Patrick Hogan argues that admired or preferred stories in cultures follow a limited number of patterns, which are determined by cross-culturally constant ideas about emotion. Hogan aims to isolate universal patterns of story structure, explaining these patterns by reference to well-defined cognitive principles. Hogan posits two universal and basic conflict tales: the romantic and the heroic, later extending this to include the sacrificial. In his view, readers and auditors identify with a character on the basis of shared high-level properties in their self-conception and prefer works involving characters with whom they identify.

Literary scholar Storey notes the emotional appeal of narrative to the reader, claiming that tragedy does not so much *purge* the emotions, as evoke and intensify them, “even and most especially the “painful” emotions.” He argued that evolution-backed critical theory provides the best tool for the analysis of human existence, as well as “a necessary (and inevitable) replacement for the structuralist- and poststructuralist-inspired ontologies that now dominate the critico-theoretical scene.” For Storey, a sociobiological approach “is neither a program nor a platform nor an agenda: it is a scientific theory that explains – to my mind, cogently and elegantly – a large body of fact, ethological, anthropological, sociological, psychological, endocrinological, neurological, and so on.” In his view, a redundant postmodern literary criticism can regain its integrity and legitimacy “only if it abandons the hermetic anthropocentrism of poststructuralism for the more inclusive view that evolution affords.”

Literature scholar Carroll observes that “The central concept in both evolutionary social science and evolutionary literary study is ‘human nature’: genetically mediated characteristics typical of the human species.” Evolutionary psychology, drawing heavily on cognitive developmental psychology, emphasises “the logic of reproduction as a central

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14 Fox 1995:142.
15 Fox 1995:137.
16 Hogan 2003:32.
18 Hogan 2003:29.
23 Carroll 2008a:103.
shaping force in human evolution.”

In this view, “culture does not stand apart from the genetically transmitted dispositions of human nature.” Thus, “Darwinian literary criticism is grounded in the large facts of human evolution and human biology, facts much larger and more robust than the conceptions that characterize the various branches of postmodern theory.”

Carroll likewise believes that postmodern literary analysis, eschewing any possibility of human universals, is blinkered by its ideological belief. Countering this kind of “wishful thinking”, he argues “We can construct social policies that reflect our sense of justice and decency. But we can’t do it effectively unless we take account of the materials with which we have to work. Social institutions are made out of people. People are made out of human nature.” Thus he advocates the use of evolutionary literary theory, particularly evolutionary psychology “to examine the motivations of characters in novels, plays, and (less frequently) poems, concentrating chiefly on the sexual dynamics, social dynamics, and survival issues such as acquiring resources and avoiding predators.” The concerns of evolutionary psychology infuse the central themes of literature: “survival, reproduction, kinship, social affiliation, dominance, aggression.” Additionally, as he observes: “Most stories are about people seeking resources and reproductive success.”

Further, a growing number of literary scholars agree with Carroll’s approach. For instance, Brett Cooke notes: “Compared to reality, works of art tend to exaggerate the iterance or urgency of a biological issue.” David Michelson points to the inevitability of the biopoetic approach; “conflicts surrounding life-history motivations and goals are present to some degree in virtually all literature by nature of their inevitability in life. No theories other than those stemming from evolutionary theory can presently explain such regularities in

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26 Carroll 2005:103.
27 Carroll 2010b:58.
28 Carroll 2010b:58
30 Carroll 2010b:54.
31 Carroll 2008a:129.
32 Carroll 2005:90.
34 Cooke 2008:150-1.
content across literary traditions.”\textsuperscript{35} Blakey Vermeule believes that “Literary Darwinism” not only addresses universal concerns, but, unlike arbitrary ideologically driven literary criticism, “runs with the grain of human nature rather than in any old direction.”\textsuperscript{36}

“Approaching literature through evolution” according to literary scholar Boyd, “allows us to understand the subject matter of literature in terms of the interests evolution has given us, as well as the way these are further reframed by each culture and each author.”\textsuperscript{37} With several other literary critics, he deplores the negative effects of postmodern literary criticism.\textsuperscript{38} For instance, Gottschall points to the failure of postmodern criticism to account for human universals: “Literary scholars have clung to obsolete \textit{tabula rasa} theories of human nature because they consider these theories to be consistent with a socially and politically progressive orientation while theories that invoke biology are viewed as socially and politically retrograde.”\textsuperscript{39} Gottschall argues for a repositioning of literary study, oriented not in theory, but in the fact that “the literary scholar’s subject is ultimately the human mind... the creator, subject, and auditor of literary works.”\textsuperscript{40} Further, he believes the same methodological approach to animal behaviour can be employed to analyse the human animal. As he observes: “Aspects of our culture, intelligence, and symbolic behavior make us different from the other apes, but they do not emancipate us from our evolved biology or lift us above other animals onto an exalted link of the chain of being.”\textsuperscript{41} In common with many scholars working with evolutionary literary criticism, Gottschall views the biopoetic approach as “inclusively biosocial”,\textsuperscript{42} explaining further that “the bodies of animals,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Michelson 2008:239.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Vermeule 2008:303.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Boyd 1998:13-14.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Boyd 2010a:198.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Gottschall 2008a:32. As Gottschall (2004:211-12) explains further, “Tabula rasa theories [of behavior/culture] predict massive cross-cultural variation while biological theories predict strong cross-cultural regularities. The data [...] reveals not massive cross-cultural flux but clear cross-cultural patterns in the most salient aspects of human mental and social life, providing unequivocal support to the theory that many of the most important aspects of human mental and social life emerge from evolved and universal aspects of our biology and psychology.”
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Gottschall 2008a:17.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Gottschall 2008b:160. Gottschall (2008b:8) counters critics’ accusations of biological determinism, stating, “there is no reason to fear that identifying an evolutionary foundation for a behavioural or psychological pattern means we are helpless to change it.”
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Gottschall 2008b:9. Gottschall's work, which analyses the conflict in Homer's \textit{Iliad} from the perspective of modern anthropology and evolutionary biology, is, in his view, “best described as an evolutionary anthropology of conflict” (Gottschall 2008b:3). Gottschall’s study of the \textit{Iliad} applies the biocultural model of male competition for wealth and status, the 'proximate' goals that enable the 'ultimate' goal: the acquisition of fertile women. He (2008b:49) states, “men compete for status and wealth because... Across species and human societies there is a powerful correlation between a male’s ability to control social and material resources and his reproductive success.” Gottschall (2008b:54)
\end{itemize}
including human animals, have been shaped by their environments to maximise survival and reproduction, *and so have their psychologies and behaviours.*

Carroll and his co-authors outline the essential approach of the sociobiological analysis; “culture does not stand apart from the genetically transmitted dispositions of human nature... Culture translates human nature into social norms and shared imaginative structures.” Despite their emphasis of the evolutionary framework, these scholars, all operating within traditional fields of English Literature, give proper recognition to the cultural contexts of literature, observing: “all writers feed off the meanings that are available within their culture: the literary forms and traditions with which they work and the forms of cultural imagination – ideological, religious, and philosophical – in which they participate.”

They argue for the interdependence of the innate and the authorial, stating; “Great novelists and playwrights tap into the deepest levels of the human psyche, connect their contemporary cultural forms with basic human passions, and give their own idiosyncratic and distinctive stamp to the world they envision.”

Some scholars of dramatic narrative also approach literary criticism from the sociobiological position, suggesting “the dramas that work best are those that depict social groups and relationships maximally similar to the kind that human social-cognitive capacities evolved to track in real life.” Nettle’s examination of narrative drama, following the biopoetic model, found that “tragedy and comedy quintessentially represent explorations of the domains of status competition (tragedy [incorporating a death resulting in the reordering of social structure]), and mate choice (comedy [culminating with a marriage reordering fitness possibilities]).” Nettle argues that both forms of drama are intrinsically powerful

cites ethnographic evidence that demonstrates “strife over women is perhaps the most frequently attested cause of all forms of male-male conflict in prestate societies.” Cf. Goldstein 2001.

Gottschall’s (2008b:55) main claims for his interpretation of the *Iliad* are:

- That patterns of conflict in Homeric society are congruent with patterns widely encountered in world ethnography.
- That this conflict can be understood, at the evolutionary level, as a product of competition within and between groups for scarce resources that convert to reproductive advantage.
- That these pressures were greatly intensified by shortages of young women brought about by de facto polygyny and, possibly, excess mortality of juvenile females.
- That a surplus of unmated males resulted in viciously circular patterns of violence.
- That these unrelenting cycles may help to illuminate both the tragic elements of the Homeric worldview and the frequently cruel and capricious natures of the gods and fate.

44 Carroll et al. 2010:213.
45 Carroll et al. 2010:218.
46 Carroll et al. 2010:218.
48 Nettle 2010:325.
“because they are intensified conversations in the social domains that, because they affect our fitness most, we are most interested in.”

Nordlund’s study of love and jealousy in Shakespearean drama argues that “the best conception of love, and hence the best framework for its literary analysis, must be a biocultural fusion of evolutionary and cultural/historical explanation.” Usefully, for this study of Medea, he reminds us that since the objective of sociobiological literary analysis “is not to reconcile literature and human nature, but to map the relationship between them, it follows that human nature can be equally illuminating when it is at variance with the work in question.” This is of course an important consideration in the analysis of authorial manipulation of stereotype and expectation.

What, then, are the evolutionary findings employed by the aforementioned scholars and which of these are most particularly relevant to a study of Medea? Evolutionary psychologists note that natural selection lies at the heart of evolution: “the differential survival and reproduction of variants within a species”, and results in individuals innately skilled “at solving the day-to-day problems of our hunter-gatherer ancestors... Those whose circuits were better designed for solving these problems left more children.” Physical and behavioural attributes of any individual are only selected if they contribute to that individual’s reproductive success, or ‘fitness’, leaving more genetic descendants than other individuals within a species. William Hamilton’s work on the seemingly contradictory factor of an individual’s altruism toward others, especially kin, addresses “the costs and benefits of an individual’s social behaviour in terms of that behaviour’s ‘fitness consequences’ – its effects in getting the individual’s genes into future generations.” Recent work on genetics clarifies Darwin’s work on sexual selection, in particular, and focuses on issues of obvious interest to any analysis of the character of Medea, such as “parental care, and the form of the breeding system (monogamy, polygyny, polyandry, or promiscuity).” However, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists working within

50 Nordlund 2007:5.
51 Nordlund 2007:12.
52 Daly and Wilson 1998:11.
an evolutionary framework of analysis observe that the Darwinian paradigm is controversial: the principal objection to the application of the method appears to be unwillingness to acknowledge the human being is also still an animal.\(^\text{57}\)

Evolutionary psychologists, while acknowledging the variance of individual human cultural examples, also attempt to characterize “the universal, species-typical architecture” of cognitive mechanisms.\(^\text{58}\) They acknowledge the important contribution of anthropologist Donald Brown’s 1991 study of biology, cultural variance, and human universals.\(^\text{59}\) Evolutionary theorists generally agree that the originating circumstance of all human adaptive

\(^{57}\) Responses to the objection of human privilege are numerous. As Buss (2008:9-10) states: “Although Darwin’s theory of evolution, with some important modifications, is the unifying and nearly universally accepted theory within the biological sciences, its application to humans, which Darwin clearly envisioned, still meets with vigorous resistance. But humans are not exempt from the evolutionary process.” Buss (2001:965) argues mounting evidence from “linguistics, artificial intelligence, cognitive neuroscience, psychophysiology, social psychology, cognitive psychology, and cultural psychology” supports this position.

Campbell (2002:2) argues this theoretical position of the SSSM [Standard Social Science Model] is pervaded by postmodern ‘hypertextuality’, in which “Humans are the sole focus of interest and any comparison between our behaviour and that of lower animals is unjustified, demeaning and reductionist… because humans have language, language enables discourse and it is through discourse that social reality, including gender, is constructed.” In Campbell’s (2002:8) view, “Social constructionist and environmental theories explain the transmission of the status quo”, but fail to address the origins of behaviour. She notes that feminist rejection of biological differences as a result of evolution, both mental and physical, prevents useful analysis, and hinders a coherent strategy to improve women’s lives (differences, Campbell 2002:13; strategy, Campbell 2002:24).

Biologists Waage and Gowaty (1997:585) attempting to bridge the ideological divide agree, observing: “Terminology, politics, and ignorance are, in retrospect, major barriers to the dialectic of feminism and evolutionary biology.” According to some, it is Postmodern antipathy to Western science, perceived to be “an ideological construct designed to serve the dominant political powers”, which is responsible for “scientific illiteracy [,] shallow understandings of the nature of science and ignorance of basic Darwinian processes” (antipathy, Knight et al. 1999:5; scientific illiteracy, Gowaty 1997:1).

Some psychobiologists and neuroscientists (Panksepp and Panksepp 2000:114), pointing to the inarguable biological identity of the human animal, state; “We do not believe that it makes intellectual sense to follow a fundamental specism in evolutionary psychology, where human proclivities are commonly discussed independently of what we share with other creatures.” Ultimately, in an evolutionary model, “[d]espite what some culturologists and social constructivists believe, the modern human mind is still tethered to ancestral animal minds” (Panksepp and Panksepp 2000:114). Daly and Wilson (1998:8) argue that “since the human animal has evolved by the same Darwinian processes as other animals, there is no apparent reason why the same principles should not apply.” Cf. Gottschall and Wilson 2005:xviii. As Carroll (2006:19) observes: “there is no real alternative to an evolutionary conception of human psychology. The only alternative is the hypothesis that humans, in contrast to every other species of animal, do not possess a species-typical set of genetically mediated behavioral dispositions.”

\(^{58}\) Cosmides and Tooby 1997:16.

\(^{59}\) Tooby and Cosmides 1992:43. Brown (1991:6) argues that human biology and evolutionary psychology illuminate many of the human universals that are of greatest interest to anthropology. In his view, Darwinian selection, the theoretical understanding of the process that shaped the human mind, provides the most inclusive theoretical framework for the illumination of the human condition.
behaviour, and subsequent cultural universals, were the diverse Pleistocene evolutionary environments of human hunters and gatherers.\textsuperscript{60} While the human species has become complex, both technologically and culturally, the psychological mechanisms developed in that era still determine our motivations and behaviour, for better or worse.\textsuperscript{61} Humans still face adaptive problems of four kinds, as do all reproducing creatures: “1. Survival and growth; 2. Mating; 3. Parenting; 4. Genetic relatives.”\textsuperscript{62}

As psychologist Anne Campbell notes, “The reproductive task can be broken into two stages and two kinds of problems: finding the right mate and raising offspring to maturity.”\textsuperscript{63} These are the core elements of Medean narrative that will be examined in this thesis: her union with Iason, its breakdown, and her murder of her own children. Material emphasizing different aspects of these may be found in the selected texts of Pindar, Euripides, and Apollonios.

Evolved human mating behaviour, in Medea’s contemporary setting as much as in the twenty-first century, is inescapably a result of selection pressures faced by the earliest men and women.\textsuperscript{64} While men and women may share many behavioural dispositions, in terms of sexual strategy their motivations and behaviour differ widely, despite the “prevailing dogma ... that the distinction between men and women is a collective and tyrannical fiction.”\textsuperscript{65} What then are the evolved behaviours and motivations related to mating and parenting that biopoetics predicts will be highlighted, explored, exploited, and deliberately contravened in literature in order to depict a believable and engaging character? A brief summary follows of the findings of evolutionary psychology informing biopoetic predictions.

\textsuperscript{60} Campbell 2002:26; Scalise Sugiyama 2001b:124; Cosmides and Tooby 1997:1, 12; Cosmides et al. 1992:5.
\textsuperscript{62} Buss 2008:69
\textsuperscript{63} Campbell 2002:60.
\textsuperscript{64} Buss 2008:106.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{strategy}, Campbell 2002:14; \textit{dogma}, Campbell 2002:1. Buss (2008:108) also states; “Humans still possess this underlying sexual psychology, even though the current environment has changed.” Campbell (2002:7-8) argues further that while “Nobody can seriously doubt that environmental factors modify the expression of sex differences... The question is whether these processes alone can explain the origins of the cross-cultural differences between male and female.” Her meta-analysis of sex behaviour research found enduring patterns of different behaviour in male and females from birth onward, and she warns; “If evolutionary theory is correct then we cannot design twenty-first century woman as if from scratch. Ideology, social policies, law and the media cannot in and of themselves make women into something they are not. What we can and should do is to give people choices that allow them the maximum freedom to be whatever they want. With that freedom, women’s nature can take its own course” (Campbell 2002:33). Miller (1999:71-2) also found that much creative artistic behaviour was gendered, and could be correlated with reproductive goals; “cultural behaviour is very much more instinctive in nature and sexual in function than most cultured people would care to admit.”
of narrative theme and character relevant to an analysis of Medea: mating strategies, marriage, romantic love, jealousy, parental investment, kin relationships, and infanticide.

There is widespread agreement among biologists and evolutionary psychologists that females are discriminating in mate choice and pursuit because their fertility opportunities are necessarily limited.\(^6\) Females prefer intrasexually competitive and dominant males who have resources and the power to get more.\(^6\) While female reproductive success is not demonstrably linked to their own status level,\(^6\) females reward men who are high in status, with more frequent sex in short-term relationships and extra-marital affairs, with a consequently larger number of children, in part because the women who ‘choose’ them tend to be younger and hence more fertile.\(^6\) Traditionally, women’s reproductive success was heavily dependent on the wealth of their husbands. Therefore, even in modern society, women tend to reject males with fewer resources than the women themselves possess.\(^7\) Females frequently employ early sexual behaviour when other economic and mating opportunities are unavailable to them.\(^8\)

Males on the other hand are indiscriminate in mate choice and pursuit because their fertility opportunities are almost limitless.\(^8\) Males prefer female youth and beauty as indicators of fecundity and fertility.\(^9\) Cross-culturally, men prefer younger wives because younger women are likely to bear more children in the future than are older women, in terms of average expected future reproduction potential.\(^10\) However, males adjust their mate standards to circumstances (long/short term mating).\(^11\) That males compete with each other for access to as many females as possible is undisputed across diverse schools of evolutionary psychology.\(^12\) The male pursuit and maintenance of status through intersexual

\(^8\) While males compete for and maintain status as a proximate path to reproductive success, the converse does not hold for females, whose reproductive success is a corollary of their male mate’s status behaviours. One meta-study (Sadalla et al. 1987:730-731) for example found that “Empirical studies of the behavioral correlates of sex roles in contemporary culture consistently indicate that dominance is an integral part of the male role and is consistently absent in descriptions of the female role.” Cf. Daly & Wilson 1983; Symonds 1979; Wilson 1975.
\(^12\) Buss 2008:322-3; Barrett et al. 2002:95; Campbell 2002:40; Kenrick and Trost 1987:64-5.
competition is explained through the increase in reproductive opportunity enjoyed by high-status males.\textsuperscript{77}

Male and female evolved reproductive strategies are inevitably in an ‘arms race’ style conflict,\textsuperscript{78} although mating strategies in practice are flexible and contingent on socio-

\textsuperscript{77} The issue of status is a demonstrably universal human male concern (Sadalla et al. 1987:730). While nearly all fertile women will reproduce, reproductive success among men is much more variable, and is dependent on individual male status (Buss 2008:360). Dominance competition among males is rewarded by preferential access to reproductive opportunities, including access to other men’s wives (Buss 2006:240-1; Barrett et al. 2002:91; Henrich and Gil-White 2001:167; Betzig 1986:85-6). Therefore, male willingness to defend their status will be selected for, through female preference for dominant males, and through male appropriation of lower-status males’ mates (Buss 2008:360). The reproducing female who actively prefers high-status males immediately gains access to better resources for herself and her children: her male descendants inherit a dominant disposition, and therefore enjoy increased production of offspring (Sadalla et al. 1987:731). The importance to men of personal reputation, and a preoccupation with individual and family honour can be explained as logical outcomes of this imperative. Human inter-male networks, promoting and reflecting individual male reproductive goals, are therefore typically very concerned with individual and group honour, as well as “alliance, rivalry, marital exchange politics, obligation, reputation, and resource distribution” (Wilson and Daly 1985:61). Male-male ‘petty’ or ‘trivial’ violent disputes, it is suggested, are actually vitally important expressions of dominance status (Wilson and Daly 1985:59-60). Conversely, impending or threatened loss of status has measurable consequences. Diminishing levels of testosterone, and “the onset of social anxiety, shame, rage, envy, and depression” typically follow the loss of social status among humans. Of these, rage often impels the disadvantaged individual to seek redress, the satisfaction of ‘honour’, and thus the restoration of status (Buss 2008:369). Revenge-seeking behaviours are psychological mechanisms evolved in ancient contexts where “a loss of status could have been catastrophic in the currency of survival and reproduction” (Buss and Shackelford 1997:614).

\textsuperscript{78} Daly and Wilson (1996:11-15), inquiring into the causes of marital conflict found that “the relationship between mates also entails endemic conflicts... [an] escalated “evolutionary arms races” between the sexes.” Trivers (2002:103) had, in fact, predicted this in his work on parental investment, stating: “I emphasize that sexual selection favors different male and female reproductive strategies and that even when ostensibly cooperating in a joint task male and female interests are rarely identical.” Buss (2008:322-3) notes that while men and women do not compete for the same reproductive resources, they have “evolved differences in sexual strategies... Men, far more than women, have evolved a deeper desire for sexual variety... Conversely, women have evolved to be more discriminating in short-term mating, typically delaying sexual intercourse beyond what men usually desire... the strategy of one sex can interfere with the strategy of the other.” Cf. Symons (1979:126-7) concluded that “many features of human sexuality suggest that it is ill-adapted to ensure marital happiness [given] the existence of adultery in all human societies.” Betzig (1986:6) also pointed out that “Darwinian theory makes the simple prediction that men and women will cooperate when it is in their reproductive interests to do so. Where, however, genealogical kinship and reciprocity are absent, individual conflicts of interest are expected to exist.” Others agree, finding that across species, “Cooperation between males and females... is likely to be much less common than intra-female cooperation”, and that “It is often assumed that female mate choice and male-male competition are complementary. However, sexual conflict theory predicts the evolution of antagonistic mechanisms [in] sexual selection” (cooperation, Key and Aiello 1999:21; sexual conflict theory, Moore et al. 2001:520). The cause of inherent conflict between sexes is their differing reproductive roles, according to Campbell (2002:11-12): “The strategies that enhanced reproductive success for females were not identical to those that enhanced it in men.” Further, as she (2002:35) notes, “What is a good strategy for a man may even be counterproductive for a woman.” Buss, arguing that such conflicts are responsible for the “antagonistic coevolutionary arms races between
ecological circumstances. Marriage, the socially preferred form of mating, is a cross-culturally ubiquitous feature of human societies, embedded in networks of kin, and entailing sexual rights and duties, contingent on successful female fertility and reproduction, and structured by the inheritance of resources. Marriage is primarily an economic and child-rearing partnership. The emotion most directly relevant to institutionalised marriage dynamics is not ‘romantic love’, but sexual jealousy, mitigated by agreements among groups of males, principally fathers and heads of families, about sexual rights over females.

Marital customs in 849 human societies studied by anthropologists found polygyny usual or occasional in 708, polyandry permitted in only 4, and the remaining 137 strictly monogamous. Males, however, prefer institutional or effective polygyny, especially when they are wealthy. Introsexual violence is characteristically and universally male because of a long history of mild but sustained effective polygynous opportunities. Theories of men as

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The text continues with more paragraphs discussing the evolution of compensatory behavior, the role of marriage in social structures, and the prevalence of polygyny and polyandry in different human societies. The text cites various studies and researchers to support these points, highlighting the social and economic factors that influence marriage and gender roles.
defenders of ‘their’ women ignore universal male disposition to violent competition, sexual opportunism, and predation upon other men’s mates.\(^8^4\) While polygamy remains the preferred practice, monogamy has been selected for principally because more infants survive infanticide attempts, and unmated males in such a system are less violent to each other.\(^8^5\) While serial monogamy is preferentially selected for, romantic love is a universal emotion, serving to initiate attraction.\(^8^6\) Romantic ‘cycles’ of infatuation and disattachment correlate to improved reproductive success.\(^8^7\)

\(^8^5\) Mace and Sear 2005:144; Campbell 2002:249. Campbell (2002:244) believes a better explanation of monogamy’s appeal to women may lie in the observations of mating strategy in other ‘monogamous’ species; “the appeal of monogamy did not lie in the reduced risk of predation that males offered, nor in the males’ ability to defend a foraging area for the females. What made monogamy successful was the dramatic decrease in infanticide among monogamously fathered infants.” Mace and Sear also found that while “children with fathers were no better nourished than those without [among some hunter-gatherers] fathers are very important to child survival, probably largely through their roles as protectors from infanticide” (nourishment, Mace and Sear 2005:153; infanticide, Mace and Sear 2005:144). Additionally, as Hrdy (1999b:243-4) notes, in various primate groups, lower-ranking females are usually not permitted by the alpha female to breed at all. A monogamous husband, albeit poorly resourced, may enhance an individual low-ranked female’s breeding opportunities.

\(^8^6\) Falling in love, while not universal among individuals, is certainly a cross-cultural phenomenon. Cf. Fisher 2004:5, 135; Fisher 1995:24; Jankowiak and Fischer 1992:154; Tennov 1979:244. The term ‘limerence’ to describe the psychological phenomenon of falling in love was coined in 1979 by Tennov, one of the first to take the topic seriously (Tennov 1979:16, 170-3). Tennov (1979:247) states: “The most consistent result of limerence is mating... [also] Limerence frees the young from too strong an attachment to the parents.” Aron et al. (2005:237) state that “Worldwide, romantic love plays a key role in courtship, suggesting that it evolved as a primary aspect of the human mating system.” Romantic love may be defined as “any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future” (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992:150). While children can result from any opportunistic sexual encounter, “Romantic love emerged to drive men and women to focus their mating attention on a preferred individual, thereby conserving invaluable courtship time and energy. And the brain circuitry for male-female attachment developed to enable our ancestors to live with this mate at least long enough to rear a single child through infancy together” (Fisher 2004:78). Kim and Hatfield (2004:175) observe that while cultures which value individualism may equate love with personal happiness, other cultures may associate love with “sadness, jealousy, and other dark views.” In cultures with strong kinship and extended family structures, however, passionate relationships between individuals may attract disapproval, because they “disrupt the tradition of family-approved and arranged marriage choices.”

Because they experience jealousy primarily over perceived or actual female sexual infidelity,\(^8^8\) males have accordingly been selected for hyper-jealousy, proactive suspicion of infidelity, and a propensity to effective violence or its threat.\(^8^9\) Additionally, males are evolutionarily selected to prefer chaste females.\(^9^0\) Because human paternal investments are often substantial, men universally prefer their wives to be sexually faithful. Men who preferred chaste females would have enjoyed greater reproductive success through increased probability of paternity.\(^9^1\) Male concerns over certainty of paternity, in the context of female adultery, accounts for the institutionalised seclusion of females, common in patrilineal societies, and enforced relative to both reproductive age and social status of the woman.\(^9^2\) Extreme sequestering of women became possible only relatively recently in human history, with the inequities engendered by agricultural surpluses and the rise of complex, role-differentiated societies, and extreme polygyny. Whenever and wherever men gain absolute power, they use their power and resources to hoard large numbers of fertile women as wives and concubines.\(^9^3\) While female sexuality/fertility is manifestly a commodity protected and traded between male alliances,\(^9^4\) females traded within male social networks are less likely to suffer abuse within marriage if their own kin are accessible.\(^9^5\)

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three years. Fisher (1995:33), arguing for an evolved and persistent patterning in relationship disintegration, notes: “1) Mateships tend to disband during and around the fourth year of marriage. 2) Men and women in a variety of cultures tend to divorce while in their twenties, the height of their reproductive and parenting years. 3) Men and women most regularly abandon a partnership that has produced no children or one dependent child. 4) Most divorced individuals of reproductive age remarry. 5) The longer a mateship lasts, the older the spouses get, and/or the more children they bear, the more likely they are to stay together.” Campbell (2002:262) supports Fisher’s argument for systematic serial monogamy, adding, “[t]he typical birth spacing among hunter-gatherers is four years (identical to the modal length of marriage)... [while] research on the physiology of sexual attraction suggests that it typically lasts between two and three years.”

\(^8^9\) Buss 2007:379; Campbell 2002:43, 255; Buss 1997:177:255; Smuts 1996:230; Symons 1979:245-246. As Buss and Shackelford (1997:615) state: “Much of men’s nonsexual violence against women is directed at spouses, mates, or girlfriends, and sexual jealousy appears to be the major cause.”
\(^9^0\) Hrdy 2009:153; Buss 2006:244.
\(^9^1\) Buss 1992:250-251; Wilson and Daly 1992:292; Symons 1979:244.
\(^9^2\) Wilson and Daly 1992:301.
\(^9^3\) Wilson and Daly 1992:301.
\(^9^5\) Hrdy 2009:239; Hrdy 1999b:xxv. Betzig (1988:11) also found that a cross-cultural preference for proximity to kin, correlated to actual and reciprocal kin support, and increased reproductive success for those engaging in kin relationships. Buss and Shackelford (1997:611) point out that “the husband of a woman with four strapping brothers and a powerful father living nearby will think twice before beating her for flirting with someone else. The presence of extended kin, therefore, is one context of cost that should moderate the manifestation of spousal violence. Recent empirical evidence supports this prediction.”
Females, however, experience jealousy primarily over a perceived or actual threat to their emotional relationship with ‘their’ male provider of resources.\textsuperscript{96} Nevertheless, female jealousy is more flexible than that of males. Co-wives can endure polygamy, although second wives suffer diminished fertility.\textsuperscript{97} Because women as potential mothers have been selected to inhibit their anger, when their jealousy is aroused they do not tend to commit murder.\textsuperscript{98} In fact studies show that it is maternity certainty that correlates with the female non-violent attitude to impending or actual loss of spouse and children.\textsuperscript{99}

Parental investment decisions (conscious or covert) concerning their offspring depend not only on both parents’ and offspring’s future reproductive prospects and on parental genetic relatedness to offspring.\textsuperscript{100} Rather, mothers make the greatest investment (anisogamy, pregnancy, lactation, nutritional, emotional), and do so discriminatingly.\textsuperscript{101} As

\textsuperscript{96} Buss 2007:378.
\textsuperscript{97} Campbell 2002:255-8. Buss (2008:360) states: “women in polygynous societies often prefer to share with other co-wives a bounty of resources that a high-ranking man can provide rather than have all of the smaller share of resources held by a lower-ranking man.” While polygyny is always a win for males, Campbell (2002:236) observes; “Polygyny is a heartless strategy from the female’s point of view.”
\textsuperscript{98} Campbell 2002:258. Cf. Dobash et al., 1992; Daly and Wilson, 1988. As Buss and Shackelford (1997:615) observe: “Male sexual jealousy, in short, appears to lie at the heart of women killing their spouses as well as the more common case of men killing their spouses.”
\textsuperscript{99} Daly and Wilson 1984:501. This is the converse of universal male response to jealousy, as Buss and Shackelford (1995:615) note: “Men kill their wives or girlfriends under one of two key conditions - the observation or suspicion of a sexual infidelity and when the woman is terminating the relationship.” Fisher (2004:177-8) found that “Women are far less likely to maim or murder when they are jealous of a rival and fearful of abandonment. They tend to berate themselves for their own inadequacies and try to lure and seduce instead, hoping to recapture their mate’s affections and rebuild the relationship.”
\textsuperscript{101} Campbell 2002:37-8, 43, 45, 51, 61; Trivers 2002:136-137; Hrdy 1999a:316, 323-4 ff; Waage and Gowaty 1997:605; Daly and Wilson 1994:123. The ideal of human maternal investment in any and all offspring is unequivocal (which would make humans unique among maternal species) has only recently been countered. As Hrdy (1999a:309) remarks, “most social scientists still assumed that in nature, mammal mothers instinctively and automatically care for every infant they produce.” She (1999a:309) observes that feminists through the eighties and nineties “were eager to discount biological explanations, and had little incentive to keep up with what was going on in reproductive ecology or sociobiology… Instead of taking a closer, critical look at the original, biologically based explanations to see if perhaps something had been left out, feminists (along with other social scientists who were trying to explain the widespread practice of abandonment by mothers) patently rejected evolutionary explanations [preferring to believe that] The way a mother feels toward her infant must be solely determined by her cultural milieu.” Daly and Wilson (1994:123) also observed, “mammalian motherhood is not typically a generalized state of nurturant inclination.” Trivers (2002:136-7) notes of many mammalian species that maternal attachment was never an unvarying state, but had stages, beginning with mutual acceptance, and progressing to maternal avoidance and
with other mammals, human mothers’ emotional commitment to infants is ecologically and historically contingent.\textsuperscript{102} Males ensure paternal investment is not wasted through female seclusion and cultural restriction to reduce paternity uncertainty.\textsuperscript{103} But his paternal investment in offspring is optional, secondary, and contingent on his positive relation to the mother.\textsuperscript{104} Males have, however, been selected for willingness to commit, because this improves offspring survival.\textsuperscript{105} Despite male involvement, maternal kin provide essential aggression. And, as Campbell (2002:45) states, “So great is the commitment demanded by every child that women’s bodies and minds are exquisitely careful to invest only in high quality children.”

\textsuperscript{102} Hrdy 1999a:309, 316; Hrdy 1999b.

\textsuperscript{103} Barrett et al. 2002:179; Campbell 2002:244; Hrdy 1999b:184, 187; Key and Aiello 1999:21; Daly and Wilson 1998:44; Betzig 1986:78; Daly and Wilson 1984:501. As Campbell and Buss both observe, men who willingly resourced other men’s offspring would soon be eliminated from the gene pool (Campbell 2002:43; Buss 1997:177). Human males are thus predisposed to precautionary doubts about paternity; of those men who seek confirmation through modern DNA testing of their paternity, less than one third actually have reason for their doubts (Anderson 2006:516). Even when no paternity doubt exists, social customs have developed to guarantee paternal investment is never wasted; pre-pubescent marriage for females; female seclusion, and severe punishment for transgressions; and direct physical intervention such as female circumcision and infibulation (prepubescent marriage, Barrett et al. 2002:179; transgressions, Betzig 1986:78; female circumcision, Hrdy 1999b:184).


\textsuperscript{105} Buss 2008:140. It is important to remember that child survival in preindustrial times was extremely uncertain, and parental behaviour developed in response to this. While hunter-gatherer societies suffered as much as a 50 per cent pre-pubescent mortality rate, even among modern post-industrialist populations “the risks of lineage extinction may be as high as 20-50 percent” (hunter-gatherer societies, Campbell 2002:52; lineage extinction, Barrett et al. 2002:209). This may explain some of the preoccupation of early cultures with, and preferential investment in the begetting of legitimate sons, who alone might perpetuate the family name. One of the key variables controlling disinvestment in any infant is that infant’s sex, evidenced throughout history, and predicted by Trivers’ theory (Trivers 2002:102). Trivers and Willard (2002:117) argued that “available data from several species support the prediction that females in better condition tend to invest in males.” They (2002:115-16) hypothesized that adult differences in condition, as a result of favourable upbringing, would affect male reproductive success, so that “an adult female [animal] in good condition who produces a son will leave more surviving grandchildren than a similar female who produces a daughter.” Sexually selected infanticide among animals is motivated by environmental issues of breeding opportunities (Hausfater and Hrdy 1984:xviii). In hunter-gatherer societies, ethnography confirms a bias in the elimination of female infants (Johansson 1984:463). As Scrimshaw’s (1984:456) study of infanticide noted, “Parents can maximize their reproductive success by raising more children of the sex that is most likely to succeed reproductively”, and this in practice is usually the male sex. Betzig (1988:9) identified this as being based primarily in economics, rather than sex ideology per se; “Parents with lots of resources at their disposal may benefit most by producing sons, while those with relatively few resources may do best by producing daughters.” Others observe the evidence that “sons were favored when populations were increasing, but daughters were favored in stagnant populations” (Barrett et al. 2002:200). Others have also found socio-economic origins for sex-selective infanticide, with preferential investment in males found almost universally, but not exclusively. These arguments and interpretations also receive support through comparison with economic data from those very few societies and cultures preferentially practicing male infanticide: Hungarian Gypsies (Barrett et al. 2002:195), and the West African Mukogodo (Barrett et al. 2002:181, 189). Cf. Gottschall 2003. Hrdy (1999a:321) observes that sex-selective infanticide is
support, and are often more investing in the offspring’s survival than are the infants’ fathers. \(^{106}\)

Anthropologists have recently revised theories on the development of the Pleistocene pair-bond, originally based on popular Victorian assumptions about provisioning husbands, and now undermined by comparative ethnographic evidence. \(^{107}\) In the context of minimal male provisioning, alloparenting falls principally to post-menopausal females, who live on for decades after their own last birth; sometimes contributing 60 to 80 percent of supplied calories through plant-gathering, and usually to their own kin. \(^{108}\) In evolutionary terms,

currently practiced in about 9 percent of the world’s cultures, and that sons are the preferred sex; “extreme son preference and the devaluation of daughters that accompanies it go hand in hand with patriarchal ideologies.” Hrdy’s study of the extreme female infanticide practised throughout India and Asia (and not just in one-child-policy China) found the overwhelming factor was hypergamy, the universal tendency for females to marry a male with better resources. She (1999a:339-340) states; “Eliminating daughters at the top of the hierarchy produces a vacuum sucking up marriageable girls from below [thus] Hypergamy is not a fluke. It was a longstanding necessity for lineage survival.” Scrimshaw (1984:455) attributes hypergamy to the social institution of large dowries, which created an excess of women in upper classes, precipitating large-scale female infanticide. Barrett et al. (2002:189-90) agree, adding; “To marry down the social scale [for females] was an unacceptable practice [harming kin reputation]… many of the female infants born into [high castes] were killed shortly after birth [because in a hypergamous culture] husbands could not be found for them.” 

\(^{106}\) Hrdy 2009:143-144; Mace and Sear 2005:151-3, 155; Betzig 1988:11. In complex human societies, with extremely altricial young, women have always depended on the goodwill of others, most especially maternal postreproductive kin (Hrdy 2005:311). Conversely, the effect on maternal effort of paternal kin can be detrimental. Hrdy discovered for instance that by the end of the eighteenth century, “up to ninety percent of infants born in urban centers such as Paris and London were nursed by women other than their biological mother”, and that “the prime movers (if not the only beneficiaries) from relieving wives of the “drudgery” of nursing... were most likely husbands, patrilineal, and grandparents” (infants, Hrdy 1994:10; beneficiaries, Hrdy 1997:425). Among preindustrial societies, absent fathers are the norm. Hrdy (2009:150) found in some groups that “only 36 percent of children had fathers living in their same group.” Mace and Sear’s (2005:148-50) cross-cultural meta-study found that while mothers were essential to the survival of children, especially those aged two, fathers had little direct effect on children’s survival. What was important was their influence upon the socio-economic status of the mother. In fact, the role of the maternal grandmother “generally equals or exceeds that of fathers.” The effect of paternal grandparents, however, when there was any effect, was generally negative. Paternal kin had a positive effect on the quantity of children a female produced, but a correspondingly negative qualitative effect on child survival, through insistence on shortened intervals between births, and a preference for child-brides for sons (Mace and Sear 2005:151-3). While men can remarry if and when a wife dies in childbirth, “to the matriline she is irreplaceable”, which may explain why “maternal grandmothers seem to concentrate on offspring survival whereas paternal grandmothers are more interested in increasing birth rates” (Mace and Sear 2005:153-6).

\(^{107}\) Hrdy 2005:297.

\(^{108}\) Buss 2008:349; Hrdy 1999a:266-67, 280-1, 282. Hrdy (2009:261) found that the support of maternal kin, especially grandmothers, is universally of benefit to human females and their offspring, “whereas the presence of the father’s mother is more likely to be correlated with increased maternal fecundity, earlier reproduction, and shorter intervals between birth.” Maternal grandparents frequently nourished their daughters’ offspring more effectively than those offspring’s own fathers (Hrdy 2009:260).
purely nuclear families are always likely to lose out in competition with those families with extensive kin networks.\textsuperscript{109} Traditionally, adoption most often involves taking on distantly related kin, rather than unrelated children.\textsuperscript{110}

Infanticide, a necessary aspect of reproductive practice, is ubiquitous and universal, explained as a parental investment mechanism.\textsuperscript{111} Differential treatment of infants by parents may, in fact, be quite unconscious.\textsuperscript{112} Cross-cultural evidence generally attributes infanticide, directly or through neglect, to one of three main causes: males are more likely to kill infants when they are uncertain of the infant’s paternity;\textsuperscript{113} infanticide is more likely when infants are handicapped;\textsuperscript{114} and infanticide is more likely when resources are scarce or uncertain.\textsuperscript{115}

Other features of modern infanticide are predicted by sociobiology and confirmed by cross-

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\textsuperscript{109} Mace and Sear 2005:155. Betzig (1988:11) also found that a cross-cultural preference for proximity to kin, correlated to actual and reciprocal kin support, and increased reproductive success for those engaging in kin relationships. Note, however, that the intense affective relationships and reciprocal relationships between kin can also engender animosity. While Hamilton’s 1963 and 1964 work proved the predictability of altruism of kin was universally correlated to degree genetic relation, Symons (1979:7) points out that “Nothing in inclusive fitness theory implies that selection will not sometimes favor maximum violence toward the closest kin.” Cf. Hamilton 1963:354-5; Barrett et al. 2002:44, 66; Trivers 1971:35, 45; Hamilton 1963:354-5.

\textsuperscript{110} Barrett et al. 2002:66

\textsuperscript{111} Barrett et al. 2002:178-179; Mesnick 1997:242; Hrdy 1994:5-6; Oliverio 1994:106; Daly and Wilson 1984:487-8; Hausfater and Hrdy 1984:xxvii ff; Johansson 1984:463; Scrimshaw 1984:439, 450; Symons 1979:122; Trivers and Willard 1973:90-2. It has in recent times been difficult to study infanticide; firstly, the Western emotional abhorrence of it has obscured intellectual acceptance of its naturally widespread occurrence, and, secondly, because of the opposition of various ethnographers, concerned about the politically biased use of their work (abhorrence, Hausfater and Hrdy 1984:xiii; opposition, Parmigiani and vom Saal 1994:xv). Ironically, the census findings of the urbanised societies disparaging infanticide give the most accurate data concerning its universality (Hausfater and Hrdy 1984:xxvii). While infanticide is more openly practiced in preindustrial societies, there are cultures comparatively less likely to practice them at all, preferring fostering to death of unwanted infants (preindustrial, Johansson 1984:463; comparison, Barrett et al. 2002:178). Infanticide itself has in all preindustrial societies always been adaptively preferred to abortion, carrying far less risk of maternal mortality (Scrimshaw 1984:455). In modern societies, social disapproval of infanticide precludes the acceptance of “a prescriptive set of circumstances legitimising infanticide.” Yet, despite condemnation and sanctions, adults in modern societies practice just as much infanticide, directly, or through selective neglect or abuse (Daly and Wilson 1984:495). Hausfater and Hrdy (1984:xxvii) argue that the data best describes “parental manipulation of their progeny” in terms of family size and sex adjustment. Cf. Mesnick 1997:242.

\textsuperscript{112} Barrett et al. 2002:179; Mesnick 1997:242; Scrimshaw 1984:458. Where immediate infanticide is disallowed, ‘passive’ infanticide methods may include “outright abandonment as well as neglect in the areas of feeding, sanitation, medical care, supervision, and attention” (Scrimshaw 1984:459). Passive neglect and prolonged abuse are by default the preferred methods of infanticide in postindustrial societies, which disdain the more traditional forms of institutionalised infanticide (Scrimshaw 1984:452). Nevertheless, the dynamics underlying infanticide decisions, whether acceptable or covert, remain the same.

\textsuperscript{113} Mesnick 1997:242.


\textsuperscript{115} Barrett et al. 2002:179; Hausfater and Hrdy 1984:xxxi.
cultural evidence: infanticide is more likely when infants are very young, and this declines with age,\footnote{Daly and Wilson 1984:496-8.} females are less likely to commit violent infanticide;\footnote{Scrimshaw 1984:449.} mothers, however, are more likely to commit infanticide when they are unmarried, young, and lacking paternal, or any support.\footnote{Barrett et al. 2002:179 ff; Oliverio 1994:117; Betzig 1988:10; Daly and Wilson 1988; Daly and Wilson 1984:496-8. While unmarried mothers are more likely to eliminate unwanted babies, this factor decreases with age. Cf. Buss 2008:218-19; Barrett et al. 2002:186. When women commit infanticide, given their limited lifetime reproductive opportunities, as Campbell (2002:50) points out; “we should expect infanticide to be a line of last resort by a woman who believes that the investment in the current infant is not worth continuing.” Campbell (2002:51) also found the absence of paternal child support was recognized by 56 of 60 societies as a mitigating factor in the choice of infanticide. Buss 2008:228. Campbell 2002:59; Daly and Wilson 1998:7, 32-5, 50; Mesnick 1997:243; Daly and Wilson 1996:17; Daly and Wilson 1994:127; Oliverio 1994:117; Daly and Wilson 1984:496-8. Daly and Wilson (1998:5-6) argue that the cross-cultural ubiquity of narratives of cruel stepparents, as in the well-known ‘Cinderella’ story, points to the universal resonance of the theme. They point to several studies that found that consumers of literature “expect imaginary characters identified as stepparents to be more distant and less supportive of the children than otherwise identical characters identified as the ‘natural’ parents.” That many traditional stories highlight the wicked step-mother may be the result of earlier rates of maternal mortality and rudimentary preindustrial medicine, which resulted in a greater number of step-mothers than seen in the modern era, explaining why, in Western cultures at least, “there were dozens of children slain by stepfathers for every one killed by a stepmother” (examples, Mesnick 1997:242; dozens, Daly and Wilson 1998:60). As Daly and Wilson (1998:65-6) observe; “The proposition that stepchildren are not loved like genetic children strikes many social scientists as distasteful… hand in hand with an assumption that interpersonal attachments are arbitrary ‘social constructions’…” [but] A hypothetical psyche that treated stepchildren and genetic children exactly alike would be a psyche vulnerable to exploitation, and would be evolutionarily unstable in competition with more discriminating alternatives.” Independently of risk factors such as low socio-economic status, large family size, and maternal youth, “preschoolers living with step-plus-genetic-parent were more than forty times as likely to be victims of severe abuse as those residing with two genetic parents” (Daly and Wilson 1994:129). Nor is the practice specific to the stresses of modern life; “the ethnographies of recent and contemporary hunter-gatherers abound with anecdotal information on both the prevalence of step-relationships and their predictable outcomes” (Daly and Wilson 1994:127). It is also apparent that a disposition toward violence itself is incidental, with stepparents targeting their stepchildren, while treating their own children well (Daly and Wilson 1998:50). While both biological and stepparents engage in infanticide and child abuse, the degree of violence peculiar to step-relationships is remarkable. Biological parents, when depressed, most often kill their children while they sleep and then themselves, “whereas homicidal step-parents are seldom suicidal and typically manifest their antipathy to their victims in the relative brutality of their lethal acts” (Daly and Wilson 1998:35). As to why adults willingly enter into step-relationships, despite the ancient and negative reputation of stepparents, Daly and Wilson (1994:125) suggest, “human willingness to enter into situations of stepparental obligation is [given animal models] to be explained as a component of courtship of the genetic parent.” They (Daly and Wilson 1998:64) therefore conclude; “Step-parents are primarily replacement mates, and only secondarily replacement parents.”}
more evolutionarily valid explanation for the ancient Greek mythic archetype of mother-son alliance against the adult male than Freud’s psychological model.\textsuperscript{120}

Further, children living with one genetic parent and one stepparent are forty to one hundred times more likely to be killed than are children living with both genetic parents,\textsuperscript{121} but abusive step-parents typically spare their own children.\textsuperscript{122} Studies also show that infanticide is more likely when an unrelated male is in the household,\textsuperscript{123} while females in step-relationships are less likely to commit infanticide than males.\textsuperscript{124}

These are the findings of evolved human behaviour and motivation specifically relating to the analysis of the characterization of Medea in Pindar, Euripides and Apollonios. As the character of Medea is partially created through gender dynamics between other characters, and through her relationships with her family, her husband and her children, aspects of their characterization illuminating her own will be examined in detail where appropriate.

\textsuperscript{120} As Daly and Wilson (1984:496-8) argue: “in polygynous societies, sources of father-son conflict do not arise over sexual access to the mother but over who should be the most successful polygamist. Mothers get involved in this not because they are the object of sexual competition, but because their [genetic] interests coincide with those of their sons’ and conflict with those of their husbands… females can also achieve very high fitness [descendants] within systems which seem to favor only male interests.” This explains in part female compliance with social structures restricting female behaviour and choice.

\textsuperscript{121} Buss 2008:228. As Buss and Shackelford (1997:616-17) explain: “From a stepparent’s point of view, a stepchild represents a conflict of interest - a genetically unrelated child absorbing the time, energy, and resources of a mate. Even from the point of view of a natural parent married to someone other than the natural parent, the child represents a conflict of interest, threatening to interfere with the marital relationship and possibly jeopardizing future reproduction. None of this is consciously calculated, but rather is likely to operate through evolved psychological mechanisms.” Cf. Daly and Wilson 1985, 1988.

\textsuperscript{122} Mesnick 1997:243; Daly and Wilson 1996:17. Daly and Wilson (1998:34) also observed selective and differential violence by stepfathers; “about eighty percent of homicidal stepfathers are found to have battered, kicked or bludgeoned their victims to death, whereas the majority of those who killed their genetic offspring did so by less assaultive means.”


\textsuperscript{124} Daly and Wilson 1998:60-1; Mesnick 1997:242. Additionally, Daly and Wilson (1998:61) found that while abuse of children was as frequently committed by stepmothers as by stepfathers, it was not as violent or lethally murderous.
Chapter Two: Pindar’s Medea - The Maiden

The earliest extant reference to Medea appears in a victory ode (epinikion) by the early fifth-century poet Pindar. This ode, now referred to as the Fourth Pythian, was Pindar’s longest, deemed by Richmond Lattimore to be of “unparalleled length” in comparison with all other extant epinikia. It was produced in 462 BCE, after Pindar had been composing epinikia for more than thirty years; and celebrated the victory of Arkesilas IV of Kyrene, the eighth ruler in the Battidae dynasty, who had colonized Kyrene from Thera, c. 630 BCE. The ode’s political motive is to persuade King Arkesilas to end the exile of the young Kyrenian Damophilos, a descendant of the house of Battos, itself an important feature in Medea’s prophetic announcements.

The epinikion itself was a relatively new form of lyric, with its creator Simonides, his nephew Bakkhylikes, and their contemporary Pindar being the most notable exponents of the art. The odes were commissioned by or for the victors at the various athletic games, but their target audience(s) were the victor and immediate family, the victor’s city, and the Panhellenic aristocracy generally. While the works themselves were, in William Race’s words, “complex mixtures of praise (and blame)”, Pindaric song in particular tended more to praise, often lavishly so.

Although literary analysis based on evolutionary psychology is relatively recent, many classical scholars have long observed Greek literary preoccupation with the genetic transmission of human nature (although they have not framed it as such). Classical mythology and literature are intensely and unabashedly concerned with issues of the inheritance of ability and right, and this has also been noted by scholars in the case of Pindar and his works.

George Walsh’s study of Pindar points to a common theme of the odes: dynastic, inherited excellence: “The best foundation for success... and the source of abundant splendor, is what comes to men naturally, their congenital, inherited ability... Fate and

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1 Lattimore 1948:19; cf. Race 1997:258. Gerber (1997:255) notes that while most of the triadic odes have three to five triads, with approximately 100 lines, the Fourth Pythian with its thirteen triads possesses 299 lines.
2 Segal 1986:5.
3 Race 1997:258.
4 Race 1997:11.
5 Kurke 1991:3, 5
“nature” become interchangeable terms… each man’s personal fortune – the decisive, divine factor in everything he does – is given to him at birth… Because god’s favor comes to men at birth, as an inherited product of their nature (Nem. 3.40), it belongs to whole families, passing from one generation to the next in direct descent.8

In conjunction with the belief in inherited excellence was an emphasis on arête “a special combination of physical and psychological qualities”, as well as male beauty.9 As Anthony Podlecki states: “Pindar’s use of such terms as ‘nature’, ‘breeding’, ‘innate’, and ‘inbred’ shows how much stock he put in qualities, moral as well as physical, that were inherited rather than acquired.” He argues further that Pindar’s poetic elevation and focus on heredity, and the circumstances of his patrons’ wealth “seem to have predisposed the poet to what have been called “conservative” political attitudes.”10

Peter Rose’s Marxist analysis also focuses on the political consequences of a belief in inheritable excellence and thus right to power. His study of Pindaric ode counted “twenty-three odes out of the surviving forty-four in which the excellence of the victor is explicitly presented as inherited from the heroes of his homeland… Of these, all but Ol. 9 and Nem. 3 also emphasize a purely literal sense of inherited excellence by associating the victor’s achievements with those of his relatives or family line [and in these] Pindar is nonetheless strikingly emphatic in proclaiming the principle of inherited excellence [Ol. 9.100-4, Nem. 3.40-2].”11 Rose argues that earlier Homeric verse lacks specific reference to inheritable excellence. In his view “it is during the Archaic period proper that the discursive counterattack of the aristocracy emerges… heroic myth is relentlessly reinforced in major public festivals and vase painting… [where] a whole vocabulary equating human excellence with aristocratic birth is valorized and elaborated.”12 Pindaric poetry was one of the tools of this campaign to legitimise aristocratic rule through an ideology of inherited excellence, using language that associated abstract concepts of good and bad with social position through birth.13 But, as Rose points out, “Aristotle cites the poet Simonides’ declaration that the

9 Podlecki 1984:238. Given the ambiguity of Greek male sexuality, this supports the prediction that any and every object of male lust must possess beauty, and presumably, though not stated here, youth. See also Ch.4, n18, on Iason’s sexual appeal to women.
10 Podlecki 1984:238-9. Citing Is. 3.13-14; Nem. 1.25, 1.28, 3.40-2, 6.8, 10.51; Ol. 2.11, 9.100-2, 10.20; Pyth. 8.60, 10.12-13.
11 Rose 1992:160. Citing Is. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8; Nem. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11; Ol. 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11; Pyth. 4, 5, 9.
‘well-born’ are simply ‘those whose family has long been rich.’\footnote{14}

Bruce Braswell too points to the privileging in archaic poetry of those with a superior pedigree, observing that in Pindar’s partial catalogue of Argonauts [169-87], “only sons of Gods are named… in the order of their father’s dignity… Euphemus, the ancestor of Arcesilaus, can as a son of Poseidon take his place amongst the elite of what is itself an elite. Thus the ultimate encomiastic and political aims of the ode are never quite lost sight of even here where the emphasis on heroic narrative might seem politically neutral.”\footnote{15} The aim then is the valorization of institutionalised aristocratic right to rule, through an illustration of the reliability of inherited excellence, necessarily involving female contribution. That Iason’s victory over his usurping uncle is achievable only through the assistance of divinely descended females may be speculated as a matter of implicit author irony within the context of political patronage.\footnote{16}

Charles Segal points to the specifically Greek privileging of inheritable excellence as a \textit{male} prerogative: “Pindar privileges the generative act of the father as the active, formative agent of creation.”\footnote{17} In his view, the “mysteriously powerful females” who are fundamental to Iason’s success are, in fact, “overseen by Father Zeus and have as their goal the establishment of continuity and succession among males.”\footnote{18} Moreover, the misogyny of later years is notably absent in archaic literature. While “[p]rocreation in marriage, male domination, patriarchal sovereignty, and agrarian productivity” predominate as theme in the archaic odes, “Pindar mutes or suppresses the dangers of feminine seduction, domestic and political chaos, and women who have killed their husbands, with threats of matriarchy or gynaeocracy in the background.”\footnote{19}

Pindar’s rosy view of Archaic aristocracy might or might not reflect his own beliefs, but his idealization of the upper class undoubtedly has much to say about the dependence of the poet upon the goodwill of the wealthy elite of the ancient Mediterranean world. Pindar’s patrons were (mostly non-Athenian) aristocrats, whose political power went beyond the

\footnotetext{15}{Braswell 1988:27.}
\footnotetext{16}{That later poets and dramatists described Iason as heirless at the hands of one of those females (the exotic Medea) may suggest an ideological devaluation of inheritance itself, and the foregrounding of both the female and the foreign. But it is worth remembering that the practice of rule through inherited right both preceded and replaced a brief period of democracy in the classical world; ‘democracy’ is only relatively recently and incompletely established in the modern era. The idea that human nature is inheritable is no less prevalent, despite a very brief period of social constructionism, and increasingly confirmed by modern science.}
\footnotetext{17}{Segal 1998:107.}
\footnotetext{18}{Segal 1986:165.}
\footnotetext{19}{Segal 1986:70-1.}
bounds of the *polis*. His *epinikia* promoted aristocratic values of inherited excellence and exclusive privilege against the claims of a new ethos of inclusive democracy. Rose reads Pindar as a “professional ideologue [who] speaks from and to a homogeneous and untroubled aristocratic world.” Pindar’s rich and powerful commissioning clients exploited their successful participation in the Panhellenic games to both display their wealth, maintaining their position among their peers, and restate their right to rule through individual and inherited excellence expressed through victory. Classical democracy, however, was to have a profound impact on Greek values.

Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian*, while his longest extant work, is relatively brief compared to the other texts examined in this thesis. Additionally, material within the *Fourth Pythian* concerning Medea is minimal. Despite this, the poem is still widely considered to be one of the principle influences on the characterization of Medea in later works. Although Pindar was in all likelihood aware of mythic variants that incorporated a Medea who murdered her own brother, and perhaps her own children, reference to this darker side of her character is fleeting. The predictions most relevant here, therefore, are those concerning mating strategies and marriage.

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22 Rose 1992:144.
24 The transformation of Greek society explains an important difference between Pindar’s and all following characterizations of Medea. Pre-Democratic Greece consisted of *poleis*, ruled by “small groups of aristocratic families who also owned most of the land [whose] authority was based on their economic power, on their ancestry, and on marital and kinship connections with other aristocrat clans both within and outside their own states” (Blundell 1995:63). The political power of aristocratic rulers, however, came to be threatened by an entrepreneurial “middle” class of farmers who were becoming impatient with their lack of socio-political recognition. The union of individual family oikoi was about to replace the aristocracy as the centre of Greek society (Arthur 1984:22). Political changes brought about by Solon’s constitution prioritised the pursuit of wealth and rewarded it, instead of noble birth and tradition (Arthur 1984:30). The codified Athenian democracy undermined the freedom of the aristocratic elites to acquire wives and concubines, and determine inheritance (Lacey 1968:154). Population excess influenced Perikles’ reforms of 451/450, in somuch as the new prerequisite for citizenship was descent from both father and mother. That citizenship entitlements were dependant on population fluctuation is evidenced in the fact that “after the population in general had been depleted by the plague and [the Peloponnesian War] the Athenians passed a law permitting a man to take an additional woman in order to produce children” (Pomeroy 1997:39). See also Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 26.4. The changes in citizenship laws through the sixth and fifth centuries were accompanied by important changes in “power relations between the sexes” (Schaps 1998:184). In van Wees’s (1998:45) view, as legitimacy of heirs within the developing democracy became a prerogative of marriage, “men began to assert greater control over their wives, sisters and daughters... they increasingly sought to confine women to the private sphere... they justified the new balance of power by redefining the ‘natural’ traits of each sex.” Cf. Reeder 1995:29.
Pindar’s Medea is sparsely drawn, compared with later depictions. Medea’s narrative appearances occur at the beginning (9-59) and toward the end of the poem (213-50). In her first scene, she is the centre of attention, delivering a long and powerful speech of prophecy as the Argonauts sail away from Kolchis (13-56). The poem then jumps back in time to the arrival of Iason in Iolkos, and his claim on the sceptre of sole rule (152). The Argonauts are assembled and the crew departs for Kolchis. As soon as they arrive, the narrative returns to Medea, and Aphrodite assists Iason in the seduction of the Kolkhian princess, who immediately succumbs. The emphasis is on Iason’s physical prowess in the achievement of the tasks, and Medea’s role, although acknowledged (233), is peripheral. The references to Medea in her second appearance are fleeting, but each is of fundamental importance in this and future characterization of her: Medea’s parental respect is taken away, and desire for Hellas enflamed within her (218-19), she creates a magic drug to assist Iason (220-2), she weds him “in a sweet marriage of mutual consent” (223), she is “skilled in all medicines” (233), and finally, this “slayer of Pelias” aids her own abduction (251).

R. W. B. Burton believes the Fourth Pythian gives no sign of Medea’s later “Romantic” characterization, with its “almost infinite variety of colour and psychological detail.” In his view, Pindar’s Medea is “a prophetess of inspired power, practical commonsense, skilled in magic, and at the same time a maiden who feels the lash of desire and leaves her home to fly to Greece with the lover who has won her by magic and whom she herself loves by magic.” It is certainly true that Pindar depicts Medea as a powerful and helpful sorceress, but her divinely inspired desire is for Hellas (218), not for Iason, or for any man.

Medea, although of eligible age and highly placed position, is clearly not actively attracted to any other suitor. In this respect, she is clearly exercising discrimination about prospective mates. Falling in love certainly appears to be a novel experience for her, and is not one she seeks willingly. In this respect it is arguable that she does not adjust her sexual behaviour according to circumstances, usually posited as environmental conditions and opportunities. The question of whether she has any control over her attraction to Iason is complicated by the involvement of the gods (213-19), to whom the impetus for sudden action is often ascribed.

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While Medeia before Iason’s arrival was suitably reverent toward her parents, the change in her behaviour was, however, externally, in a sense, environmentally motivated. Insomuch as divinity acts as a hypostasis for human thought and action, however, it is arguable that Medea’s sudden passion is entirely explicable through the irresistible impulse of her biological imperative, expressed through the socially framed convention of falling in love. Of this romantic episode, Braswell states; “No time is lost on the psychology of love, which is regarded as a divine intervention from without.”27 This overlooks, however, the reality that *eros* as an external and often unwelcome force was the ancient Greek psychology of love.28 Thus, the attribution of Aphrodite as the architect and mover of Jason’s seduction of Medea is no literary incidental, but an instance of divine intervention in human sexual union, instrumental to heroic action.

Pindar’s Medea is by disposition obedient to her parents, and it takes the intervention of the goddess of love herself to shift her inclinations. The incident is so remarkable as to mark the invention of a device for this very purpose. Aphrodite uses the *iynx* to enchant Jason, bringing it from Olympus for the first time to men, teaching him “to be skilful in prayers and charms, /so that he might take away Medea’s respect for her parents, and so that desire for Hellas might set /her mind afire and drive her with the whip of Persuasion.” (217-19). Sarah Iles Johnston likens the persuasive power of the *iynx*’s voice to that of the Sirens; “attractive, but also so mesmerizing as to make the listener forget all his other concerns.”29 Pindar describes the *iynx* as πολίκη, a term with connotations of deception and misrepresentation. Importantly, Johnston notes that the power of the *iynx* was “particularly associated with the sort of persuasion that mesmerized its victim into doing something against his or her natural judgement [my italics].”30 Thus, Medea betrays her parents and abandons her home, not as an expression of innate disposition, but through the irresistible compulsion of the *iynx*, a magical tool “usually connected with love affairs that are doomed to end unhappily.”31 As Johnston implies, Medea’s “natural judgement” would not have permitted her to choose such a course of action.

Braswell’s commentary attributes the invention to Aphrodite’s desire to assist Iason in his quest.32 He adds that Medea’s “longing” for Hellas is not the word commonly used for

32 Braswell 1988:301.
something lost.\textsuperscript{33} He also points to the specific reference to the personified Persuasion as marking Medea’s yearning as sexual passion.\textsuperscript{34} In evolutionary terms, however, this sudden awakening of the princess’s sexuality can hardly evidence Medea’s “adjustment” of early sexual behaviour in response to any adverse economic circumstances. She is after all a princess of a wealthy kingdom, and enjoys divine descent in her own right. Her sexuality is in this case a commodity in the hands of divine plan.

Nor does Medea figure as the female who prefers a mate having resources and/or the power to increase resources. While Iason is a dispossessed prince, whose father’s “ancient honor of kinship” was usurped by Pelias (106-10), he is also a courageous seafarer, with an outstanding ship and crew at his disposal. This certainly speaks to some personal power, if not direct resource control. Modern readers may applaud Medea’s active role in Iason’s capture of the Golden Fleece, a material symbolic resource of great value, but Iason’s dependence on Medea to provide such wealth would not have had the same appeal to ancient audiences. Nor is Iason a hero in the mould of Herakles, or Perseus, able to slay the dragon through proper masculine might. Instead, he slays τέχνας “by craft” (249).\textsuperscript{35} Braswell goes further, observing: “It is sometimes assumed that τεχνη has a basically neutral sense… [but] the meaning ‘trick’, ‘ruse’ is, in fact, the most common one in early Greek (and remains so even later).”\textsuperscript{36} Even the application of intelligence here has a negative connotation in a literary world of heroic strength and sword skill. Thus, while Medea’s attraction to Iason cannot be said to follow lines predicted by evolutionary psychology, this is principally because Iason himself does not appear to display solely and stereotypically male qualities. On the other hand, it is also true that she is not in the narrative ‘reality’ experiencing spontaneous attraction for him.\textsuperscript{37}

Similarly, the depiction of Medea does not follow the preferences of males for females with youth and beauty in the evolutionary model. Heroines of ancient Greece are rarely active and intelligent participants, but when they are, it does not bode well for the length of their relationships. Theseus for instance abandons Ariadne very quickly, despite

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Braswell 1988:302.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Braswell 1988:304.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Race 1997:xxx.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Braswell 1988:343.
\item \textsuperscript{37} There is certainly some relation between Greek eros and modern ‘limerence’. The essential differences between the two do not, however, permit a perfect correspondence. Greek eros is heavily imbued with androcentric, even misogynistic bias, whereas limerence is analyzed through empirical universals, and it functions regardless of gender (Fisher 1995, 2004; Tenenov 1979). See Ch.1, nn.86, 87.
\end{itemize}
her essential role in his success and her love for him. Jason’s rejection of Medea does not occur in Pindar’s poem, but would have been well known to later audiences of the archaic work. Pindar emphasizes neither youth nor beauty. She is in Pindar most remarkable for other qualities, none of which are traditionally ‘feminine’ in nature. Instead, the poem dwells upon Medea’s exceptional powers. As soon as the poem begins she is introduced as “high-spirited” (ξαμενής 10). Braswell argues for “with a strong spirit”, with menos meaning “power” or “energy” of any kind, “especially that which manifests itself in mental or emotional activity.” Thus, Medea is spirited rather than prophetically inspired: “nowhere is menos used of prophetic inspiration.”

Hesiod’s Theogony records the genealogy of Aeetes and his originally immortal daughter Medea (Th. 956-62), and her fruitful marriage to Jason (Th. 992-1002), while his fragmentary Catalogue of Women is thought by Braswell to have dealt substantially with the Argonauts. Braswell argues that Pindar follows Hesiod’s depiction (Th. 992) of Medea as “originally a goddess… in the Corinthian, if not in the Colchian tradition”, pointing to Pindar’s description of her as possessing an “immortal mouth” (ἀθανάτου στόματος 11).

Segal, however, retains and emphasizes the connection between an immortal mouth and the power of prophecy, delivering the words of divinities. Supporting this position are several factors: Pindar’s own use of an authoritatively formal term marking Medea’s predictions of the future; her command “Hear me” (κέκλατε 13) and her use of “I declare” (φαμι 14). Johnston’s study of Medea also notes the anomalous and exceptional privileging of the heroine’s voice in Pindar’s ode. Segal interprets Pindar’s characterization of Medea as inspired prophet, niece of Kirke and granddaughter of the sun god Helios, as a means to infuse the story with “the atmosphere of a fabulous world close to the gods.” C. M. Bowra argues Pindar’s Medea has “formidable character”, and that her very name resonates with her mental facilities, lexically referenced as the Argonauts drag their ship over land, by her counsels μήδεσιν ἀναπάσαντες ἁμοῖς (27).

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38 Note, however, Lattimore (1947) gives as an alternative translation “mantic”.
41 Swanson’s (1974:80) has an alternative translation: “her voice immortally prophetic.”
42 Braswell 1988:76; Segal 1986:139-140.
43 Race 1997:263.
44 Johnston 1995:193. Medea’s prophetic speech, covering 44 lines, consumes 15 percent of the 299-line ode, more than any other direct speech in Pindar.
46 Bowra 1964:212.
It is Medea’s formidable powers as a *pampharmakos*, not her beauty, which save Jason from the oxen’s flaming breath: “The fire did not make him flinch, owing to the commands/ of the hospitable woman skilled in all medicines” (233). Braswell points to Pindar’s allusion to Medea’s dangerous potential, arguing that, “A *pampharmakos* is one who has at his disposal *every* kind of remedy or means of changing the course of nature including those which can destroy.”

Segal notes that the very expertise in drug-lore which saves Jason (221, 233) is that which will kill Pelias, whose death at Medea’s hands is only fleetingly alluded to (250). Johnston argues the description of Medea as *pampharmakos* was deliberately intended to allude to Homer and Hesiodic description of Kirke as *polu(pharmakos*, evoking the sorceress, helpful, but potentially dangerous. Yet, as Johnston points out, Pindar deemphasizes this traditional *metis* (“cunning intelligence”) of Medea in favour of her power of prophecy.

At any rate, Medea possesses a quite unfeminine power over men; “Such were the verses of Medea’s speech; the godlike heroes shrank down in silence/ and without moving listened to her astute counsel” (*ἴ ῥα Μηδείας ἐπέων στίχες, ἐπταξαὶ δ’ ἀκίνητοι σιωπᾶ/ ἔρως ἀντιθεῖ πυκνὰν μήτιν κλύσοντες, 57-8).* Braswell notes that Πτησσω and its compounds are “especially used of birds and other animals which cow when frightened or disturbed and thus applied to men (or others) who feel fear or awe.” That a mere woman should have such an unnatural power could and does foreshadow later monstrous events. On the other hand, it could also serve to foreground Medea’s divine ancestry, in which case her later infanticide could be interpreted as beyond mortal standards of behaviour.

In addition to her unearthly power to deliver divine proclamation and overawe mortal men (and some of these the sons of gods), Pindar also characterizes Medea with epithets unconcerned with physical appearance, emphasizing her power and authority, qualities more associated with male attractiveness in evolutionary terms. Medea is the “queen of the Kolkhians” (δέσποινα Κόλχων, 11-12). Braswell argues that in Pindar the word, *despoina*, “emphasizes Medea’s status and power [and] retains much of its original sense [of

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47 Race 1997:289
48 Braswell 1988:321
49 Segal 1986:52-3.
52 Race 1997:269.
53 Braswell 1988:140.
majesty].” His interpretation is supported by Pindar’s description of a Medeia with the right and power to direct men, “in accordance with my instructions” (μήδεσιν ... ἀμοῖς, 27). Medeia’s power to direct men is reiterated in “I frequently urged” (ἐπικρινοὺ θαμά, 40). Braswell sees a need to explain such power, postulating that instructing is “something Medea might have done with the servants, but hardly with Euphemus ... in an encomiastic poem on the Euphemidae it is obvious that their eponym must be absolved of all suspicion of blame [allowing the clod to fall into sea, despite warnings]. It is for this reason that the servants “are mentioned at all.” Braswell’s explanation, however, seems somewhat strained. Greek mythology contains other heroes who have erred, often disastrously, without any loss of personal acclaim: Akhilleus through excessive pride, Odysseus through hubris. But there is no need to so explain away Medea’s powers. Pindar’s depiction of a puissant Medea is appropriate and apposite, given her divine ancestry.

The fore-grounded intervention of Aphrodite makes any evaluation of Iason’s spontaneous feelings for Medea difficult to ascertain. Has he relaxed his mating standards in respect of a long-term or short-term mating strategy? Does he even have a mating strategy? Iason’s goal is to seize the fleece, and regain his throne. Aphrodite’s divine plan does not entail marriage, only that Medea be inflamed with desire for Hellas. At any rate, Medea’s help is clearly expeditious, and her attraction for him is necessarily associated with this. Her first response to Iason’s charm is immediate assistance. Pindar does not elaborate on Iason’s personal motivations or decisions. While Medea is a foreigner, she is also of divine pedigree. It is therefore hard to say if he has relaxed his standards in their union.

There is little direct suggestion in Pindar that male and female sexual strategies are in conflict. There is, however, clear conflict of reproductive interests in terms of patriarchal control over female sexuality. While Greek scholars have long been in agreement with evolutionary psychologists that the purpose of [Greek] marriage is primarily reproduction,

57 Race 1997:265. Similarly, there is a considerable stretch of pragmatic politeness between Lattimore 1947:58 “over and again I charged”, and Swanson 1974:82 “repeatedly enjoined.”
58 Braswell 1988:120.
59 That Iason and his crew visit the Lemnian women after their successful adventure in Kolkhis, however, certainly implies that Iason and Hypsipyle’s interaction cannot have been the blissful sexual union described in Apollonios’ Argonautika, as Medea’s presence would have surely made some difference to Iason’s interactions with the Lemnian princess. In this sense, male preference to seek sexual opportunity has been curtailed, and so the strategic conflict is resolved in favour of the woman with a prior claim on the hero.
and secondarily the inheritance of resources, it is clear that Iason’s union with Medea in Pindar is not at the wish of either of their families, and there is no formalisation entitling their children to any inheritance.\footnote{Scholars are essentially in agreement about this point. Powell (2002:162), for instance, states: “Marriage was not based on mutual affection, but arranged between families on political and economic grounds.” Demand (1994:11) agrees, observing that marriage for the ancient Greeks was “a practical business arrangement, not a love match.” Blundell (1995:67) adds: “marriage was seen as an institution that established a relationship, not so much between a woman and a man as between a father-in-law and a son-in-law.” Arthur (1984:33) notes that a woman’s role in marriage was merely as a loaned object. Patterson (1998:60) expands on the wider social role of marriage, stating: “a marriage recognized by the community was a vehicle to “political” power and authority, as well as a communally approved way of transferring wealth and property.” See also Ch.3, nn.68, 70, 85.} Iason, in fact, steals both the maiden and the most valuable symbol of her family’s power and wealth, the Golden Fleece. Nor is Medea’s marriage a contractual matter between powerful males. Their union is in their own hands: “and so they agreed to join with one /another in a sweet marriage of mutual consent” (222-3).\footnote{Race 1997:289.} This single aspect of Medea’s character is so important that Pindar, when he refers to Medea again in the \textit{Olymian} 13, does so as “one who resolved on her marriage against her father’s will, and thus saved Argo and its crew” (\textit{Ol.} 53-4).\footnote{Braswell 1988:14.}

Braswell, however, points to their union (and implying perhaps all marriages) as necessarily originated in reproduction, stating, “gamos refers in the first instance to sexual union and not to the institution of marriage as such.”\footnote{Braswell 1988:309.} Nor is Medea’s later marriage failure attributable to lack of fertility. Pindar’s canonic description of Medea and Iason’s coming together is therefore valuable in providing the narrative record of the nature of their union, with its implications for later disaster; the lack of parental approval is perhaps the most pertinent aspect of this narrative foreshadowing.

The important point is Pindar’s highlighting of Medea’s active compliance with her “abduction”, connected, with lightest of touches, to her future powers of destruction: Iason “with her own help stole away Medea, the slayer of Pelias” (250).\footnote{Race 1997:291.} Braswell cites Herodotus 1.4 in comparison: “women like Medea and Helen would not have been abducted if they had not consented.” By implication, such a statement belies a belief that the offence of abduction was not against the girl herself, but against the male head of the family. Braswell also states “It should be noted, however, that in accordance with general notions of law, what made such
[Raubehe] legal marriages was not the consent of the women but the intention of their abductors to regard them as wives.65

Pindar’s deliberate mention of Medea’s consent does not affect the important social context of her elopement, for only the consent of the father held legitimacy in the Greek world.66 Eva Cantarella’s analysis of Greek law shows that female consent to sexual union was unimportant, and that male control of female procreativity, not the integrity of the female self, was the overriding legal issue.67

There is no hint in Pindar that Medea will face a future rival and replacement, with attendant jealousy, although later (and perhaps contemporary) audiences of the poem would have known variations of the story encompassing this. The Argonauts’ arrival upon the Lemnian Isle, an important part of the Fourth Pythian, does demonstrate his, and the other Greek males’ willingness for short-term liaisons, many of which resulted in offspring. This does indicate male willingness to engage with women, and if, as seems likely, some of the Argonauts were already married, then a form of effective polygamy is evidenced. Ironically, the prediction that serial monogamy has been selected for is also evidenced in Pindar’s not mentioning any union between Iason and Hypsipyle. Presumably, being recently married to Medea would have in this instance outweighed any opportunistic mating.

Pindar’s work does not reference any sexual jealousy in Iason (or in Medea either). Iason’s preoccupation in this poem is the regaining of his throne through the successful completion of the task set him. Iason’s main rival is his uncle, and the issue is usurpation not adultery. There are no circumstances in Pindar’s poem in which Iason demonstrates suspicion of or control over Medea’s sexuality. Medea appears to be a stereotypically modest daughter at the time of Iason’s meeting her. While the implied chastity may have made her more attractive to him, there is, in fact, no sense that he has fallen uncontrollably in love with her, and this is arguably also the situation in Euripides and Apollonios. There is no reference in Pindar’s poem to Medea’s later intolerance of a rival female, or reaction to the loss of her role as wife. Nor is the issue of infanticide relevant. While Pindar’s poem does not include reference to Medea and Iason’s later experience as parents, a passing reference to

67 Cantarella 2005:240. Despite the lack of familial recognition or formal ceremonies, if Iason and Medea intended to be married, as is certainly depicted in the poem, then audience interpretation of Medea’s much later claims to the reality of their marriage in Euripides could have been influenced by their knowledge of the union as presented in Pindar.
Medea as “the bane of Pelias” may have invoked for his audience the remembrance of Medea’s various murders, and thus her potential for violence.

Pindar’s Medea then, can be seen to contravene several archaic Greek norms for marriageable daughters; she is powerful rather than beautiful, she commands men, she works against her own family’s interests and rather than bringing in wealth, diminishes it. These are, in fact, the distinguishing characteristics of other Greek literary female mythological types (one hesitates to call them heroines). Klytaimnestra for example, is another of the same dangerous and destructive type. It is a character type associated with the fall of kings and heroes, and serves to both entertain and instruct. Pindar’s Medea, while enabling the hero’s success, destroys her family, through theft of prestigious symbolic resources (herself and the Fleece), and by conspiring against her father and country. The diachronic character complex also has her destroying, or attempting to destroy, the sons and heirs of every significant male ‘Other’ she engages with, as Pindar’s audience may have known. Later audiences certainly associated her with the classical mytheme of the destructive female.

Pre-democracy mythic Greek females are the passive receptacles and transmitters of male genetic goodness. Medea in Pindar certainly exemplifies this, despite her non-Greek origins. But the foreignness of Medea is not here the issue that it would become. If Pindar knew of versions of her tale that cast her as a rabidly jealous infanticide, he is careful to allude to them only obliquely. Pindar’s Medea may not present as a typical narrative maiden, femininely beautiful and in need of rescue, as predicted by evolutionary literary theory.\(^{68}\) Instead, Pindar deliberately contravenes audience expectation, firstly to capture the attention of an informed and intrigued audience who are interested in the ‘celebrity’ Medea’s mythological ‘backstory’, and, secondly, to illustrate the mistakes of his appealing but less masculine hero, whose later misfortunes may perhaps be traced to his failure to ditch the witch when he had the chance.

The characterization of Medea in part depends upon the contrast she poses to the hero of the narrative. Iason is juxtaposed by Segal against the untypical Medea as the typical young prince, straightforward and open and with a legitimate royal right.\(^{69}\) Segal finds Iason to be forthright, restrained and polite, modest and reverent, with qualities of instinctive

\(^{68}\) Gottschall et al’s (2005) analysis of folktales from 48 cultures for instance found that “female protagonists were primarily motivated to help persons other than themselves”, while the “vast majority” of female characters themselves were unmarried, of peak reproductive age, and almost universally beautiful.

\(^{69}\) Segal 1986:125.
leadership. Burton too considers Iason “an attractive character, calm, courteous, and resolute.” In his view, Iason’s character “reflects an ideal of chivalry” intended to inspire in Arkesilaos of Kyrene “a spirit of compromise and non-violence… which would supply a pattern of behaviour in settling his own quarrel with his kinsman Damophilus.”

Yet various critics have also pointed to a very different interpretation of Iason. Lattimore notes Pindar’s de-emphasis of the incidents in which Iason is dependent on Medea’s guile to achieve success, while Segal also considers Pindar aware of his hero’s “ambiguities.” Segal notes that Medea’s drugs are “indispensable” to the hero’s victory over the bulls (233), which Pindar glosses over while emphasizing Iason’s physical strength. Race and Fritz Graf both mention that Pelias and Aetes were forewarned of the one-sandalled hero, Iason, but neither observes that in each case it was, in fact, a female, Medea, who brought death to both Pelias and Aetes’ heir. Christopher Carey (1980) does point out that the calm and conciliatory Iason of the Fourth Pythian is “far from the spirit of old epic”, and that Iason is “unusual is his violation of the archaic and classical attitude to enmity.” Johnston attributes the eventual failure of Iason’s heroic program to his deployment of the ἰνξ, that “deceptive, magical voice… to constrain the divinity within Medea.”

Much of the description of Pindar’s Medea is thus actually at variance with predictions of evolutionary psychology concerning character delineation. This may, however, be interpreted as evidence for deliberate authorial manipulation of expectation for narrative purpose, in this case, the depiction of a superhuman Medea. Such authorial action of course requires awareness of the conventions of character behaviour. In a sense, the episodes here act as a deliberate prequel, or ‘backstory’ to Medea’s better-known jealousy, and the infanticidal events of Euripides’ play, as have the events in Apollonios’ Argonautika, as has been extensively argued.

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70 Segal 1986:7.
71 Burton 1962:156.
73 de-emphasis, Lattimore 1948:21; ambiguities, Segal 1986:12.
74 Segal 1986:65.
76 Carey 1980:146.
78 Insomuch as the primary differential attributes of gendered attractiveness for females is youth and beauty, and, for males, power over resources.
79 See Ch.4, n.44, for a discussion of ‘prequels’ to Euripides’ Medea. While we can never establish exactly what the intentions of the ancient authors were, it is certain that all authors intend something,
Medea’s attributes in the *Fourth Pythian* are often better suited to the male hero; the power of prophecy, authority, status through descent. Similarly, Pindar’s Iason betrays troubling manifestations of a failure of heroic value and action. These gender inversions suggest that the source of Iason and Medea’s ultimate troubles lay not only in their usurpation of mating and marriage ritual, but in the ‘unnatural’ gender roles underlying their doomed relationship: powerful heroine, and pacifist hero.

In order for Pindar to achieve maximum narrative effect of these deliberate gender transgressions in his characterization, it must have been the case that he and his intended audience held mutual gendered expectations of behaviour. The findings of evolutionary psychology show that these expectations are universal and diachronic. Pindar’s audience may well have responded to his Medea with the same fascinated and conflicted attention as that of the audience of the modern era; sharing with the cowering Argonauts a sense of admiration, and awe.

...and that audiences in all eras respond to certain elements in particular, predictable ways. See Ch.1, for a discussion of this.
Chapter Three: Euripides’ Medea - The Mother

Euripides’ Medea was first presented at the Dionysia in late March of 431 BCE, on the eve of the outbreak of Peloponnesian war, and arguably reflected the increasing hostility between Korinth and Athens.1 The tragedy of 1419 lines has, it is claimed, influenced all further versions of the myth.2 There is, however, agreement that the Medea is a deeply intertextual work.3

While some elements of the myth remain, such as the death of the children, the institution of cult, and a Medea both mortal and divine, Euripides’ original contributions to the story are “something uniquely shocking and tragic.”4 Other original aspects of Euripides’ heroine redefined her for all future depictions: her association with Korinth, the death of her children by her own hand, her escape in the Sun’s chariot.5 Of the ‘new’ elements of characterization, it was the infanticide of her children that most completely determined perceptions of Medea’s essential character.6

Euripides’ plots and characters are perennially engaging, and avail themselves of much productive analysis, especially, given his interest in gender relations, of feminist

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1 Mossman 2010:11; Blondell 1999:149. McDermott (1989:117) compares Medea’s slaughter of her sons to the callous dispatch of Athens’ youth to certain death at the hands of the Spartans. Hall (1997:xiii) argues that the agon between Medea and Iason mirrored the “the identical confrontation of justice with expediency which informs Thucydidés’ first debate between the Corinthians and the Corycians.” Boekecy (1991:110) also relates the action of the play to the events of the Peloponnesian war, suggesting Medea’s verbal manipulations illustrate “the need for great care with language, especially among philo.” Mossman (2010:12-13) observes that all of Euripides’ 431 plays (Medea, Philoctetes, Dikty, and Theristae) were concerned with “displaced persons [and] voyages on the sea.” Further, the Medea appears to share with Dikty the theme of the horror of childlessness. Mossman (2010:14) further notes that Dikty (fr. 332) considered the theme of the horror of childlessness for the aging, while fragments 345 and 346 explored “the universality of the love of parents and children.” That war would disrupt families, leaving parents bereft of filial support in their old age, is a topic that surely preoccupied mid fifth-century Athens.

2 In Mossman’s (2010:54) view, the extensive scholia on Euripides’ Medea attest to its enduring interest, while the “explosion” after Euripides of numbers of dramatic treatments of Medea demonstrates the “tremendous impact” that his play had, despite its only coming third in the year 431. She points out (2010:4) that critical uncertainty over the chronology of the many versions of the myth of Medea means “There are substantial difficulties... in determining what Euripides’ audience might have expected from a play about Medea, and how Euripides has fulfilled or frustrated that expectation.”


analyses.  

The *Medeia* has been possibly the most popular of Euripides’ plays in the twentieth century, a situation not unrelated to feminism’s confrontation of an androcentric Western society. Ann Michelini, for example, believes that the quintessentially Euripidean *Medeia* is “a play that challenges gender norms as it does audience expectations, repeatedly evoking conflicting responses to its remarkable protagonist, who questions the oppressive circumstances of women’s lives.” Others, however, warn that “modern performance and adaptations have been quite explicitly obsessed with such feminist interpretation.”

The central theme of Euripides’ restyling of the Medea myth has been variously interpreted over the last one hundred years. Early ‘pre-feminist’ critics emphasized the breakdown of the couple’s emotional relationship. Gilbert Murray thought the natural romance of the play was deliberately repressed, with a resulting emphasis on character and situation. Denys Page thought the heart of the play was a domestic incident of desertion. Herbert Musurillo agreed with this, describing the play as “a psychological disquisition on the sharp decay of man’s noblest passion, love, and the proximity of love to hate.”

Later, a politicised post-modern criticism focussed on perceived ethnicity issues, of Greek self-definition in contrast to the ‘barbarian’, and on contemporary gender questions. Medea and Jason’s difficulties were less personal, and were now interpreted as symbolizing socially encoded gender conflict. as Margaret Visser states, the *Medeia* “is not a play about simple sexual hatred, about “men versus women”, so much as a treatment of the theme of marriage.” While modern critics are free to interpret the play in light of modern Western social and political preoccupations, it does seem more probable that the *Medeia* reflects the contemporary concerns of mid fifth-century Athens. I would argue that these were not so

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7 Hall 1997:xi.
8 Michelini 2002:56. Blondell (1999:157) similarly believes Medea’s behaviour is “in part the outcome of her plight as a woman in a patriarchal culture.” Another feminist critic, Rabinowitz (1993:12), argues that “tragedy served the polis” in its prescriptive socially constructed definition of gender.
9 Feminist interpretation, in Mendelsohn’s (2002:26) opinion, is too ideologically narrow, “its final goal the exposure of patriarchal strategies in response to anxieties about – and in order to control – real women.” As Bowman (2002:164) reminds us, the Dionysia was a masculine festival: “Under these circumstances, it is folly to expect or see in the Medea a naturalistic representation of the lives, hopes, or innermost thoughts of real Athenian women.” Cf. Foley (2000:10), who argues that Euripides’ treatment of the myth was intended to warn audiences of dangers of female rebellion.
10 Murray 1910:ix, v.
12 Musurillo 1966:74. Barlow (1989:158) argues the plot of the *Medeia* “concerns infidelity, a woman discarded by her husband for another younger woman and a more ‘suitable’ match.”
different from the conflicts of sexual strategy and reproductive maximization facing men and women in all ages.

However the Medea is interpreted, in terms of theme and contextual reflection, it is for his particular skill in the exploration of character psychology that Euripides owes much of his ancient and modern popularity as a dramatist.15 Donald Mastronarde observes that Euripidean complexity of character was intentional, “designed to evoke shifting and mixed reactions to the major figures and to leave little room for either moral certainty or moral smugness by the end of the play.”16 This is certainly evident in the attitudes of modern critics to Medea, who disagree on almost every point of interpretation.

Most modern critics have, however, consistently interpreted the character of Medea as losing more than she gains.17 Critical response to her actions spans a wide range of foci. At best, she is self-deluded as to her success.18 At worst, Medea has in one sense murdered herself as a woman, and become “[a] hard and embittered creature.”19 Critics point to the irrevocable loss of Medea’s humanity.20 But, as Carrie Cowherd observes, that Medea is no longer a mother does not entail she is no longer human.21

Other critics have found a Medea with more positive characteristics. Stephen Ohlander, for example, claims that her encounter with Aigeus depicts a different view of Medea with “dignity and stature.”22 Similarly, William Allan argues that Euripides’ Medea

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15 Mastronarde 2002:2; Ohlander 1989:5. Blondell et al. (1999:38), however, point instead to tragedy as emphasizing not individualized characters, but “members of social and political structures where one’s gender, age, and status are essential determinants of who one is.” Cf. Gregory 2005:261-2. Elliott (1969:121), arguing against views of Euripides as a misogynist, notes Euripides’ skill and interest in the depiction of female characters.
17 Bongie 1977:55. I have yet to encounter any critic who interprets Medea’s outcomes as completely successful. But in evolutionary terms, in different versions of the myth her future holds more children: surviving son Thessalos (Mastronarde 2002:50), and a further son Medeos (Sfyroeras 1995:130), while she also achieves a marriage to the greatest hero of ancient Greece, Aghilleus (Blondell 1999:152). She is still one of the most famous figures of Greek myth. Additionally, while she may be said to have lost some reproductive effort through the murder of her sons, did any semi-divine female ever truly face the ‘ticking clock’ of limited reproductive opportunity?
19 Mead 1943:20. As Schlesinger (1968:89) states, “The granddaughter of Helios may stand in triumph on her dragon-chariot, but Medea the woman is dead.”
20 Cf. Shaw 1975:262; Burnett 1973:22; Reckford 1968:333; Cunningham 1954:159. Blondell (1999:414, n.40) contrasts Medea with Aghilleus, her distantly destined husband, with whom she shares some personality traits: “A striking difference is that Achilles is rehumanized at the end of the Iliad, when he shows mercy to his enemy’s father, whereas Medea is progressively dehumanised.”
21 Cowherd 1983:135. Boedecker (1997:127) argues for an ambiguity in outcome, observing that while Medea has in a sense “destroyed herself, she has also acquired a profound and disturbing power.”
is “a coherent, credible, and effective character, a woman with a strong sense of honour and justice whose suffering and humiliation drive her to revenge.” Louise Mead thinks that Medea has warm and genuine relationships with neighbours, servants, and children. George Gellie, however, correctly points to the characterization of this positive Medea as “intermittent.” Emma Griffiths too notes the typically Euripidean complexity of characterization, creating a Medea equally maternal and murderous.

This ambiguity in Medea’s emotional nature presents critics seeking consistency of characterization with some problems. Page argues that her “inconstancy” is her character keynote, while Thalia Papadopoulou suggests that any inflexibility in her characterization, coupled with her infanticide, would have created a woman lacking in audience sympathy. Charles Lloyd, discussing her volte-face between offstage lamentation and coolly collected first entrance, describes her “malleability” as “stunning if not demonic.”

Some critics identify important ambiguities of ethnicity in her characterization. Others argue that ethnicity is peripheral or irrelevant to Medea’s story. As C. A. E. Luschnig observes, “Since being a Hellene is cultural rather than ethnic and Medea is presented as no less Greek than anyone else in the play and as like other Greek heroes, this preoccupation with her and her children’s ethnicity betrays, perhaps, a modern obsession.”

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23 Allan 2002:44.
24 Mead 1943:18.
26 Griffiths 2006:57, 81-2. Cf. Mossman 2010:267. Michelini (1987:87) observes, “the tension between Medea’s roles as suffering mother and as demonic avenger is continually increased up to the moment of her final exit,” while Mossman (Mossman 2010:2) states that Medea in the final scene “behaves at times disconcertingly like a goddess, at times like a vindictive and jealous woman; the juxtaposition leaves the audience breathless and disorientated.”
27 Blondell 1999:156.
30 Lloyd 2006:115. But, as Allan (2002:53) points out of this scene, “this so-called conflict only arises if one assumes too static a picture of dramatic characterisation.” In terms of audience expectation, even realism, who has not answered the door or telephone in time of distress, donning a socially acceptable semblance of unfussed mien?
33 Luschnig 2007:22.
Some critics insist that far from being ambiguous in ethnicity, Medea is definitively Greek in moral outlook and action.\textsuperscript{34}

This ambiguity of Medea’s humanity is, like the fate of the Argo, “of interest to everyone” (\textit{Od.} 12.69-70), particularly to classical scholars. As Ruby Blondell explains, mythical Medea is a semi-divine sorceress, most renowned “for her sinister magic powers” which she inherits through her genealogy as the grandchild of the sun-god Helios, the niece of that other great sorceress Kirke, and with connections to the goddess of witches, Hekate, “the three most notorious witches in Greek mythology.”\textsuperscript{35} But, as several scholars argue, throughout the play Euripides confuses and downplays her supernatural aspect, in favour of a more human characterization.\textsuperscript{36}

Bernard Knox, for example, argues that “Until she is rescued by the god Helios, and she is herself transformed into some kind of superhuman being, she is merely a helpless betrayed wife and mother with no protection of any kind.”\textsuperscript{37} Ohlander agrees, arguing for a Medea sharing the same problems as other women, differing only in degree of affliction, and audience sympathy.\textsuperscript{38} Judith Mossman argues that even after her elevation in the chariot of Helios, Medea retains enough mortality to make her experience (and response) still relevant to the human level.\textsuperscript{39} The deliberate ambiguity of her humanity is the means by which Euripides leaves the audience with more questions about gendered behaviour than answers.

These ambiguities of Medea around gender have generated enormous interest and debate.\textsuperscript{40} Laurel Bowman argues that Medea “is loyal and helpful to her friends; she has courage and determination; and, unlike Jason, she keeps her word. In Athenian terms, however, all her virtues are ‘masculine’... ascribed to and praised in men rather than women.”\textsuperscript{41} Many critics have identified Medea as being wholly or partly masculine in nature.\textsuperscript{42} Segal believes that Medea’s ambiguous gender characterization enhances her

\textsuperscript{34} Shaw 1975:259. As Blondell (1999:155) states, “Medea is not the bloody, passionate, and transgressive barbarian sorceress of myth, but a stereotypical Greek woman.”
\textsuperscript{37} Knox 1983:285.
\textsuperscript{38} Ohlander 1989:58.
\textsuperscript{39} Mossman 2010:38.
\textsuperscript{40} Mossman (2010:31) points out that while Euripides de-emphasizes Medea’s ethnicity and magical powers, he conversely foregrounds her gender.
\textsuperscript{41} Bowman 2002:163.
narrative appeal, to both ancient and modern audiences.\textsuperscript{43} This suggests, at the least, that human interest in issues of contravention of expected gender behaviour is a diachronic universal, as well as cross-culturally effective in narrative terms.

In particular, ancient Greek society associated the heroic ideal with masculinity. A female hero therefore was a cultural oxymoron. Blondell argues “no woman can be portrayed taking decisive public action without being to some extent masculinized.”\textsuperscript{44} A ‘masculinized’ Medea, assuming such an interpretation is correct, necessarily behaves in a way more suited to heroes, and this is particularly emphasized through the deliberate depiction of Iason as decidedly unheroic, even ‘feminized’. Critics have also identified Medea as being forced into the role of narrative hero by adverse circumstances, rather than through expression of any innate heroic nature.\textsuperscript{45}

Medea’s supernatural abilities are also those associated with extraordinary intelligence.\textsuperscript{46} Her unscrupulous manipulation of Kreon, Aigeus, and Iason is positively Machiavellian, her superior metis (‘cunning intelligence’) marking her for the Greeks as the most unnatural and dangerous kind of woman.\textsuperscript{47} Knox succinctly states the matter: “Men distrust superior intelligence in general but they really fear and hate it in a woman.”\textsuperscript{48}

One of the ambiguities facing the audience of the Medea is how to reconcile the natural urge to sympathy for the wronged woman with the reality of her multiple murders. Part of the answer is in Euripides’ characterization of a complex Medea.\textsuperscript{49} We first meet her through her own interactions with the Nurse and the Chorus of Korinthian women, her

\textsuperscript{43} Segal 1996:18.
\textsuperscript{44} Blondell 1999:165.
\textsuperscript{45} Allan 2002:82; Gabriel 1992:353; Barlow 1989:162, 1678; McDermott 1989:1. Galis (1992:74) qualifies the heroism of Medea, arguing she is no hero per se, but “an aspirant to heroic arête” who must set aside her femininity. See also this chapter, nn. 42, 119.
\textsuperscript{46} Griffiths 2006:76.
\textsuperscript{48} Knox 1983:290. Griffiths (2006:74) agrees, stating that Aristotle’s view reflected that of Greeks generally: “excessive intelligence in a woman was not just a bad thing, but unnatural.” Cf. Arist. Pol. 1254 b 10-14. Even the vaunted intelligence of Homer’s devoted Penelope is not straightforwardly praiseworthy, being no guarantee of her loyalty, as the disguised Odysseus’ tests of his wife demonstrate.
\textsuperscript{49} As Mossman (2010:48) observes, a patently repulsive Medea would defeat the purpose of tragedy, to invoke in the audience a mixture of identification and horror.
neighbours, all of whom express friendship and understanding of her throughout the play.\textsuperscript{50} She gains and holds the audience’s sympathy because it is impossible not to sympathize with a woman who is so wronged, and so vulnerable, despite their (and our) foreknowledge of her later actions.\textsuperscript{51}

Others, however, question the reality of an audience’s undivided sympathy toward Medea. Alan Elliott points out that we should not read Athenian sympathy toward her as in any way similar to that of modern audiences.\textsuperscript{52} More specifically, Griffiths points to important diachronic differences in audience reception of Medea’s proto-feminist outpouring, with its comparison of childbirth to warfare (250-1): “Modern audiences may receive Medea’s comments as a positive rallying cry, but the original audience members were probably shocked, even offended, and their views of Medea’s may have become hardened and hostile at this early point in the drama, colouring their response to the whole of the play.”\textsuperscript{53} Ancient audience sympathy for Medea probably ebbed and flowed with each new episode, just as it does today. Medea is also unflatteringly compared throughout the play to a wild beast, a dehumanisation alternated at breakneck speed with the depictions of the warm-hearted mother conflicted to the point of madness in her grief.\textsuperscript{54} Medea does not merely experience a change of nature in the course of the play, but continuous changes, leaving the audience in a state of perpetual and uncertain pity and fear.

Rainer Friedrich points to Aristotle’s exposition on the nature of the literally uncivilized as explaining Medea’s transformation in the final scene: “the apolis, the being without a polis is either superhuman, a theos, or subhuman, a therion.”\textsuperscript{55} Many critics agree that Medea has changed from mortal woman to immortal and prophetic theos.\textsuperscript{56} Like a god, Medea displays the power to flick aside human values and aspirations, as dangerous to men as any female villain could ever hope to be, a woman-goddess with terrible ‘oikocidal’ power.\textsuperscript{57} In a modern world no longer ascribing the inexplicable to the arbitrary intervention

\textsuperscript{52} Elliot 1969:77.
\textsuperscript{53} Griffiths 2006:75.
\textsuperscript{54} Mossman 2010:224.
\textsuperscript{55} Friedrich 1993:235-6. Arist. Pol. I. 1.1253a. Cunningham (1954:159) argues that Medea has exchanged her humanity not for bestiality, but for “the awful, implacable, inhuman character of a theos.”
of the gods, Euripides’ Medea owes its enduring appeal to the contravention of gender roles, the depiction of a woman unexpectedly beyond male control, and the disruption of male bloodlines, all matters of supreme interest to an evolutionary analysis of human behaviour.

Material in Euripides’ Medea appertaining to reproduction is abundant.\(^{58}\) Other material throughout the tragedy supports the interpretation of her character through an evolutionary approach. Evolved behaviours and motivations determining character thought and action in this play are predominantly those concerning mating strategies, marriage, jealousy, parental investment, kin association, infanticide, and the role of status-maintenance in Medea’s decision to murder her children. While much of the description of Medea is strikingly consistent with the predictions of evolutionary psychology concerning character, other aspects of Euripides’ depiction invert or contravene contemporary and present audience/reader patterns of gender expectation.

There is no specific evidence for the prediction that Medea exhibits particular discrimination in mating preference, or that she adjusts her sexual behaviour according to her circumstances. Euripides appears to follow Pindar and perhaps other versions in describing Medea’s love for Jason as divinely inspired (526-31). There is conversely much ‘hearsay’, particularly in the speeches of Jason, concerning the inflexibility of female lust, of female sexuality as being impossible for women themselves to have any control over, reflecting the common Greek belief.\(^{59}\)

There are several events in the play supporting the claim that characters and audience anticipate a specifically female fascination with wealth, and base their comprehension on this expectation. This is arguably derived from the evolutionary finding that females prefer mates who have resources and/or the power to increase resources. Firstly, Medea is adamant that

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\(^{58}\) Even virgin goddesses such as Athene and Artemis are potential reproducers: Athene achieved a ‘son’, Erechtheus, while retaining her virgin status, while Artemis famously protected her modesty from male interloper Aktaion.

\(^{59}\) The Greeks believed that eros was “frightening, socially destructive and physically, emotionally and mentally debilitating” (Johnson and Ryan 2005:3). Additionally, female sexuality was insatiable, and dangerous, and women themselves were incapable of controlling it. Cf. Powell 2002:161-2; Reeder 1995:20; Walcot 1984:39-40. Some scholars have argued that male control of female sexuality, and the taming of the virgin through marriage enabled ‘human civilization’. Cf. Cox 1998:72; Stewart 1995:83; Keuls1985:6. Ancient sources concur: “Every woman loves sex more than a man does. Out of sense of shame [aidos] she conceals the goad of eros, even though she is madded by desire” Anon, Ap 10.120 (Johnson and Ryan 2005:13, n.16). Cf. Pseudo-Aristotle. Problems 4.26 (Johnson and Ryan 2005:113). Hesiod (Th. 4-6) describes eros as irresistible: “Eros the limb-relaxing/ He overpowers the mental strength of all the gods and/ all humankind, as well as the thoughtful counsel in their breasts. The female poet Sappho also appears to uphold this view of eros as an “utterly irresistible little beast” Sapp. Fr. 130.3 (Johnson and Ryan 2005:35). Cf. Buss’s finding that human females are not likely to exhibit sexual avarice, this chapter, n.77.
the royal daughter of Kreon must “receive the gifts into her own hands” (972-3). While this incidentally involves the children in the princess’s murder, dooming them to death at the hands of the Korinthians, it also suggests that Medea is aware that the princess must physically behold the rich gifts herself. Female interest in resources could explain why the immediate presence of the gifts would fascinate the princess, who would inevitably handle them, as was necessary for Medea’s plan to succeed. A servant’s mere report of the present would lack the immediate and compelling visual appeal of the glittering robe and diadem.

Secondly, after Medea’s instruction to her sons, the chorus confirms that the princess will not be able to resist the glittering gifts, and will act as agent of her own death (983-4). This suggests character and audience awareness that, even though the princess is no doubt aware of Medea’s hatred of Jason’s new wife, and would otherwise exercise some caution about accepting such gifts, the visual beauty of the shining presents will inevitably overcome her better sense. Similarly, the messenger’s report of the actual event states quite categorically that the princess’s goodwill toward the children is not won by her beloved Jason’s directions but by the very sight of the robe and diadem, her heart moved only by material wealth (1156-62).

The entire incident is also one of the many used to depict Jason in a negative light, insomuch as he has previously declared that he believes his new wife esteems him more than any wealth. His understanding of female motivation is also shown to be deficient, as the original audience would no doubt be aware, when they hear Jason’s reasoning to Medea for withholding the precious gifts: “Keep them, don’t give them away! For if my wife holds me in any regard, she will value my wishes more highly than wealth, I am quite sure” (961-3). Thus, while the princess is merely prey to a ‘natural’ feminine desire for glittering goods, Euripides’ Jason succumbs to a ridiculous and pitifully un-masculine naivety concerning female nature.

While there is little beyond conventional description of female attractiveness, the fact that Jason is casting aside Medea for a younger woman arguably supports the prediction that

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61 Cf. other translations: “The immortal grace and gleam will persuade her” (Mossman 2010:167); “She cannot resist such loveliness, such heavenly gleaming” (Vellacott 1963:47).
62 Mossman (2010:340) also notes the importance of this aspect of the princess’s “enthusiasm”, even “obsession”, for the gifts.
males prefer females with youth and beauty.\textsuperscript{63} There is one particular reference to the youth of Kreon’s daughter, and this is linked not to her desirability, but to her unfortunate bad temper toward the innocent sons of Medea. The audience at this point is wholly sympathetic to the children who are the object of “the young woman’s wrathful mood” (1150). The princess’s turned-away cheek is here described as “white” (1148). Similarly, the Nurse’s exposition introduces Medea as a typical aristocratic heroine with “snow-white neck” (30-3). There are, of course, numerous examples in Greek poetry of whiteness as a marker of beauty, in goddesses and noble women.\textsuperscript{64}

The physical description of the princess is never otherwise detailed, and this is typical of the genre. More evocative is the messenger’s emphasis upon her actions, as she preens and parades, “entranced” by her new and multicoloured robe and her golden diadem. Her

\textsuperscript{63} There is no suggestion that Medea is not beautiful, although, as Griffiths (2006:55) points out, Medea’s blood relation to a god entailed a conventional beauty. As Arthur (1984:41) observes, idealized women in Greek literature were “beautiful goddesses and heroines, the wives, mothers and daughters of the gods and heroes... tall and stately, proud, slightly haughty, and cultured.” Powell (2002:161-2) notes the idealized woman was also “submissive, fertile, chaste, and silent, and virtually invisible to those outside the home.” Van Wees’s study of female attractiveness (2005:1) found that pre-democracy literature concentrated on three aspects of female value: beauty, productive skill and intelligence. As he further explains (2005:23) the new ideology of the transformed democratic polis emphasized male “innate mental superiority: [men] are capable of rational, self-controlled judgement and planning, whereas women are driven by emotion and appetites and cannot govern themselves... clearly inferior and subordinate to men.”

\textsuperscript{64} In the \textit{Iliad}, several female characters are described as having white arms: Hera, \textit{Il.} 1.54-6; 1.571-2; 1.194-5; 5.711-20; 5.764-69; 8.370-83; Aphrodite, \textit{Il.} 5.311-18; Andromache, \textit{Il.} 6.377-80; and Helen, \textit{Il.} 3.121. In the \textit{Odyssey}, when Athene makes Penelope beautiful, “she made her whiter than sawn ivory”, \textit{Od.} 18.188-96. Arete is also white-armed \textit{Od.} 7.229-35, 11.335-41; as is Nausikaa \textit{Od.} 6.101-9; 7.4-13. Hesiod’s Hera is white armed (\textit{Cat.} 22), as is his Persephone (\textit{Theog.} 886-920). This feature of female beauty is maintained in the \textit{Homeric Hymn} for Hera (\textit{Hymn to Dionysus.} 5-7; \textit{Hymn to Apollon} 90-101) and for Selene (\textit{Hymn to Selene.} 14-18), while her sister Eos is rosy-armed, (\textit{Hymn to Helios.} 4-7). Mastronarde (2002:42) notes that even female characters who might be expected to be dark-skinned are depicted as pale: “Andromeda is shown as white-skinned even on vases which include dark-skinned Ethiopian slaves beside her.” Blondell (1999:416, n.12.) also observes that “Paleness is associated with women, who did not go out into the sun, at least if their husbands could afford to keep them inside. It also suggests vulnerability or suffering.” Cf. Pavlou 2009:187. In this reading of the trope, female paleness indicates family wealth. Xenophon relates how a wife alters her appearance to become more attractive, taller, with whiter skin, specifically: (\textit{Oikon.} 10.2). The use of the white-skin epithet and the descriptive focus upon it in Greek literature arguably follows evolved tendencies. Long understood as a conventional literary and artistic trope, this also relates to “empirical evidence in the ethnographic record [indicating] that human males evolved a specialized psychological mechanism to prefer females with a skin tone somewhat lighter than the female average” (Symons 1992:144). Others (Swami, Furnham and Joshni 2008:428) have also found that “The available research on judgements of skin tone suggests that, within ethnic groups, there is a general preference for women with skin tones lighter than the local average and men with skin tones darker than the local average.” That this preference is evolutionarily selected is suggested by the finding that in estimations of perceived fertility, both men and women rated light-toned skin significantly higher than dark-toned skin (Swami, Furnham and Joshni 2008:433). Cf. Frisby 2006; van den Aoki 2002; Bergh and Frost 1986.
hair is left undescribed, and while her feet are conventionally white, the description of their dainty steps evokes both the princess’s youth as well as her natural grace and spirit, making the awareness of her impending death more dreadful (1156-66).

Iason is the epitome of the male who alters or relaxes his mate standards depending on short or long term mating decisions. He presents to his former wife his reasons for abandoning her – essentially that it benefits his reproductive success, through material gain and support for his current sons, while in his view Medeia has no need of further children, from him, at least (551-67). He states that this new marriage is not based on any actual attraction to the girl concerned, implying that his union with Medeia was based on sexual love. He adds, in a backhanded manner, that he is not weary of her bed (555-6). Yet it also seems clear that he will not be enjoying it at this point, and, since she has no need of further children, perhaps never again.

Iason has only married Kreon’s daughter for the gains in wealth, security and status it will offer him and his sons, in contrast to his previous decision to marry the dowerless Medeia, for love, and perhaps even for gratitude’s sake. His later comments about having chosen Medeia over other Greek women, only to regret it (1339-41), suggest that he has, in fact, mismatched standards to effort, and has wasted years of his own effort on a relationship that should never have been a long-term one. It is, however, hard to discern which of his marriages could really be regarded as a long- or short-term mating effort; but it is not hard to imagine Iason continuing to mould his mating effort to his perceived advantage at any given moment. 65 While there is certain evolutionary advantage accruing to a male who exchanges an older mate for a much younger one, Iason will enjoy a higher status, itself a proximate goal to increased reproductive opportunity. 66

Medeia’s famous speech on the social disadvantages faced by women (here in ancient Greece, but readily transferable to many, if not most, historical societies) includes their lack of self-determination over their marital status (235-7). This speech is one of the clearest

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65 Reckford (1968:342) describes Iason’s shifting mate choice as “cold-blooded, selfish utilitarianism.”

66 As Luschnig (2007:15) suggests, Iason’s position is unappealing, but achieves both proximate and ultimate goal success: “he is still on the make, going after the next princess with something to offer him.” Elliot (1969:83), however, argues that Iason’s “change of wife to a sounder investment would not shock [the Athenians] as it does us... it is the manner in which he carries out his normal role which condemns him.” Hall (1997:xviii) considers Iason is simply one “man trying to make a life in a xenophobic new city”, which overlooks the fact that the couple and their children have been quite happy in the city for some ten years. Similarly, Shaw (1975:260) argues that Iason “only wants to secure the place of his house in society.”
descriptions of the ways in which male and female mating strategies conflict.

Marriage decisions were in the hands of a woman’s controlling males, her father, brother, or son(s).

Medea, of course, is remarkable for being one of the few famous Greek heroines who arranged her own marriage. It is interesting that she compares the female human situation to all other breathing, feeling creatures, suggesting that it is the human species alone which suffers from such ‘unnatural’ and undesirable marriage customs (230-1). In terms of the deprivation of females’ right to ‘choose’ their own mates - a feature of mammalian species universally, if not of all sexed creatures – her accusations are well founded. Female and male mating strategies conflict in all known species, and in general exist in an uneasy balance of interests, but in humans institutionalised patriarchal control of females ensures preferential male advantage in terms of reproductive success. In the Greece of Euripidean tragedy, this was maintained through early female marriage, sex-selective infanticide, and idealised seclusion of fertile-age women, practices also evidenced in other human cultures.

Ironically, one of the principal instruments of male control of females was female willingness to comply. The Nurse warns of the perils of a woman’s overthrow of a principal mechanism of female control (13-15). She alludes to the patriarchal strategies of female control circumvented by Medea herself in her union with Jason; the power of the father to determine a daughter’s marriage, and the contractual negotiations between men for a bride (13-15). It is, as the Nurse notes, female compliance with masculine control that ensures the stability of society, within the oikos, and by inference, beyond.

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67 Schaps (2006:592) observes that Medea’s marital problems are not personal with Jason, but are political for all women: “it is not hard to see why she has been so popular among feminists.”

68 Arthur 1984:24. Patterson (1991:60) suggests “that Athenian marriage be understood not as a simple legal event but as a composite process leading to or having as its goal the establishment of a new household or oikos, with the eventual production of children. Each could at times be taken to stand for the marriage as a whole... but any part or aspect should not be taken to be the whole. Likewise, omission of one element does not mean that there was no marriage.” The elements listed by Patterson include enguan, betrothal, gamein marriage, sunoikein cohabitation, telein ritual fulfillment, and paidapoien, reproduction. Others argue that marriage was a fully defined legal mechanism enabling and privileging male-to-male political and economic exchange. Cf. Lyons 2003:127; Powell 2002:162; Blondell et al. 1999:55; Cox 1998:83, 104; Blundell 1995:67; Demand 1994:11, 31. Reeder (1995:20) draws attention to Aristotle’s comparison of the nature of marriage to that of an economic partnership (Arist. Econ. 1.3.1, 1343b). Critics have disparaged Jason for treating “relationships as economic contracts” (Nimis 2007:403); for thinking “his new marriage was merely a kind of business relationship” (Musurillo 1966:56, cf. Mossman 2010:306); and, for marrying not for love, but to become the son-in-law of a king (Rabinowitz 1993:141; cf. Elliot 1969:84). Des Bouvrie (1992:222) argues that Jason’s motives were entirely economic, rather than concerned with getting legitimate children. Jason, in fact, is not only behaving according to universal expectations of his gender, but in complete accordance with Greek cultural norms, themselves biased to privilege male biological values and concerns. See also Ch.2, p.60, and this chapter, p.70.

69 See Chapter 1, nn.89, 90.
Other female characters also make statements on this theme. The awareness of historic gender difference, both cultural and innate, is expressed openly by the chorus when they state their belief that women’s version of the conflict will one day be made public (421-30). They ascribe the responsibility for the denigration of women, and women’s own silence on the matter, to Apollo, the epitome of male ideology, and the ancient (and male) bards.

Up until this moment in time, Medea has, in fact, been a model of female compliance: her metis “cunning intelligence” and her fertility have both served her husband. Medea recounts the ways she has assisted Iason, including murder and the despoiling of her own royal house, highlighting the injustice of his abandonment of her (476-87). Yet, as she herself admits, all of this would have counted for nothing, if she had not also borne him sons (488-91). Thus, for this reason overwhelmingly, he has no legitimate right to abandon either her or their marriage. This is very clear support for the evolutionary finding that the purpose of marriage is primarily reproduction, and secondarily the inheritance of resources.\footnote{There is general agreement that the purpose of marriage in Greek society was the reproduction of children. Cf. Mossman 2010:228; Roisman 2005:28; Bowman 2002:158; Friedrich 1993:224; McDermott 1989:29; Arthur 1984:32; Lacey 1968:110. The fourth-century orator, Demosthenes states: “we have hetairaí for our pleasure, pallekí for daily service to our bodies, but gunai for the procreation of legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of the household.” (59.122. Trans. Reeder 1995:28). Cf. Lysias I.6.}

Iason, too, is aware that their legitimate marriage has been further regularized by the production of children. He acknowledges he has been truly married to Medea, who has borne him children (and he never questions their paternity).\footnote{Cf. Od. 16.300-4, where even Odysseus cannot assume the paternity of a child born to Penelope, the mythologically idealized Greek wife.} In comparing the murderous Medea to other Greek women, he states again, twice, that he is married to Medea; “you were married to me” (νυμφεύθεισσα), and “I married you” (ἔγὼ γῆμα σέ 1336-41). Yet, despite his acknowledgement of both his preference for her and the creation of children, he also refers to their union as ‘hateful and destructive’ (κῆδος ἕχθρον ὀλέθριον 1341).

One of the principal issues raised by the play is the practice of polygamy, found to be the form of marriage universally preferred by males. Iason is attempting to engage in serial monogamy rather than polygamy per se, although he does claim to imagine his wives co-existing, if not co-habitting. Thus, the question of whether Medea is still married to Iason, now that he is married to Kreon’s daughter, is not as important to the consideration of this prediction as is the expectation – of the powerful males of the story (Iason, Kreon, and Aigeus) – that Medea will accept and support Iason’s new marriage. The Nurse, however, makes it clear that Iason has not simply taken on a second marriage, but abandoned his first
wife and the children from their union (17-19). In this respect, Iason is not a polygamist, but a serial monogamist.

While Greeks enjoyed only one official marriage, they were also the owners of female slaves, and concubinage was permitted, even encouraged, for the production of sons for Athenian imperialist ambitions. Iason’s justification (discussed above) of his second marriage (551-67), while unconvincing to modern (and post-feminist) ears, would have been appreciated quite differently by a Greek audience (even if his maladroit estimation of its impact upon Medea had evoked amusement, or even contempt).72

Iason himself, in his self-defense to Medea, does not appear to consider that he has technically abandoned her and the boys, but on the contrary, is actually being a better husband to her, ensuring a better life for their sons through his politically advantageous and expeditious second marriage:

You may be quite sure of this, that is was not for the sake of a woman that I married the royal bride I now have, but as I have just said, because I wanted to save you and to beget princes as brothers to my children, to be a bulwark for the house. (593-7).

It seems unlikely that he frames the situation in quite the same way to his youthful wife with the wrathful temper.

While evolutionary psychology posits that sexual jealousy is primarily a male quality, an evolved response to paternity uncertainty and the sociopolitical commodification of female sexuality and fertility, Euripides’ Medea ostensibly has instead as its primary focus a female sexually jealous response of the first wife to a husband’s second marital union. This appears to be at variance with the predictions of evolutionary psychology, but Euripides’

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72 Blondell et al. (1999:59) identify the threat to resources that underlie a woman’s refusal to accept a husband’s other sexual relationships in the family home. She states: “respectable Athenian women... were expected to tolerate their husband’s mistresses, provided they were not brought into the same household, which would humiliate the legitimacy [sic] wife and threaten the social standing and economic security of herself and her children.” Michelini (1987:93) expands on this, stating: “The conflicts that resulted from concubinage and second and third marriages where the claims of rival offspring were advanced by different mothers, and the resultant unenviable status of stepchildren, can be seen by consulting sources as diverse as Alkestis and the speeches of the orators. The rights of legitimate wives, vis-à-vis concubines and other subordinate mates, are relatively clear ... the prerogatives and resources of the wife and of her children must not be infringed upon, and ideally the two women should not share the same household as sexual rivals.” Mossman (2010:263) notes: “Athenian men were certainly able to have women other than their wives in keeping and might produce children by them; but gentlemen took care to ensure that their other women were kept quietly out of the way of their wives.” As Blondell (1999:423, n.88) points out, a Greek audience would certainly have suspected Iason’s fantasy of a united family with sons by different mothers. Cf. Mossman 2010:274; Allan 2002:59. See also this chapter, n.80.
manipulation of gendered behaviour is deliberate, part of the characterization of Medea as exceptional. While Iason constantly frames this jealousy as the result of Medea’s foolish and uncontrollable female lust (569-73), there is no real evidence for this in the text. Medea loves him, certainly, and her rage is clearly fuelled by pain, but the crux of her fury, for which there is ample, even overdetermined, evidence, is, in fact, her husband’s disrespect, manifest in his contravention of the oath he swore to her in return for her assistance.

That Euripides chooses to make the *accusation* of Medea’s sexual jealousy part of Iason’s indictment of her character, suggests that the audience would have had some appreciation of or interest in sexual jealousy per se, especially the arguably more likely male sexual jealousy. While female sexual desire was considered in ancient Greek culture to be greater than that of the male, with concomitant female sexual jealousy, female jealousy in evolutionary terms is emotional, a specifically female response to threatened resources, a response more likely to be based in practices of polygamy and concubinage (see below).

Some critics have highlighted the ‘masculinization’ of the character of Medea, and, *if* she were sexually jealous, this might be evidence in support of this. Iason’s disparaging, but erroneous attribution of Medea’s anger to sexually motivated jealousy alone denies the validity of her genuine emotional attachment to him, but, more importantly for the Greek audience perhaps, denies the consequences of his transgression of the socio-religious sanctity of the oath. Again, Iason’s mistaken interpretation of female nature presents him as unsympathetically inferior, even dangerously naïve, in masculine intellect.

One concern of the *Medea* might be said to be Medea’s immoderate sexual desire. This is certainly Iason’s avowed perception of the cause of her distress. In this sense, there is in this reading evidence for a male preference for female chastity, all the more striking considering the Greek belief in the inability of females to control their lust. Greeks were at

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73 See Ch.3, n.59, for discussions of Greek attitudes to eros and female sexuality.
74 Of particular interest in the study of Euripides’ Medea, is the finding that “passionate arousal seems to decrease over the course of a relationship, but is aroused again at the threat of termination” (Kenrick and Trost 1987:86). This would require a reading of Medea’s jealousy as an intentional mechanism to reignite their relationship. Several classicists, however, argue against this. Bongie (1977:28ff.) notes that Medea’s anger does not originate in her loss of Iason’s love. Others agree that it is not loss of love that she laments, but loss of her own honour. Cf. Easterling 2003:192; Allan 2002:44; Friedrich 1993:219; Ohlanger 1989:93; Elliot 1969:94.
75 See this chapter, n.42, for a discussion of the masculinization of Medea.
76 There is some critical agreement that stupidity is one of Iason’s most unfortunate characteristics. Cf. Mossman 2010:300; Ohlanger 1989:82-83; Page 1938:xv-xvi. See also van Wees’s comments on the gendering of intelligence, this chapter, n.63.
77 In fact, evolutionary psychologists note the opposite effect is expressed cross-culturally: women are generally much less interested in sexual opportunities than men. Buss (2008:329) explains: “by
best ambiguous about the powers of *eros*, and these sentiments of the chorus confirm the perceived dangers of excessive eroticism:

Loves that come to us in excess bring no good name or goodness to men. If Aphrodite comes in moderation, no other goddess brings such happiness. Never, o goddess, may you smear with desire one of your ineluctable arrows and let it fly against my heart from your golden bow! (629-35).

Yet it is obviously Iason whose propensity to seek another mate has initiated the action of the play. A female who responds to this with extreme agitation and the threat of violence may follow Greek cultural stereotype, but inverts the typical sociobiological behaviour found in humans.

Evolutionary psychologists are in agreement that female jealousy is an emotional response to loss of resources. There is no doubt that Medeia’s response to Iason’s betrayal is intensely emotional. She frankly admits that while women are not naturally aggressive, a serious threat to their relationship is the sole situation that will inspire them to murder (263-6). Similarly, the chorus address Medeia as an “unhappy” mother, whose filicide is entirely due to the wicked abandonment of her marriage-bed by Iason for another wife (996-1001). While Iason (and some modern critics) attribute her jealousy to sexual motivations, it is equally plausible that Medeia’s jealousy springs from the threat his new wife will pose to Iason’s provision of resources to herself and their offspring. Their house is not especially well resourced now, or so Iason claims, giving the reason for his desertion as the intention to acquire the means to keep them well. The reality is that Medeia and the children will be further disadvantaged by his absence. If Kreon was not willing to support their household before Iason’s defection, he will hardly divert resources from the future investment in his daughter’s household in order to support a woman he clearly abhors, and children unrelated to him.

After Medeia has acted out her murderous intentions, Iason is still minimizing the effects of his actions, failing to acknowledge her pain, and failing to appreciate that what is advantageous for the male may be conversely detrimental to the female (1367-9). It suits him, and by extension, the polygamous male, to classify any woman objecting to a second wife as without sense. Thus, in his view, Medeia’s resistance to the idea of sharing him is because of a personal flaw of character, and not because women have genuine reasons to

withholding sex, women increase its value... [and] the price that men are willing to pay for it... Granting sexual access early and often causes men to see a woman as a casual mate.”
disapprove the loss of a husband’s support, through, at best, a halving of male-controlled resources to themselves and their offspring.

Yet, as Euripides implies, Jason’s offer of “some” financial assistance to an exiled Medeia and children is much less a division of resources, more a token gesture to placate his own conscience (609-15). The statement that he is “ready to give with unstinting hand” indicates that the household resources, such as they are, are, in fact, entirely within his control. Medeia will therefore be dependent on his goodwill, a gallling position for any princess descended from the Sun, and exceedingly disrespectful to the wife to whom he owes the successful capture of the Golden Fleece.78 Thus, in the Greek cultural context, the impending threat is not only to the essential resources Medeia will be losing, but also to the respect due to her status and her offspring’s status.79 In any event, the threat she perceives is equally undesirable, in terms of her unconscious perception of personal reproductive success.

While ethnographic evidence suggests that women in polygynous societies can tolerate polygamy when necessary, preferring to share one extremely well resourced male rather than enjoying exclusive access to a male with few or no resources, there are limited and specific factors that influence their agreeability over such an arrangement.80

Kreon’s attitude to the first wife of the man who is marrying his own only daughter clearly demonstrates the potential dangers of intra-female conflict in the polygamous

78 Allan (2002:61) describes his offer as “insensitive”, while Mueller (2001:476) marks it as “inseparable from his bringing to a shameful end his marriage.” Mossman (2010:278) considers Jason’s offer “so facile, that it is hard to sympathize with anyone but Medea here.”

79 See also Ch.1, n.77, for a discussion on the effects of status on reproductive success. This characteristic of Medeia’s is again atypical for her gender, and demonstrates Euripides’ skill in constructing an attention-grabbing female character with complex and contradictory gender in the Greek cultural context.

80 While polygamy always favors the husband’s reproductive success, when stepmothers or co-wives share genes, intra-female conflict is mitigated by Hamiltonian kin altruism; in polygamous cultures, women demonstrably prefer sororal or close-kin polygyny, which supports their own maternal effort (Hrdy 2009:246). Campbell (2002:236) notes that while women may find ways to withstand the worst effects of polygamy, it is never their first preference, as it is for males. There are more good reasons, however, for women to reject polygamy: Hrdy (1999b:243-4) notes that monogamy among some species developed in response to the ‘alpha’ female’s prohibition of lesser females reproducing, through infanticide. Where hierarchal social levels exist, “high-ranking mothers have significantly more success than lower-ranking females at keeping their infants alive, in part because of their enhanced ability to defend vulnerable infants against the rare, opportunistic attacks by mothers in rival matrilines” (Hrdy 1999b:246). Similarly, the traditional fear of the murderous stepmother, in folk wisdom and narrative throughout the ages, acknowledges the danger posed to children by women unrelated to them, and who are competing for a husband’s resources on their own offspring’s behalf (Daly and Wilson 1998:5-6). Belfiore (2000:7) has observed this very scenario in the Greek context as well. As she observes of concubinage, “the birth of children with the same father and different mothers is an important cause of tensions within the household for legitimacy, favors from the father, and recognition by the polis. In similar ways, tension is created by the presence of stepchildren.” See also this chapter, n.72.
situation. In insisting she takes ‘her’ children with her (they are also the only living sons of his new son-in-law, who do not share any blood to relation to Kreon), he is pragmatically seeking to neutralise the threat they will pose to his own future grandsons (271-4). Where Iason sees only the benefit future sons would provide to the sons he already has, Kreon’s motivation is not the transmission of Iason’s bloodline per se, but of his own, through Iason’s sons with Kreon’s daughter.  

In the chorus’s commiserations to Medea they use “domos” to refer to both the father’s home, and to the house that Medea no longer controls (441-5). But, since Medea lives in a house with her children, and Kreon’s daughter and Iason dwell together in another building, it seems the “house” over which the princess now holds sway is not just a physical building, but is Iason’s ancestral “house”, his paternal bloodline. Medea then has good reason to fear for herself, and especially for her sons, at the hands of a second wife and stepmother. The princess’s spontaneous and “wrathful” reaction to the sons of her husband – disgust and rejection – only confirms how accurate Medea’s apprehensions are (1147-9).  

In light of these observations, Iason’s unquestioning acceptance of Medea’s apparent backtrack on his second marriage is patently unbelievable and ridiculous. Medea’s blatant parroting (869-93) of Iason’s earlier justifications (547-67), already marked as foolish misapprehension of female nature, imbue the scene of her deception of him with a certain melodramatic pathos. Where Iason’s speech concluded by stating that mankind would have no further trouble if they could only reproduce without the need for the female sex, articulating the Greek attitude toward women as a necessary evil, Medea’s speech of astonishing compliance with his polygamous behaviour responds with the observation that women are not so much evil, but simply bound by female nature (884-90). Iason’s failure in

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81 The question of why Kreon would wish to marry his only child, an epikleros in the Greek cultural context, to an impoverished foreigner, is also a vexed one. Rabinowitz (1993:5) reports that “If a man died leaving a daughter but no sons, the daughter would be married [...] to her nearest male relative, thereby keeping the wealth in the family.” Further, Kreon knows exactly how dangerous Medea is.

82 Rabinowitz (1993:145) notes of this passage that Euripides’ highly unsympathetic depiction of the princess allows the audience another reason to sympathize with Medea’s belief that her children will suffer if she leaves them behind. Cf. Mossman 2010:339. There are also ancient sources that assume that second wives are a danger to their stepchildren: “A woman is naturally somewhat hostile towards the children of a previous marriage when she is their father’s second wife.” Aig. Fr 4. Trans. Collard and Cropp 2008a:7. Similarly, the dying Alkestitis pleads with her husband: “do not marry /again and give our children to a stepmother /who will not be so kind as I, who will be jealous /and raise her hand to your children and mine. Oh no, /do not do that, do not. That is my charge to you. /For the newcomer stepmother hates the children born >/to a first wife, no viper could be deadlier” (Eur. Alk. 304-10. Trans. Lattimore 1955). See also Ch.1, nn.119f.

83 This is not to disparage the pleasurable effect of such dramatics on an audience.
apprehending the biological female nature, in favour of the culturally idealized, is now
beneficial to Medea, and makes her deception of him remarkably easy.

No fifth-century audience member could possibly have made the continued errors of
judgement that Iason makes throughout the play, not only about female nature, but also his
failure to see the murder of his children is the proper punishment for his oath breaking.
While his response to Medea’s feint does acknowledge natural female resistance to
polygamy (909-10), he still grossly underestimates the consequences of this, and he continues
to do so, even when confronted with the corpses of his children.

Surveys of domestic violence (against partners, children, ex-spouses’ current partners
and even pets) demonstrate clearly it is usually a male strategy to intimidate and control
‘their’ female, and that women rarely if ever exhibit the same violence toward spouse and
offspring when faced with relationship break-up. Given this pattern of gendered behaviour, it
is therefore of interest to examine Euripides’ depiction of a woman who constantly threatens
violence against her departing partner, his new spouse, her family, and her own children.
Retaliatory filicide will be discussed more fully below. When Medea first declares she will
murder Kreon, his daughter, and Iason (373-5), she does not appear to have plans to murder
her own children.

While the future sons of Iason and the princess are targets of Medea’s violence (805),
something rarely considered is that Iason and the princess have been ‘married’ and co-
habiting for some unspecified time. Therefore, it is not impossible, though clearly not
indicated in the play, that Kreon’s first grandchild is also a victim of Medea’s successful
killing campaign. An indirect reference is suggested, however, in Medea’s statement that
she will utterly confound “the whole house of Iason” (794-5). This obviously includes the
two living sons of Iason, but it does not exclude, and it logically implies, any newly
conceived children by the princess. Medea’s motivation for her actions is linked twice in
this speech to her wish to avoid the unendurable mockery of enemies, rather than any direct
wish to injure Iason. Later she will provide this justification, to him at least, increasing his
pain. But avoidance of dishonour to herself (797), and to her heirs (782), seems here to be
just as important (780-97). A few lines later, the plan to deprive Iason of all and any of his
children, even if they are also her own, is marked as enjoying divine approval, a proper
punishment for Iason’s oath-breaking (802). And again, Medea baldly anchors her
murderous intentions in the preservation of her personal honour, stating: “Let no one think
me weak, contemptible, untroublesome. No quite the opposite, hurtful to foes, to friends
kindly. Such persons live a life of greatest glory” (802-10).
Issues of parental investment in offspring arise again and again in Euripides’ Medea. The chorus outline some important concerns and dilemmas (1098-113). While children are described as “sweet”, the parental role is always one of unambiguous toil and anxiety. It is hard enough to ensure that children are well provided for in infancy, yet the parent must also strive to leave them some inheritance, in evolutionary terms to support the upbringing of their future grandchildren. The consciousness that some offspring are better investments than others is inescapable; parental effort may just as easily be expended on either “worthless or worthy objects”. Ultimately, even if the offspring has been a wise investment, parental effort may return no “profit”, if death takes the child, a “further grief most painful” (1115).

The bearing and rearing of children is never, in this play, a meaningful activity or goal in and of itself. After the death of Medea’s children by her own hand, the chorus observe that her toil is now unjustified, for the ‘purpose’ of parenthood cannot now be fulfilled (1262-3). This is by no means to suggest that the emotional attachment of Greek parents (or any other parents) to their children is subordinate to purely pragmatic estimations of investment return, in conscious considerations, at least. But the political dangers of this are foreshadowed (327-9). That Kreon freely articulates his love for his offspring, beyond even love for his own fatherland, only hands Medea the perfect weapon to repay him for her degrading exile.

The choral passages immediately preceding the appearance of Aigeus state that no fate is worse than exile from one’s homeland. Their disparaging of the man who would abandon friends to such a fate certainly prepares the audience for the idealised Aigeus’s natural (if unwise) generosity to Medea. Yet, there is also irony in their view that the worst fate that can befall a man is “citylessness” – the “most pitiable of woes” (645-9).

The Greek male horror of childlessness (or more specifically sonlessness, for a man with daughters was officially ‘childless’), despite the chorus’s warnings of accompanying toil and potential regret over misinvestment, is the very wedge that Medea exploits to secure the assistance of Aigeus (716-18). By the end of the play it is clear that for Iason, whose life

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84 March (1990:36) for instance believes that child-parent relationships systematically thematically underlie both the play and Medea’s thought and action.
has been “destroyed” by childlessness, the elimination of his children is a fate far worse than even loss of city (1325-6). 86 This bleak truth, a lesson in priorities for Jason and by extension the Greek audience, suggests an uneasy juxtaposition of family and polis loyalties and allegiances, perhaps an ongoing preoccupation during wartime fifth-century Athens.

The chorus may regret the tendency of death to remove highly valued offspring from the family, creating a waste of parental effort, but Jason’s reproductive mistake was the intentional abandoning of his own beloved and assuredly worthwhile children, in the foolish expectation of better offspring from the better-connected local princess. While the elimination of offspring by death is arbitrary and inescapable, Jason’s action was intentional, entirely avoidable, and indisputably short-sighted. Medea points to the hypocrisy of Jason’s regret for the loss of his children, as he longs to take their corpses in his arms (1399-402). She has some cause; while they lived, his interactions with them in the play were, while friendly, emotionally indifferent, and she is fully aware of it. His affective investment in them was visibly diminishing, and, when he pictured them as relevant in his future at all, it was as fully-grown and independent young men and useful allies (914-21). By the end of the play, however, Jason finally perceives that sons living in the present are always worth more than imaginary sons in the future. The physical presence of his slaughtered sons is all that remains to him (1402-3), and is the final weapon Medea will wield in her revenge.

The great long-term mistake made by Jason in this play, which will haunt him long after Medea is no more than a memory, is not, as he thinks, his marriage to Medea (1341), but his strategically short-term but unjustifiable reproductive disinvestment in his children. As Medea delights to inform him, his consciousness of this will be, in his old age, utterly unbearable (1395-6).

describes the recurring theme of childlessness in Greek literature: “the inability to transmit an oikos to future generations was considered “a terrible punishment”, and for the man with only female descendants, regarded as a disaster.” Slater (1974:21) also notes “A woman who failed to produce an heir for her husband was viewed as not having performed her most elemental function, and women could be divorced for barrenness.” Loraux (1998:51-2) argues that while in Greek mythology mothers never directly kill female children, “A murderous mother always kills her son(s), because the important thing is to get at the husband.” Segal (1996:16), seeking to emphasize Greek valuation of legitimate children, makes the claim that “modern society does not place so much emphasis on the father’s need for children to continue the male line.” In fact, DNA testing in the West is often requested by men at the least or imagined evidence of adultery, and children often take the father’s name in modern societies, even when married women keep their maiden names (and, of course, non-Western societies still practice extreme sequestration of fertile females). Cf. Anderson 2006. See also Ch.2, n.60, and this chapter, nn.68, 70.

86 As Des Bouvrie (1990:223-4) observes, “The dramatic text, then, concludes by establishing two facts: the children are of paramount value to Jason, and their death means ultimate disaster for him, because it reduces him to childlessness.”
It is clear that, from the very beginning, Medeia’s personal attachment to her children is real and natural. The chorus attempts to dissuade her from killing the boys, referring to them specifically every few lines, reminding her of their existence, and thus of her role as mother (849-65). Even as she is ruthlessly successfully deceiving the hapless Iason, her love for her children, and the memory of the birthing of them, returns to her mind, strong enough to shake her resolve, and to almost betray her real intention (922-30).

Medeia highlights the priority of parental attachment when she refers to the folk wisdom that material gain is most valuable to both gods and mortals. Conversely, her own position is that her children’s safety is more desirable than even gold (964-8). Her farewell to her children, ostensibly as she prepares for exile alone, enumerates the return that a parent may expect for their investment, including the horrific, life threatening, and specifically female pain of giving birth. The greatest returns a child can give its parent are here described as the successful mating of that child, when grown, and its duty of care to the aging parent (1024-35).

Similarly, as Medeia steels herself to commit the actual murder of her beloved sons, wavering between direct address to the chorus, herself, and the boys themselves, her speech echoes the chorus’s (849-65), as she lovingly refers to and addresses the children again and again (1040-75). This is quite contrary to the Nurse’s opening statements, in which Medeia is said to loathe her children, with savage intent in her glance upon them (36, 92-3). Medeia’s first on-stage utterances do indeed describe the children as accursed, and express her wish that they, as members of Iason’s house, should perish with him (112-14), but thereafter her anger is directed at Iason, Kreon, and the princess. While she plans to kill the children, and succeeds in doing this, it is not because she does not love them.

The question of who ‘owns’ the children, and the question of investment and/or attachment, is of interest throughout the play. While characters may express this in a number of ways, translators of the text are prone to stylistic interpolations that grammatically attribute the children to either, both, or neither of the parents. While the text itself frequently presents the children without any possessive pronoun, translators insert it at need. One early and definite attribution of the children to Iason alone comes when the Nurse states that Iason has abandoned “his own children” (17-19), and shortly thereafter addresses the Tutor as the “old attendant to the children of Iason” (53).

It is, in fact, in these early lines that the household servants establish the defaulting of the ‘ownership’ of the children away from Iason. The Nurse cannot believe that Iason would allow his sons to be exiled, but the Tutor explains that the allegiances of a new marriage
displace those of the old (74-7). Jason’s friendship is shifting away from the “house”, and this does not only refer to the dwelling, if at all, but to the bloodlines within it. In realigning himself to the royal “house” of Korinth, Jason is disinvesting in his extant issue, although he will by the end of the play come to realise, at his own cost, that where blood links exist, the heart remains.

When the mother of his anticipated sons is murdered, Jason hastens to re-establish his relationship with the boys, protesting almost too much his care for their welfare, now that his dynastic plans have been overturned, indicated by his double use of the genitive τέκνων (“offspring”) and παῖδων (“children”) in his speech (1299-305). Similarly, the chorus twice describe the slain children to him as σῶν τέκνων (“your offspring”), deliberately using the possessive to confirm his relationship with the boys; the reconnection comes far too late to save them. Medea herself confirms Jason’s paternity of his slain sons, in her use of πατρεῖς “from one’s father, paternal, hereditary”, but only to assign the fault of their death, albeit by her own hand. Also, their relative perceptions of the value of their offspring in their bitter address to the slain boys, she uses παῖδες “children”, while he emphasizes his genetic relationship to them, in τέκνα, literally “begotten ones” (1363-4).87

Evolutionary analysis predicts that females are necessarily selective about which offspring to invest in. There is no doubt that in Euripides’ play Medea deliberately disinvests in the children sired by Jason. The pathetic death-cries of the boys illustrate a simple truth of investment selection; while parents can and do choose which children to disinvest in, children are much less at liberty to reject their parents, upon whom they depend for life (1271-9). The boys cannot escape their death by their “mother’s hands”, a terrible inversion of the universal cultural icon of the infant safe in its mother’s arms; this imagery is further intensified by the identification of those hands as the “murderous snare” about to close upon them (1279).

While all animal females, including humans, do demonstrably make decisions about which of their offspring to invest in, the thought of this is as unpalatable today as it undoubtedly was to Euripides’ contemporaries. The denial of maternal ambivalence, as discussed in Hrdý, is the inevitable consequence of patriarchal reliance on unquestioning maternal commitment.88 Yet, from a purely pragmatic point of view, Medea’s actions are entirely consistent with the principles of maternal disinvestment; she has been abandoned by

87 I thank Dr. Arlene Allan for drawing my attention to this point.
88 Hrdý 1999a:316, 323-4; Hrdý 1999b:xxv.
her husband, she lacks close kin to support her, she is young, and, ultimately, her future reproductive prospects stand a good chance of being improved through disencumbering herself of the unsupported children.

The finding that males’ investment in their offspring is contingent on the quality of their relationship with the offspring’s mother is amply evidenced in Euripides’ Medeia. As discussed above, the servants have observed that Iason’s loyalties no longer lie with his sons (74-7). His severing of “old marriage ties” from the boys’ mother is, in their eyes, the necessary precondition to his compliance with their impending exile. They express shock that being at odds with his sons’ mother should influence his apparent disinvestment with them, but research indicates this is, in fact, a norm of parental disinvestment.89

A few lines later in the servants’ conversation, the Tutor states the matter explicitly; “Because of his new bride, the father does not love these boys” (85-6). Further, he attributes this behaviour to the inevitability of self-interest. In evolutionary terms, Iason has disinvested in the children because he no longer believes they have optimum opportunity to transmit his bloodline. His anticipated sons by the princess, in his view, whether consciously or otherwise, would be better placed to continue his stock. It is only when this option is eliminated that he rediscovers exactly how important his sons are, or were.

Medeia’s own decision to disinvest in the children depends on her perception that Iason has ceased to care for the boys; Medeia implies that Iason’s detachment is unnatural, flatteringly juxtaposing it with Kreon’s more natural parental feelings of “kindness” (340-5). Her perception is clearly founded on convincing evidence; Iason has marked the children lexically as hers – σύν τέκνωσιν – failing to evince any distress as he calmly discusses arrangements for their immediate departure (459-63). But Iason’s disinvestment in his children is not ‘unnatural’. His long-term plan viably positions him as the son-in-law of a king, in line to be a king himself, and the future father of kings. Iason’s deliberate disinvestment in his children, which costs him very little insomuch as his new, much younger wife will almost certainly provide him with more offspring, is entirely logical in the context of his long-term reproductive strategy.

Similarly, although she patently loves their children, Medeia’s decision to commit filicide does not necessarily entail the need for revenge as a sole motive. Medeia’s pragmatic acceptance of the necessary, even inevitable death of the children, does not spring solely of her desire to destroy Iason, but is developed in response to an overwhelming consideration of

89 See Ch. 1, n.104.
her own reproductive options, and the children’s role in these. As a relatively young and fertile woman, her own future opportunities are actually enhanced by the elimination of her disinvesting husband’s sons. Beneath Medea’s apparent impetus lie both the realities of human reproductive decisions, and the audience’s experience and appreciation of these. As stepchildren, their life opportunities would very likely be compromised. As resource-draining appendages, they lower her personal appeal as a potential mate.

Medea’s withdrawal of parental investment is also motivated by the bleak reality of her dissociation from her own kin. While male investment in offspring is generally secondary to that of maternal kin, Medea’s family are no longer a part of her life. Medea is alone in Korinth. Despite having enjoyed the goodwill, even love, of the city during her residence there with Iason (12-13), when the crisis comes, the lack of kin support becomes overwhelming. Not only has she fled her homeland, but her betrayal of family, her disobedience to her father, and worse, the murder of her father’s heir, her brother Apsyrtus, has ensured she cannot count on rescue by her kin, whom she must now count as enemies (166-7, 502-8). Had she been able to call upon their help, with her very legitimate grievance against the injury done to her by her husband, it is possible that her options would have been many more, and her sons might have survived. Through the proper use of her magical powers, she might have gained friendship of the house of Pelias, and thus sought help from them. But this opportunity too is denied her, because of her decision to cause Pelias’s death on Iason’s behalf. In this sense, she is as culpable as Iason for initiating the series of events that will result in the death of her sons. In another sense, her prioritisation of husband over kin is her undoing.

Medea is constantly regretting the abandonment of her family and the subsequent lack of kin support for her in her predicament, supporting the evolutionary finding that women are less likely to be abused when maternal kin are present. The Nurse, summarising the main themes of the play in her opening lines, states that Medea has cast aside father, country, and ancestral house, and all for a man who has now made nothing of this, her ultimate sacrifice for him (30-3).

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90 See Ch.1, nn. 120, 121.
91 Medea, in her exchanges with Aigeus, is an example of a woman careful to display her value as a future mate, trading the promise of fertility for the guarantee of security (Williamson 1990:19). Blondell (1999:413, n.29) describes their arrangement as a “quasi-marriage.” Sfyroeras (1995:129) agrees that Aigeus offers marriage to Medea in this scene, while Rickert (1987:106) comments on Medea’s deliberate omission of any mention of her children as a way of increasing her appeal. As Luschnig (2007:24) points out, Medea’s decision to attach herself to another man is completely justifiable in terms of a woman’s very limited options. See also Ch.1, n.121.
While Greek marriage was patriarchal and patrilocal, there exists a clear inference in Medea’s statements that in marriage a wronged wife could expect and benefit from a full turnout of supportive kin whenever her interests were threatened by the decisions of her husband. This supports the finding that females are disadvantaged when living far from kin. Medea herself states the case succinctly, even as she minimizes the importance of her complicity in her current situation:

I, without relatives or city, am suffering outrage from my husband. I was carried off as booty from a foreign land and have no mother, no brother, no kinsman to shelter me from this calamity. (255-8).

Even she is aware that she cannot call upon paternal help, given her own role in depriving him of both treasure and daughter.

Despite the severance of Medea from her kin, and her repeated regret over this, that Medea’s only help arrives at the hands of her family is one of the most intriguing twists of the narrative. While Jason desperately continues to believe the gods will punish Medea, it is fact the gods’ will that he be punished in the worst way possible for his crime of oath-breaking, even unto the death of his children, present and future. In this respect, Medea is but the agent of divine destiny. Even so, to be a divine instrument does not bring exemption from culpability for atrocity. Medea ought, by tradition and genre – witness Phaidra’s death after her involvement in the revenge scheme of Aphrodite against Hippolytus – to have been properly punished for her brother’s blood-murder. Yet it is that brother’s grandfather who saves her.

Medea’s grandfather Helios, whose son Aeetes has been robbed by her, whose grandson has been murdered because of her, and whose great-grandsons have been killed by

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92 As Michelini (1987:77) notes: “A woman’s proper quality (arête) consisted in loyalty, first to the family of birth, and second to her family of marriage and the children that cemented that family.” A woman could expect to maintain important, even primary, ties to her family after marriage. Cf. Holland 2003:271; Visser 2000:150; Blondell et al. 1999:56. As Visser (2000:152) states, “If marriage broke down, the wife’s father and brothers would support her.” Galis (1992:75) observes that separation from kin is a misfortune for Greek males, but for Greek women, “a full-fledged disaster [so that] she has no choice but to act in her own behalf.” See also Ch.1, nn. 95, 108, 109. See further discussion on a married woman’s conflicting loyalties in Ch.4, nn.54, 79, 92.

93 Hrdy 2009:239. Hrdy (2009:265) observes that locality of the married couple determines whose reproductive interests are prioritised. Patrilocality gives free rein to the interests of paternal kin, and is always potentially harmful for the wife and offspring. See Ch.1, 106, 108.

94 She nevertheless receives vital help from her father’s father, in evolutionary terms the least likely grandparent found to support a person. Cf. Buss 2008:246-7, 250. The order of helpfulness was found to be: Mother’s mother, Mother’s father, Father’s mother, Father’s father. This correlates precisely with degree of relatedness through paternal certainty. See also Ch.1, nn.108, 109.
her own hand, is the very same all-seeing god of justice called upon by the chorus to witness the killing (1251-70). Helios is invoked by Iason as in danger of unholy pollution through the glance of the woman who kills her own children (1327-8), but he is the divine ancestor whose chariot saves Medea from punishment, and raises her in the theatrical context to the very level of a deity herself.

While the intentions of Euripides in this unexpected (and still controversial) narrative twist can never be known, let alone the reasoning of Helios himself in assisting her (in the sense that any fictional character can make coherent ‘decisions’), in evolutionary terms it all makes perfect sense. Of all Helios’ kin, it is Medea and her aunt Kirke who are the most powerful, the cleverest, and, subsequently, the most famous in myth and epic, despite the ‘impediment’ of their gender. Helios might be said to be declaring, through his support of Medea, his preference for his most successful descendant, whose fame will endure for two and a half thousand years, and whose pride in her bloodline would withstand no injury, even at the risk of the “stain of kindred-blood” (1268-9). Medea confirms her grandfather’s support of her when she addresses Iason from high above in Helios’s own chariot (1319-22). Iason’s inadequate riposte to this is to accuse her, despite all the evidence against this, of being “utterly hateful to the gods” (1323-4).

Medea victorious, and now beyond human accountability, readily acknowledges there has been a crime. In her own words, because of “this unholy murder” she will initiate “a solemn festival and holy rites for all time to come” (1381-3). The allusion in this scene to the land of Sisyphos may also refer to the alternate versions of the Medea mythos, in which the Korinthians themselves slay the children, or to the house of Sisyphos, famed for its murder of its own children. The connection made in the narrative is not accidental, for the infanticide of Medea’s children is the central nexus of the tragedy.

Contrary to the modern sociological finding that infanticide is universal in human (and animal) culture, and thus arguably ‘natural’ (if also distasteful), the chorus very clearly accuse the child-murdering Medea of being unnatural, inhumane, even inorganic, made not of flesh and blood, but of stone or metal (1280-1). Moreover, infanticide is more likely when infants are handicapped, very young, or co-habitating with a male of unrelated or uncertain

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As Blondell (1999:422, n.69) states, the Korinthian founder Sisyphos was long associated with treachery. Holland (2003) examines the relation of Iason’s family history to the plot of the Medea. Iason was the great-nephew of Sisyphos, who had raped his niece Tyro. She later killed the sons he got upon her. Holland (2003:256) points out that Kreon and his daughter also descended from the house of Aiolos, which was “replete with murderous acts, including maternal infanticide.” In her view (2003:256ff.), Medea functions as an alastor, the avenging spirit of an inherited ancestral curse, similar to the role of Klytaimestra in the house of Atreus.
paternity. In this respect, as Medea’s sons are healthy, strong, past infancy, living (until recently) with their biological father, their murder is indeed arguably less than natural. Yet part of the chorus’s condemnation concerns her usurpation of the right to determine the children’s moment of death.96

Iason’s protestation that he wishes he had never seen his sons dead at Medea’s hands perhaps implies that to see them dead at the hands of someone other than Medea would not have been so dreadful (1413-14). Indeed, to see them dead at the hands of a woman, their own mother, who did not possess the social or legal right to decide her own infant’s acceptance into a family (although she was often burdened with the responsibility of ‘disappearing’ the rejected child), is even juxtaposed by Iason with the declaration that he wished he had never even begotten them. This certainly contradicts the findings of ethnographers and social scientists that observe that while males make the life or death decision, it is usually the mother who must then enforce it.97

The imputation that the act of child-murder by a woman is so unnatural is reiterated by the chorus, who claim that only one other woman has ever killed her own children; Ino, driven mad by the gods (1282-91).98 Yet their very words provide evidence that Medea is not unique among mythological women who kill their offspring in retaliation against their erring spouse. Additionally, the fictive chorus and the real audience would surely have been aware of Prokne’s revenge-slaying of her own son Itys, as in Sophokles’ Tereus.

Euripides makes Iason’s selective awareness go even further, when Iason claims that no other Greek woman would have “dared” to commit such an act (1340-1). Interestingly,


97 Scrimshaw (1984:449) notes that mothers are generally the agents of unwanted infants’ dispatch, due to maternal proximity, opportunity, and compliance with social pressures. Brule (2003:135) also observes that although the Greek father makes the infanticidal decision, he often delegates the act to women or slaves.

98 As Segal (1996:23) argues, the chorus’s comparison of Medea to Ino is “so inappropriate a parallel. Medea is not mad and is not driven by the gods.” Newton (1985:499) observes that Euripides might have included other more similar maternal infanticides, but deliberately did not. Friedrich (1993:220, 233) argues, against Iason’s claims, that “Greek women did dare such deeds” offering Prokne and Althaia as mythic examples. Unlike these two, in his view, Medea’s filicide was not motivated by kin-allegiance, but by pride. Blondell (1999:430, n.149) believes that the audience would have been well aware of the inappropriate analogy. Additionally, as Mossman (2010:10) observes, filicidal Ino was, in fact, Jason’s great-aunt, following the allusion to Jason’s descent from the murderous house of Aiolos. Thus she (2010:352-3) believes that the comparison with Ino is purposeful, despite the inexact match, because Euripides gains “a link to the family of Jason and to a series of dysfunctional families, including the family of the gods, where mothers and stepmothers battle, using children as pawns in the game.” See also this chapter, n.95, for a discussion of infanticide in Sisyphos’ family.
this implies not that they lacked the imagination to attempt it, but just that they lacked the
courage. Thus, only Medea’s unfeminine but heroic bravery distinguishes her from Greek
women in this. While such courage was perhaps associated with having a barbarian nature,
as some have argued, Medea herself is Hellenized in almost all other aspects of her
character.99

Immediately after this accusation, Jason berates her, describing their union as “hateful
and destructive” (1341). But, by his own admission at 1337, she has not only most
productively borne him children, both of whom were sons, but she was also the primary
instrument of his successful quest for the Fleece, and of the glory this brought him. Yet he
follows this up with the further vituperative dig that, because of her child-murder, she has a
nature “more savage than Scylla”, and is not a woman, a human, but a “she-lion” (1341-3).100
Medea’s response to this is to mock him, pointing out that he can dehumanise her with such
insults however much he wishes, for she has delivered a far worse blow, the death of his sons
(1358-1360).

The recurring imagery of the ferocity of the maternal female lion, associated with the
defence and not murder of her cubs, is found early in the play, when the Nurse remarks that
Medea’s ferocity parallels that of the lioness with cubs (187-8).101 While the image of the
ferocious lioness guarding her cubs is popular and ubiquitous in literature, and is here read as
ironic, given Medea’s ‘misdirection’ of that energy, the zoological truth is that while most
infanticide of cubs is strategic and committed by invading males, she-lions are no more
naturally compassionately ‘maternal’ than human females.102 Thus, the stereotype that

99 Some critics argue that Medea is not characterized as a barbarian, but as a typical Greek woman. See Blondell 1999:155; Shaw 1975:259. See this chapter, n.34.
100 For line 1341 both Vellacott (1963:58) and Way (1912:389) prefer “tiger/tigress”, possibly wishing to convey to modern audiences the sense of danger. This supports the argument that modern audience perceive lion families as united and loving, while tigers are traditionally solitary, and are also popularly considered particularly fond of human prey.
102 As is the case with many other species, female lions give birth alone and conceal their cubs for six
weeks, principally in order to avoid other infanticidal females both within their own family-groups,
and outside their kin-groups (Packer, Pusey and Eberly 2001:690-3; Packer and Pusey 1984: 34). Far
from being maternal models of nurturance, “there is a striking tendency for females to abandon their
litters when only one cub remains” (Packer and Pusey 1984: 38). Lionesses also abandon singletons
when a new male lion succeeds in taking over a pride, a pragmatic investment decision based on
leonine cost-benefit analysis (Packer and Pusey 1984: 34). There is perhaps, however, a hint that
fifth-century knowledge of lion behaviour may have incorporated an appreciation of such ‘natural’
leonine maternal infanticidal capacity. At 1406-7, Jason decries Medea as an “unclean, child-
murdering lioness [λεαίνης]”.

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human females are incapable of harming their own children entails selective misunderstanding of animal behaviour. The depiction of Medea as unnaturally violent depends on both the stereotype and conventional metaphorical comparison between animal and human. Similarly, the cultural presumption of female non-violence in contrast to male norms of violent murder is also exploited in Euripides’ presentation of an unnatural Medea.

The findings of evolutionary psychology, however, give that cultural presumption explicit empirical support, finding that males and stepfathers (but not stepmothers) are more likely to commit very violent infanticide. When Medea addresses the children in her first appearance on stage, her especially violent intentions toward them, as vessels of their father’s bloodline, are clearly stated; the use of the verb ὀλλωμ “lose, destroy”, here in the middle form, particularly conveys this. Here, a natural mother is depicted as being just as violent as any infanticidal male.

Generally, mothers who feel compelled to commit infanticide through adverse social circumstance (as opposed to inferior offspring) are more likely to commit (non-violent) infanticide when they are young, unmarried, or lacking resources and support, typically undertaking the act in a non-violent and regretful manner. But Medea’s distancing of herself from her doomed children is marked by the Nurse as actively hostile (36). The circumstances that initiate Medea’s disinvestment from her children are, however, consistent with those found to be associated with the act: maternal youth, being unmarried, and poverty.

First, Medea, although the mother of two children old enough to be in the care of a tutor but not mature enough to fend off her attack, is still likely to be a relatively very young woman, particularly in the context of fifth-century marriage norms. The obverse of youthful vulnerability is therefore her further reproductive potential opportunities, an important factor in the internal decision-making process of women considering infanticide.

Secondly, while Medea is married, the status of that marriage is threatened. Jason’s second marriage to the local princess and heir is certainly going to be more functionally legitimate than his early and precipitous union with the dangerous foreigner whose links with family have been severed. In friendless exile her marriage to Jason will count for nothing (510-13). The Nurse’s introduction also states that their house is “perished”, referring not to the dwelling but to the family unit, man, woman, and offspring (139-40).

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103 Medea’s use of a weapon also marks her particular filicide as exceptionally violent, as determined by Bourget et al. 2007 (see below).
104 Mossman (2010:220) believes the children “are evidently young enough to be vulnerable and to require care, but beyond infancy.” See Ch. 4, n.82, on the estimated ages of Medea and her family.
Thirdly, while Iason offers to generously gift her in exile with material wealth (619-22), there is no evidence that he actually has the resources to maintain her and the children in a decent manner; indeed, to the contrary, part of his reasoning for the second marriage is to try to acquire such resources, in order to properly support his first wife and children (559-61). It is Medeia who still possesses heirloom jewels and fine robes. Iason’s horrified response to her suggestion that she gift some of these to the princess clearly bespeaks his anxiety over their material circumstances (961). The inference is also that he is not wealthy in his own right, hardly surprising given his current state of exile from his own lands. Medeia’s decision to eliminate her current children is therefore entirely logical in terms of strategic parental disinvestment, and founded on her estimation of the three factors associated with likelihood of maternal infanticide.

While much critical discussion is carried on about Medeia’s ‘infanticide’, it is not, in fact, the modern medically or legally correct use of the term. It is important to differentiate between infanticide and filicide when assessing Medeia’s motivation for the act. The meta-study of filicide conducted by Bourget and her co-authors notes that strictly speaking, “the term [infanticide] has medico-legal implications and applies mainly to the killing of a child under the age of 12 months by a mother who has not fully recovered from the effects of pregnancy and lactation and suffers some degree of mental disturbance.” Maternal infanticide is also most commonly committed against children aged under one year old. The study found a strong degree of association between parental filicide and mental disturbance or illness (in the parent). Psychotic mothers, for instance, were more likely to use a weapon to dispatch their children, in a markedly violent manner, while such victims were likely to be older children. Paternal filicide was more likely to involve older, male, and multiple children, who were killed in more violent ways, (typically using firearms or knives), and more often for motives of retaliation or incidental child abuse. When mothers killed more than one child, this was an indication of psychosis.

The murder of Medeia and Iason’s sons is best described as ‘retaliatory filicide’, a phenomenon more commonly associated with the revenge of an ex-husband or male partner against the children’s mother. While maternal retaliatory filicide is not unknown, it is considered rare. Maternal filicide is also likely to be followed by maternal suicide, but this is not true for retaliatory filicide. Bourget et al. found that “Women who commit retaliating

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105 Bourget et al. 2007:74. All findings concerning this topic are from this article.
filicide typically have personality disorders and a high incidence of suicide attempts.” Their study also noted “the possibility of a relationship between maternal motivation for filicide and victim gender”, more specifically that “sons are more at risk in retaliatory situations.” Medea’s admission to the chorus that the desire to hurt her husband is her conscious motive for the murder of their sons (816-17), points to both her contravention of audience expectation (ancient and modern, equally) of ‘natural’ maternal love, and her playing from a script written into the biocultural human experience.

Medea’s retaliatory violence also extends to unborn children. She may have murdered a newly conceived child within the princess. She certainly aims to destroy the whole of Iason’s house, including the sons he will beget within his new marriage; the imagined sons he tries to persuade Medea will benefit him and their existing sons. These future sons, who share no part of Medea’s own bloodline, can certainly be said to be a part of her retaliatory filicide strategy, as she states (163-5).

Medea’s child-murder also reflects aspects of Bourget et al.’s ‘mercy filicide’, in which a parent feels compelled to dispatch the child for its own benefit. Because she has used her young sons to deliver a poisoned robe to the king’s daughter, she is aware that the Korinthians will wish to kill the boys. This being the case, she states that she intends to kill the boys to “save” them from a worse death at the “less kindly” hands of strangers (1236-41), raising once more the issue of who has the right to kill, and who does not. Furthermore she claims the right to perform the filicide on the grounds of parental investment; as the one who gave birth, who is more emotionally involved, and who bears a more costly investment, it is her natural right and responsibility.

106 Bourget et al 2007:77.
108 Foley’s (2000:11) interpretation of Medea’s retaliatory filicide takes a slightly different tack. In her consideration of the difficulties of a ‘feminist’ Medea, she states that while women and men both commit filicide for reasons of anger and jealousy, in Euripides’ play Medea makes her choice based on “complex issues of social identity rather than by madness induced above all by uncontrolled jealousy.” Mossman (2010:41, n.151) also identifies the murder as a case of retaliatory filicide that is not motivated by mental illness. Ohlender (1989:137, 143) explains Medea’s decision to escape without the children as originating in her need to inflict maximum suffering upon Iason, only possible through depriving him of heirs. Hopman (2008:174) agrees that the infanticide is “the most effective way to harm Jason.” Cf. Mossman 2010:322; Segal 1997:176; Segal 1996:17-18; Kovacs 1994:287; Bongie 1977:40-1.
109 Gabriel (1992:364) argues that Medea perceives the children to be doomed, because of their father’s oath-breaking impiety: “Had she abdicated her claims [of revenge], she still would have to face the fact that her children are cursed.” Ancient perceptions of the effect of a curse, and of the inevitable consequences – the fallout – of divine retribution involving the terrible death of innocents are difficult for modern Western audiences to appreciate. It is difficult, though not impossible, to imagine a viable modern parallel: Jason deliberately exposes his children to lethal radiation.
Bourget et al., however, found that sons were less likely than daughters to be the targets of altruistic filicide, that targets of mercy filicide generally had a “severe, debilitating illness”, and that perpetrators were not suffering from psychosis often present in other forms of filicide. Medea’s targets were male, were healthy, and she is arguably mentally disturbed (see below). This makes her claims of ‘mercy killing’ less likely, in terms of psychological structuring of believable motivation.

Yet there is other supporting evidence in the play that Medea’s child murder, indisputably an instance of retaliatory filicide, does share some aspects of mercy filicide. Jason himself informs the chorus that he has come to save the boys from the inevitable revenge that the relatives of the slain king and princess will mete out to them (1299-305). Medea is therefore likely justified in her expectation of an excruciating death for her sons. Similarly, in a world where the dishonourable treatment of the deceased was as injurious to a person as physical attack during life, her wish to ‘save’ the boys from the foreseen desecration of their graves marks her continuing care for their welfare, in terms of ancient Greek cultural custom (1377-81).

Additionally, given the findings concerning the fate of stepchildren, Medea might be said to be intending to ‘save’ her sons from a life with a hostile stepparent, whose natural children would be in direct competition with them. Even though Jason declares that multiply mothered offspring would increase his prosperity (566-7), the biological reality, and the calculations of investment that all parties make according to it, is less rosy.\(^\text{110}\)

Medea arguably is experiencing a degree of mental disturbance that would in the modern era qualify as depression.\(^\text{111}\) If tried today for her crime, her symptoms would certainly invite a plea of insanity. Bourget et al.’s study found that parental depression or distress and declarations of suicidal intent were frequently associated with filicidal ideation. Medea’s filicide thus follows these findings. Medea declares her wish to die and “leave behind her hateful life” (145-7; 225-7). Eventually, she can no longer see any point in living (798).

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\(^{110}\) See Ch.1, n.119f. See also Ch.1, n.121, for a discussion of the disadvantages to an individual of children from a previous union.

\(^{111}\) The question of Medea’s state of sanity has been also been explored in classical criticism, with several critics finding an explanation of madness invalid. Cf. Mossman 2010:47; Hall 1997:xvi; Segal 1997:176.
Part of the marked deterioration in Medea’s mental state is her fracturing of self in her ‘internal monologues’ (1054-63; 1242-50). Within the short space of a few lines she addresses and refers to herself in the first, second and third person. Similarly, she ‘splits’ herself, addressing her angry heart and her luckless hand as if they were separate and sentient entities. Finally, she distances her ‘real’ self completely from the maternal self, addressing the woman who gave birth to the children as “you”, while she herself is now defined, beyond the roles of wife and mother, as the “I” who is merely “an unhappy woman” (1246-50).

Whether this kind of ‘splitting’ is genuinely symptomatic of the psychosis associated with violent maternal filicide is beyond the scope of this discussion. The powerful effect of the intense self-dissociation on the lay audience, however, does not require psychiatric classification. Medea is clearly distressed, disturbed, and depressed. Bourget et al.’s findings, that “relevant features of maternal filicide in the context of major mental illness may be disorganized thinking and unstable mental state”, are arguably fulfilled by Medea’s self-splitting, and her suicidal thoughts.

The psychological splitting of Medea’s self first appears at 401-9, and is arguably a result of the intolerable insult to her divine lineage. This first example of her addressing herself as another, external entity, lurches from the relatively self-possessed ἐγὼ (“I”) of the calm and considered earlier lines of this lengthy speech, where she reveals her plans to the chorus, to the second person, and then first-person plural, where her resolve is inflamed to avenge the insult of Jason’s second marriage, citing as her reason the honour of both her royal father and her divine grandfather. Thus, such mental disturbance as evidenced, and which is typically associated with her type of filicide (above), appears to arise in Medea from an overabundant sensitivity to perceptions of personal honour, natural in a man within Greek culture, but entirely inappropriate in a woman. Evolutionary psychologists concur, finding that the defence of honour is primarily a male behaviour, to ensure and retain preferential mating opportunities. In the Greek cultural context, at least, such pride in females can

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112 Foley (2001:262) argues that Medea’s monologues of self-address are the result of the splitting of her inner self into masculine and feminine sides in “an uneasy complicity in the pursuit of revenge.” In her view (1989:83), in splitting Medea’s self into male and female sides “Euripides creates, not a private psychological drama and/or an abstract struggle between reason and passion, but an ambiguous inquiry into the relations between human ethics and social structure.”

113 Mossman’s (2010:325, 302) view of Medea’s splitting is one not of mental disturbance, but of “poetic convention”, a kind of performative artifice, in which Medea is the vessel for many voices. 

114 Bourget et al 2008:77.

115 The pursuit and maintenance of status, for its effect on reproductive success, is in general a universally masculine preoccupation. See Ch.1. nn.68, 77.
only be dangerous, debilitating, and destructive. Euripides has given Medea a masculine interest in personal honour, as another deliberate aspect of her exceptionality.\textsuperscript{116}

Later declarations in the play make explicit Medea’s concern with her own honour, and the absolute necessity of countering all challenges to it. She states, “The laughter of one’s enemies is unendurable, my friends’, trumping her full acknowledgement that the murder of one’s own children is ‘a most unholy deed” (792-7). Notwithstanding the impiety of the act, she also claims the “unholy deed” is, in fact, being committed with the help of a god, suggesting that her revenge upon Iason and every offspring he has or will have, to prevent others thinking of her as “weak, contemptible, [and] untroublesome” enjoys divine support. She states quite specifically that those who defend their honour in this manner “live a life of greatest glory” (802-10).

Steeling herself in the moments before the filicidal blows are struck, she reminds herself that failure to respond to the insult to her honour, through allowing her enemies to escape unpunished, will result in mockery from others (1049-52). While the filicide of her children is undoubtedly eased by the reclassification of husband to enemy, and his sons therefore equally of the enemy’s house, a modern reader should not undervalue the importance of personal reputation in Medea’s resolve.\textsuperscript{117} The full and successful expression of her revenge will include not only the man who directly offended against her honour, but also his intended bride, who in the modern view has not intended any harm to Medea, and the bride’s father, who provided Iason with the opportunity to offend, and, additionally, directly challenged Medea’s honour by pronouncing exile upon her (1354-7).\textsuperscript{118}

The message of all of these speeches proves that in Medea’s view it is indisputably worse to be thought of as coming off second in the contest, than to be thought a proper wife and mother. It is also better to commit unholy deeds than to suffer the mockery of others. Above all it is desirable to attain a life of fame and glory. This in itself is not incompatible

\textsuperscript{116}See comments on the masculinization of Medea in this chapter, n.42. According to Fisher (1998:92) one of the specific indications of masculinity is the “strong ideological commitment that citizens should prove their manhood, maintain their honour and avoid shame.” Cf. Roisman 2005:64; Clarke 2004:77-8; Allan 2002:81-2; Blondell et al. 1999:51.

\textsuperscript{117}Allan (2002:81) elaborates on this: “in a community where concern for one’s time (‘honour’) was paramount, injury to one’s time demanded a retaliatory response from the victim. Moreover, this obsessive concern with honour was accompanied by a no less fundamental ethic of reciprocity, which dictated that one do good to one’s friends (philoi) and harm to one’s enemies (echthroi).” Cf. Foley 1989:66. See also Ch.1, n.77, on the pressures on males to pursue and maintain public status.

\textsuperscript{118}Ohlander (1989:168), pointing out that modern anti-militarism does not permit us to hate our enemies, observes that: “The Athenians would have understood Medea’s desire to pay back the king and princess who befriended and then betrayed her, and even her delight in hearing the grimness of their death, especially since they were Korinthians.”
with the murder of innocent children and bystanders, when undertaken in the defense of honour and status. These sentiments are traditionally associated with the depiction in literature of male behaviour, and correlate with the proximate achievement of high personal status (the ultimate goal of which is preferential mating opportunities). This suggests that the depiction of Medea does indeed, in evolutionary terms at least, fall into a pattern of masculinization.

The principal insult to Medea’s honour appears not to be the second marriage per se, but the fact that it contravenes the oaths Iason has previously sworn to her with his right hand. Medea’s loss of status through Iason’s failure to uphold his oaths to her is perhaps therefore the overt instrument by which the play explores the consequences of insult and revenge, and the inevitability of divine disapproval of the oath-breaker.

Audiences of the play in the fifth century would have interpreted Iason’s disrespect of his wife in the context of their own honour-valuing culture, with its strong obligation of immediate response to personal insult. Medea stands as the strongest descendant of divine lineage, ready to defend her bloodline’s honour. Once again the character of Medea contravenes audience expectations of gender, her behaviour and attitude more indicative of masculine values and goals.

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119 Some scholars have noted the heroisation of Medea through this preoccupation with honour. Cf. Easterling 2003:192; Seidensticker 1990:98; Foley 1989:76, 81; Knox 1983:274, 279; Bongie 1977:27, 56. Others argue, however, that Medea’s actions are merely an attempt to imitate properly masculine heroism. Cf. Mendelsohn 2002:45; Friedrich 1993:223; Durham 1984:54-5; Flory 1978:70-1. Wilner and Azar (1998:7) state, “Medea embodies qualities admired in the male ruler or hero, and her appropriation of those qualities in the play ironically shows them for what they most brutally are.” Foley (1989:82-3) believes that Euripides must be using Medea to prove the problems with masculine heroism, adding further that Medea “by pursuing her heroic code... ends by imitating even her despised immediate oppressors and harming herself.” But Medea breaks no oaths, successfully parents another child, and ends fully immortal in the Elysian Fields, the destined wife of Greece’s greatest hero. In terms of both reproductive success and heroic kleos, Medea is an ariste.

120 As Zerba (2002:320) states: “Driven by honor and an obsessive passion for vengeance, Medea plays life as a zero-sum game: to vindicate her offended sense of nobility, she must make her violator lose absolutely.” This imperative, however, while culturally and biologically obligatory for men, was found in studies to be irrelevant in the perceived attractiveness and increased reproductive opportunity for women. See Ch.1, nn.68, 77, and this chapter, n.117.

121 As Mossman (2010:256) notes: “A desire to live up to one’s ancestors is not necessarily an exclusively masculine heroic trait.” Mossman contrasts Iason and the Korinthian royal family as springing “from tainted lineage” while Medea’s grandparents are the Sun and the Ocean. See this chapter, n.95, for a discussion of the reputation of the House of Sisyphos for infanticide. Gabriel (1992:353) argues that as the royal descendant of divinity, Medea is compelled to seek brutal redress for the damage to her honour. Her approving grandfather Helios is just as eager to acknowledge their mutual relationship. Cf. Mossman 2010: 349; Luschneg 2007:22; Griffiths 2006:76; Shaw 1975:263; Burnett 1973:14.
The chorus’s apparent trite observation at the close of the play, that the gods bring to pass not the imaginings of men, but conversely - perhaps even perversely - preferring to accomplish the unexpected (1415-19), is the direct reply to Iason’s plaintive lament and adjuration for the gods to witness the injury done to him in the brutal murder of his sons. The gods have not only already witnessed the annihilation of Iason’s bloodline; they have facilitated and approved it, against expectation, highlighting the man’s failure to foresee the inevitable consequences of blasphemous oath breaking.\(^{122}\) If tragedy teaches the *polis* about human error and its terrible consequence, then the lesson of Euripides’ Medea – respect for oaths – is taught through Iason’s maladroitness to respect and appreciate the implacability of human nature, and the overwhelming prerogative of divine honour. This, perhaps, is the central message of the *Medeia*, if there could be said to be one, to all men; the honour of the gods precedes even the ultimate goal, in the evolutionary use of the term, of all humanendeavour.\(^{123}\)

\(^{122}\) That Iason *has* broken an oath is widely agreed, although the nature of that oath is much disputed. Griffiths (2006:76) argues Medea and Iason’s union was “not an ordinary contract of marriage”, it was a formal oath of loyalty”, and was therefore overseen by Zeus himself in his role as Zeus Horkios.” Cf. Mossman 2010:42; Allan 2002:51, 73; Blondell 1999:161; Gabriel 1992:352; Kovacs 1994:287; Ohlander 1989:85; Flory 1978:69; Elliot 1969:76. Allan (2007:115) argues, however, that “without a verbatim repetition of the oath Medea claims Jason swore, we have no way of determining whether he is, in fact, the oath-breaker she claims him to be.” It was perhaps similar objections of this nature in ancient Greece to the justice of Medea’s actions that prompted Apollonios’ careful delineation of the oaths. At any rate, the nature of the “justice” meted out to Iason arguably identifies the crime: “Oath-breakers were subject to divine wrath, especially from Zeus Horkios (Zeus as the guardian of oaths), the ancient goddess Earth, and Helios the sun, who sees everything” (Blondell et al. 1999:13-14). Cf. Kovacs 1994:290. There is also agreement that Medea’s murder of Iason’s heirs, making him childless, was the long-expected divine retribution, which explains why she escapes unpunished, and why the gods have assisted her at every turn. Cf. Mossman 2010:283, 350, 363; Luschnig 2007:65; Griffiths 2006:77; Mastronarde 2002:33-4; Blondell et al. 1999:18-19; Hall 1997:xvi; Kovacs 1994:290; Ohlander 1989:107.

\(^{123}\) As Sourvinou-Inwood (2002:309) observes: “in the eyes of the ancient audience, this epilogue articulated the ultimate unknowability of the will of the gods, and generated at least the possibility of the meaning that the success of Medea’s revenge and successful escape was the will of the gods, and that this was correlative with Jason’s betrayal of his oaths.” Cf. Mastronarde 2002:34.
Chapter Four: Apollonios’ Medeia - The Monster

Apollonios of Rhodes was the Head of the great Library of Alexandria roughly between 270 and 245 BCE, and it is during this period that he is thought to have written the epic poem the *Argonautika*. Hellenistic scholars, Apollonios included, were very familiar with the work of Homer, and the *Argonautika* reflects both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. D. P. Nelis believes this is evident in the *Argonautika’s* outward journey in Books 1 and 2, and especially for the extended wanderings of Book 4.

It is generally agreed, however, that Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian* and Euripides’ *Medeia* are the two most influential (and extant) sources for Apollonios’ characterization of Medeia. Book 3 in particular is not only obviously indebted to Euripides’ *Medeia*, but also without doubt to a host of lost tragedies. This may account for Book 3’s enduring appeal, as Charles Beye observes, “as though it were an independent whole. It alone is the truly popular book of the poem, sometimes printed separately as an individual story.”

The intimate relation between the *Medeia* of Euripides and Medeia’s appearances in the *Argonautika* is evidenced in turns of phrase, the foreshadowing of events, and the depiction of Medeia’s psychology. As Anne Duncan states, “Medea’s soliloquies in the *Argonautica* have the same theatrical quality and psychological intensity, inevitably bringing to the reader’s mind Euripides’ *Medea*.” There is, however, one important difference between Euripides’ and Apollonios’ versions of the story: the importance of oaths is paramount in Apollonios, who takes great care in supplying the detail and circumstances of their delivery lacking in the earlier Euripides.

Apollonios’ *Argonautika* begins with Iason’s departure from Iolkos, directed by his usurping uncle to retrieve the Golden Fleece. There is much genealogical detail introducing the men who will compose his crew. The Argonauts arrive in Lemnos, where Iason and most of the crew engage in sexual relationships with the Lemnian women. At the end of Book 1,

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1 Nelis 2005:353.
3 Nelis 2005:356.
Herakles, notable for his objection to the delay on Lemnos, is accidentally left behind at Mysia. Book 2 is devoted to the trials and tribulations affecting the men on their outward journey to Kolkhis. The last event in Book 2 is the rescue of the sons of the Greek Phrixos who first fled to Kolkhis upon the golden ram. It is not until Book 3 that Medea enters the story. Under the influence of Eros’ fiery arrows she succumbs to the irresistible desire to become Iason’s helpmate in his quest to recover the Golden Fleece. Book 3 details her psychological agony as she vacillates between desire for Iason and family loyalty. Then, in Book 4, Medea escapes with the Argonauts, hotly pursued by her brother Apsyrtos and his men. Iason and Medea slay Apsyrtos, are later absolved by her aunt Kirke, and marry at the court of the Phaiakians. Finally, after surviving the terrible Libyan desert, Medea overcomes the giant Talos, and the ship returns safely to Pagasae.\textsuperscript{10}

Apollonios’ characterization of Medea is inextricably linked to that of Iason, the ostensible hero in terms of the epic form.\textsuperscript{11} The depiction of Medea as both typically and atypically gendered depends on a similarly complex Iason. Some scholars believe that Medea’s increase in power is at the cost of Iason’s disempowerment as a character, a mutual reversing of role.\textsuperscript{12} As Ingrid Holmberg notes of the poem: “the issue of heroism is consistently intertwined with considerations of the construction of gender... [and] Jason’s femininity and Medea’s masculinity complicate simple notions of the hero.” Beye argues that Medea becomes Iason’s equal, even his superior, in characteristics typically associated with the masculine hero: “power, energy, and daring.”\textsuperscript{13} The question of the flexible

\textsuperscript{10} The episode of her encounter with Talos in this reading seems out to be strangely out of sequence, in terms of a diminished sorceress. Narratively speaking, she is still able to exercise magical powers, but the depiction of her doing so deliberately presents her most unsympathetically. Her magic is frightening, and so is Medea herself. The Talos episode is our last narrative focus upon her, and it serves principally, I believe, to connect her with the immediately imminent (in narrative terms) frightening ‘later’ Medea of Euripides’ earlier play. Note, however, DeForest’s (1994:136) interpretation, referencing her victory over Talos, of Medea married and deflowered: “Access to sexuality only increases her power.” Pavlou (2009:185-186) proposes that Medea’s change of nature, from the maiden of Book 3 to the murderer of 4 is paralleled and symbolised through the changes undergone by her veil.

\textsuperscript{11} Characterization in the Argonautika is, according to Hunter (1993b:xxix), merely secondary to the overall construction of narrative. As he states: “the basic unit in Apollonius’ composition is the individual scene, and that any overarching notion of consistent or plausible ‘character’ is subordinated to the particular concerns of individual scenes.” In Beye’s (1969:36; 1982:79) view, the grandeur of Homeric epic inspires cross-cultural and diachronic admiration for heroic values, while the Argonautika concerns individuals and private matters.

\textsuperscript{12} DeForest 1994:126-127; Toohey 1992:82. At some point during the narrative, I argue, this reversal is halted, and, at least partially, itself reversed, with Medea increasingly diminished, and Iason’s power restored in his role as prophet of foundation.

\textsuperscript{13} Holmberg 1998:135.

\textsuperscript{14} Beye 1982:135.
relationship of male-female gender roles – balance, overlap, equivalency, and inversion – is of concern throughout the poem.

Pindar’s Iason in the *Fourth Pythian* was arguably heroic in the Homeric mould.\textsuperscript{15} Apollonios’ Iason is, however, in Beye’s view, “morally, spiritually and intellectually impotent, and perhaps a physical coward as well.”\textsuperscript{16} Homeric epic virtues are conspicuously absent, even obsolete in the *Argonautika*. Lars Nyberg points to the ambiguous moral position of an opportunistic hero who succeeds using questionable methods.\textsuperscript{17} The principal problem is Iason’s dependency on female support. Additionally, one of Iason’s most distinguishing characteristics is his sexual appeal to women, hardly a heroic characteristic in the classical sense.\textsuperscript{18}

In many respects Iason’s characterization as ‘second-best’ seems to be in direct opposition to the aristocratic Homeric hero.\textsuperscript{19} Andrew Dyck argues that Iason is one of the first real narrative ‘anti-heroes’: competent, but second-rate, brooding and psychologically passive.\textsuperscript{20} Richard Hunter, however, cautions against too great a dependence on the analysis of character in modern scholarship. As he states: “there is among modern critics a persistent (and indeed not unnatural) curiosity in Jason’s ‘psychology’... the great variety of Jasons available in the modern literature ought perhaps to make us pause to consider the value of the method in general.”\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, several scholars have commented on the overinterpretation of the convoluted psychology of Apollonios’ Medea.\textsuperscript{22} In Hunter’s opinion, “Medea’s ‘credibility’ can hardly be the object of serious [scholarly] debate... we are here concerned not with any young Colchian girl, but with the hypothesized adolescence of a familiar figure of myth and literature.”\textsuperscript{23}

Despite, or perhaps correlated with, the antiheroism of Iason, Apollonios’ Medea is, in Beye’s view, “the first fully realized, complex, utterly sympathetic and – finally and most importantly – heroic female figure to appear in Greek literature... more active and decisive

\textsuperscript{15} Beye 1982:78, 80.
\textsuperscript{16} Beye 1969:37.
\textsuperscript{17} Nyberg 1992:90.
\textsuperscript{18} Nyberg 1992:123; Beye 1982:90; Beye 1969:43. Although, of course, in evolutionary terms, it will enable Iason to successfully impregnate at least two women. As others have noted, Apollonios’ Iason is also appallingly and unappealingly manipulative of the princesses in his life. Cf. Dyck 1989:458; Hunter 1987:132. See also Ch.2, n.9, for a discussion of Greek standards of male attractiveness.
\textsuperscript{21} Hunter 1988:437.
\textsuperscript{23} Hunter 1987:129-130.
than Jason is anywhere."\textsuperscript{24} Apollonios’ Medea is without doubt a skilled and independent sorceress, much like her father’s sister Kirke.\textsuperscript{25} Calvin Byre points to the difficulties in the depiction of a Medea simultaneously vulnerable and powerful.\textsuperscript{26} Dyck, however, claims that unable to be both at once, Medea changes her psychological cast in terms of narrative need, her contradictory aspects compartmentalized into the romantic maiden of Book 3 and the frightening sorceress of Book 4.\textsuperscript{27} One of the important transformations of Medea is the increase and decrease of her manifestation as a person of power (discussed below). Material within Books 3 and 4 of the \textit{Argonautika} contributing to the characterization of Medea is abundant. Other material throughout the epic helps to frame her character as conventional or exceptional. Evolved behaviours and motivations determining character thought and action in evidence in this treatment of Medea are those concerning mating strategies, attractiveness criteria, male opportunistic mating, romantic love, marriage, sexuality, jealousy, kin relationships, and aspects of mental state predetermining filicide.

As noted previously, evolutionary psychology has found that females are necessarily discriminating about prospective mates, adjusting their sexual behaviour according to circumstances.\textsuperscript{28} While this suggests that female sexual behaviour is, at least, partially under self-control, conscious or otherwise, the expectation of ancient Greeks was very different. In the Greek view, females were either naturally sexually avaricious, often with devastating consequences, or were sometimes forced through divine intervention to initiate sexual relations with entirely unsuitable men.\textsuperscript{29} From an evolutionary position, indiscriminate female sexual avarice seems unlikely, and is, in fact, not evidenced. In an evolutionary timescale Greek women are in essentials not at all removed from modern women. All evidence of modern female sexuality suggests that, from the male point of view, at least, women are typically most often withholding of sexual favour, requiring much persuasion.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{24} Beye 1982:132, 135. Cf. Dyck 1989:470. Deforest (1994:11, 1, 107, 109) believes the “powerful and terrifying” Medea to be the central and only serious character of the epic, despite her late appearance.
\textsuperscript{26} Byre 1996:3.
\textsuperscript{27} Dyck 1989:456-7.
\textsuperscript{28} Se Ch.1. n.60, 70, 71.
\textsuperscript{29} Examples of both of these would be Euripides’ Phaidra and Medea. See Ch.3, n.59, for a discussion of Greek perceptions of female sexuality, and \textit{eros} generally.
\textsuperscript{30} See Ch.3, n.77.
Despite the ancient Greek model of women as sexually aggressive, even insatiable, it is interesting to see that both Euripides’ Phaidra and Apollonios’ Medea, the most famous instances of divinely inspired desire, are actually heavily conflicted about their involuntary sexual attraction. Their sexual instinct is thus presented as ordinarily or ‘naturally’ under their control (despite the cultural stereotype), and the direct intervention by divine agency is the only force that will overcome their innate female sense of shame and sexual propriety. Medea’s fate depends, as do the fates of all women who exercise mating choice, on the accurate estimation of their chosen mate’s abilities. In Medea’s case, accuracy of estimation has been suborned in the service of divine contrivance.

In Apollonios’ Argonautika, Eros directs his arrow, the “bringer of much sorrow”, straight from Iason to Medea; her attraction to Iason is inarguably initiated by this alone (3.278-84). The description of her sudden infatuation with the stranger focuses on its overwhelming and debilitating nature. While Eros departs, laughing at the effects of his intervention, the arrow in Medea’s breast burns her “like a flame”, her powers of reason leave her; her memory is obliterated, and her heart is flooded with “sweet pain” (3.285-90). The nature of the afflictive passion is frequently likened to consuming fire; in Apollonios’ illustration at 3.291-8, the fiery love is ὀδὸλος (“destructive”). Medea’s powers of discrimination have been suppressed.

But Medea is not entirely under the control of this introduced passion, as is clear when Iason departs from the hall. She does not throw herself at him, and her gaze is surreptitious, either because she is mindful of her dignity and status, or well aware of her father’s likely reaction to any indication of attraction to the stranger. Once again, however, the infatuation is depicted as painful, and as a potentially destructive fire, leaving her “smoldering with grief” (κηρ ἄχει σωχουσα 3.442-7).

The natural modesty of maidens is, in fact, assumed, even made much of, as a crow delivers Hera’s message to the seer Mopsos (3.932-5). Thus, even children may be expected to know that maidens always refrain from engaging in flirtation while in the presence of observers. Apollonios’ Medea is also expected, by other characters and readers, to behave in accordance with the cultural norms alluded to here, and those norms include sexual self-control, despite the literary convention. Elsewhere, Apollonios does incorporate a

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32 Even though in his vision of an impoverished wool-spinner, forced to work at night, the flame presumably warms the woman and aids her work, and does not destroy anything in the scenario.
predictable trope to reiterate the idea that young women, especially virgins on the brink of marital consummation, are subject to uncontrollable lusts. Medea’s lamentations are likened to the yearning of the widowed new bride, gazing at the empty marital bed as she burns with unfulfilled passion (3.656-64).

Female mating preference, cross-culturally, is for mates having resources and/or the power to increase resources, but Iason has little to offer Medea as a prospective mate. Dispossessed of his birthright, he comes instead seeking the wealth that her family enjoys. Medea’s preference for Iason in this sense is clearly a result of divine intervention, rather than the carefully considered and negotiated marriage a princess might expect or aspire to.

It is Medea in this story who has the power to award treasure, and not only to the male with whom she would mate: she offers bribes to her handmaids, offering to share with them the gifts she claims Iason will be bringing to win her. She also lies about having met with her sister’s son Argos, who has offered these gifts on behalf of Iason. She has not, in fact, met with Argos, and no one, including her sister who contrived the plot with her, has ever mentioned any gifts in exchange for Medea’s help. But there is an expectation, among characters and audience alike that Iason ordinarily would have offered gifts for her help, that these would have persuaded her, and, finally, that she has the right to share these with the handmaids, who themselves would have likely been swayed by the lure of material gain (3.900-11).

Iason himself, however, is on occasion quite favourably depicted by Apollonios as a properly heroic male, and thus a good bet for any female seeking a mate with the potential to secure future resources. When Herakles declines the leadership of the expedition, Iason is presented as an eminently suitable replacement through the epithet “warlike” (ἄρης δέ 1.349). Additionally, he is described as “eager to lend a hand” to his shipmates in their slaughter of the Kolkhians who were sent to apprehend them (4.489-91). Yet, when his shipmate attempts to comfort Iason for his voiced fear for the quest (2.609-18), Iason’s reply twists the cause of this back onto the other Argonauts (2.627-37), claiming that his concern is for them alone, and implying that he, as leader, does not know natural fear. Whether this is a proper approach for a truly heroic leader to take is not raised here, but his strategy is certainly effective; his men pass his ‘test’ of courage (2.638), and as a group their resolve is strengthened (2.638-48).

Apollonios’ Iason is also an example of Greek standards of male beauty and articulateness, neither of which figure as highly in evolutionary predictions of male compared
to female attractiveness. Hera makes Jason physically irresistible in preparation for his meeting alone with Medea, “radiant with graces” (3.919-26). In contrast with the famous beautification of Penelope by Athene (Od. 18.188-96), Medea in the Argonautika does not enjoy the same divine enhancement of beauty.

Similarly, at the clandestine meeting, it is Medea who is lost in admiration for Iason’s beauty (3.960-1). Iason at this meeting is self-controlled, reminding her it is time to return (3.1137-45). His ability to use words effectively is also drawn to our attention at three points in the narrative, especially his power to assuage the concerns of women. In Book 1, while making preparations for the voyage, he calms his grieving mother (1.295-305). Later, in the last two books, he allays her fears and persuades Medea to his cause (3.975-1007; 4.95-8), and, most importantly, he dissuades her from attempting to return to her homeland at 4.106-8. While human females do experience short-term strategic attraction to males based on physical criteria as an indication of good genetic profile, this is principally determined by their fertility cycle, as found by Gangestad et al.’s (2010) study.

While Medea certainly mulls over Iason’s physical appearance and his honey-sweet voice (3.451-8), her conscious perception of male powerfulness, in evolutionary terms one of the most attractive male qualities, is much less demonstrable. Rather, her attraction to him is interwoven with fear for his vulnerability to injury, from either the oxen, or Aietes himself (3.459-62). The depiction of Iason, ostensibly the hero of the tale, as vulnerable in the eyes of the girl whose heart he will win, seems to run counter to the story-type. Yet examination of the psychology of those in the process of ‘falling in love’ has shown a preoccupation with the threatened safety of the beloved is widely found.33

While Iason’s attractiveness is more or less compatible with other predictions of evolutionary psychology (leadership, ambition, strength), traditional masculinity is also contrasted in the poem with characterizations of females that constantly highlight female contravention of conventionally gendered behaviour, emphasizing the dangers that arise whenever gender behaviour is inverted. Iason’s masculinity is compromised in his acceptance of such inversion. That females ought not express properly male qualities of powerfulness is a constant preoccupation of the Argonautika. This is illustrated during the outward voyage of the expedition, in the cautionary tale in Book 1 of the Lemnian female rebellion against male disrespect of proper marital relations (1.607-19). While they may be able to replace men as farmers, the Lemnian women can never fill the male role of warriors.

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and defenders (1.627-32).

In Book 2, the tale refers to the various gender inversions of other exotic cultures, including the famously unfeminine Amazons, daughters of Ares, who ‘were by no means gentle or respectful of justice, but devoted to grievous violence’ (2.987-9). Similarly, the Tibarenian women, whom we hear of but do not see for ourselves, while in the throes of childbirth calmly feed and bathe their husbands, who behave as if they were in great pain. Thirdly in this catalogue of cultural inversions fall the Mossynoikoi, who transpose public and private behaviours, blatantly engaging in promiscuous intercourse in full view upon the ground, like “pigs that feed in herds” (2.1015-25).

The theme of gender contravention and inversion, and most especially the threat of female usurpation of male powers, is reiterated in other narrative structures. Jason’s men for instance cannot imagine a woman ruling in her own right, but, as in the case of Lemnian Hypsipyle, only as the sole heir of a deceased king (1.718-19). When Argos sensibly advises that the Argonauts seek the help of his powerful cousin Medea, delineating her power as magical and supernatural (3.523-39), Idas is aghast at the thought of their dependence on the power of a female to achieve their quest (despite the positive omen and its interpretation by the reliable Mopsos); none of the other men speak against this view (3.556-66). Jason himself is also disdainful of female assistance, in front of his crew, at least (3.484-8).

Yet the principally powerful deities in this tale are usually female. Mopsos describes the powers of the “dread goddess” Rhea, whom they must propitiate to continue their quest:

For upon her depend the winds, the sea, the whole earth below, and the snowy seat of Olympus; and when she goes up from the mountains and enters the wide heaven, Zeus himself, Cronus’ son, yields place to her, and in the same way the other blessed immortals pay homage. 1.1098-102.

Rhea of the Argonautika seems more directly modeled on Phrygian Kybele, placated with altar and oak, and wild dancing, than with Hesiod’s goddess (1.1117-39). Her pleasure in the sacrifice and the dancing invokes the persona of the Homeric Aphrodite, whose presence tames wild animals, while vegetation flourishes and fresh springs pour forth (1.1140-9). The aphrodisiac power of Apollonios’ Kypris is considered to be essential to the Argo’s quest, as Phineus the prophet states at 2.423-5. Well before the suggestion of Argos concerning Aietes’ powerful daughter, Jason and the others learn that sexual love alone will ensure success. Yet Homer’s powerful goddess will in Apollonios be proved a martyr to her child’s
ungovernability (3.91-9).\footnote{While Apollonios’ Hera is never diminished in power and success, his Aphrodite is a far cry from the effective manipulator in Homer’s \textit{Iliad}, or Euripides’ \textit{Hippolytus}. Kypris, as Apollonios styles her, is depicted as the diminished wife of an absent husband, waiting alone at home for something interesting to happen. As Campbell (1994:46, 50) observes, she is “a pathetic, solitary, highly-strung figure, with a problem-child on her hands.” When something interesting does happen, her necessary role in Hera’s schemes is complicated by the fact that the effective power to appropriate Medea’s assistance really lies with her son, Eros. Kypris is exposed as the laughably incompetent mother of an uncontrollable son (Campbell 1994:19, 98, 116). As an allegory, the inability of gentle Love to constrain the destructive force of erotic passion is clearly of interest at many levels. In biopoetic terms, male sexual force is in constant conflict with maternal strategy, and the outcomes are often far from attractive. Compare the inept Kypris with Thetis at 4.836, confident and unhesitating (Campbell 1994:20). See this chapter, n.77, for a discussion on the right and ability of mothers to rule their sons.}

Undoubtedly, the most powerful deity involved with the Argonauts’ expedition is also female: Hera.\footnote{Campbell (1994:19) observes that the divine scheme behind the action of the \textit{Argonautika} is an offended Hera’s “loathing for a single individual, the hubristic Pelias, who must be punished at all costs.” The reason for the Olympian queen’s hatred of Pelias is, according to Apollodorus, his impious murder of Tyro’s stepmother Sidero in the precinct of Hera, after which Pelias neglected Hera’s honours (Campbell 1994:68). Cf. Apollod. \textit{Bib.} 1.9.8. Part of Hera’s wish for revenge evokes Medea of Euripides: Hera cannot bear to be mocked by her enemy, Pelias (Campbell 1994:68). Thus, as Campbell (1994:70) suggests that as part of Hera’s scheme, her encounter with Jason at the river was not merely coincidental but deliberate, involving Jason in her revenge against Pelias. Sharrock and Ash (2002:155) similarly observe, that while Medea is the instrument Jason uses to gain the Fleece, he is merely Hera’s instrument in gaining Medea’s accomplishment of revenge against Pelias.} In her attempt to persuade Kypris to help Iason, she cites the hero’s assistance to her while in mortal disguise, claiming that because of this she holds him in the highest honour. She would even safeguard an attempt by him to rescue Ixion, who suffers eternal torment in Hades in punishment for his attempted rape of her. Her tale contains what must be the true reason for backing Iason – his role in the vengeance she plans for Pelias, who dared deprive her of sacrificial honours (3.58-74).

So it is interesting that the goddess Hera herself, at the expense of any expressed confidence in her darling Iason’s abilities, makes much of Medea’s powers, frankly admiring her cunning, and recognizing her essential role as instrumental to Hera’s revenge against Pelias. So mighty is Medea in Hera’s eyes, that only the intervention of Eros to “enchant” the girl with love for Iason will secure her assistance (3.85-9).

Medea herself, hurrying in her chariot to secretly meet Iason, is likened by Apollonios to the virgin Artemis, with more imagery of wild animals tamed and grovelling before the powerful goddess (3.876-86). But as the story progresses, the powerful maiden
Medea becomes more identified as a witch, and the introduction of her semi-divine aunt Kirke assists this.  

Kirke is first described with frightening, bloody dream imagery, which references Medea’s own experiences with magical drugs and bloody murder (4.662-71). Her relationship with Medea is immediately confirmed through the Argonauts’ identification of their unnaturally bright eyes, indicating their descent from Helios. Kirke’s mythically typical attempt to seduce the crew is circumvented by Iason’s order, and only he and Medea follow her into the house (4.682-91). As Medea the powerful witch is by the end of the tale diminished and dismissed, so is Kirke’s magic power, so central to her role in the *Odyssey*, here similarly neutralised.

These female characters evidence the conceptual conflict in Apollonios’ epic between the incontestable power of the goddesses, and the power of a female who is even partially mortal. Power is never one of the attributes of human female attractiveness as predicted by the findings of evolutionary psychology. Male preference for females with youth and beauty is arguably evidenced in Iason’s estimation of Medea as necessarily good because she is beautiful (1006-7). While the overwhelming characteristic of females in the *Argonautika* is

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36 Kirke the sorceress also figures as a couplet for diminishment of Medea. As Dyck (1989:463) observes, the Homeric Kirke, a *theos* (*Od*. 10.136) “armed both with the drugs of the Near Eastern sorceress and the wand of the northern European witch” is compared to the “neurotic” and “provincial” Kirke of the *Argonautika*, is supremely confidant and powerful. Cf. Knight 1995:187, 195.

37 The ‘beauty is good’ cultural stereotype has been widely researched. Dion et al. (1972:289) found that “Not only are physically attractive persons assumed to possess more socially desirable personalities than those of lesser attractiveness, but it is presumed that their lives will be happier and more successful.” Eagly et al. (1991:124) found in their meta-analysis that “narrative reviewers were correct in concluding that, in terms of perceivers inferences from cues that convey physical attractiveness, what is beautiful is good.” Feingold’s (1992:332-3) meta-analysis (agreeing with Eagly et al.’s concurrent meta-study), found that: “physically attractive people of both sexes were perceived as more sociable, dominant, sexually warm, mentally, and socially skilled-but not as possessing greater character (and were seen as less modest) than physically unattractive people... Character-related traits (self-absorption, manipulativeness) were also unrelated to physical attractiveness.” His answer (1992:333-4) to the question of why such stereotypes continue to exist, despite the overwhelming evidence that attractiveness does not correlate with competence, but only with perceptions of it (with the exception of sociality), is that “In the real world, very good-looking people are scarce [while] the attractive are vastly overrepresented in the entertainment world [films and advertising]. The prevailing rule [is that] social skills and sexual uninhibitedness (the main components of the attractiveness stereotype) are inextricably linked to physical attractiveness [which] can be viewed as a status characteristic, along with intelligence, charm, humor, athletic ability, and other socially valued characteristics.” Griffin and Langlois (2006:201) more recently found in the perceptions of adults and children, “Unattractive women are at a disadvantage relative to either medium or attractive women. It is more often the case that unattractiveness is ‘bad’ than that beauty is ‘good’. Cf. Gottschall et al. 2008; Chia et al. 1998. Cf. Sappho’s poetic claim: “What is beautiful is good...” (Sapp. *Fr.* 101).
of transgression against norms of male heroic prowess, attributes of youth and beauty are still important in the depictions of all female characters, as predicted in evolutionary literary criticism. But female beauty in the *Argonautika* is also associated with danger and distraction. Atalanta, for instance, is forbidden to join the company solely because her female attractiveness will cause divisive friction between the male members of the crew (1.769-773). Generally, descriptions of female physical attractiveness in the *Argonautika* tend to the conventional.

Physical beauty is accounted for in recurring description of the feminine breast. The image of Kypris on Jason’s dazzling cloak, woven by Athena, slyly notes the accidental exposure of her breast (1.742-6), while Kypris herself is also described as having “white shoulders”, and flowing “long curls” (3.43-7). The focus on the breast as an indicator and synecdoche of female beauty is repeated, in reference to Ariadne (4.432-3). Medea’s “divinely beautiful” breasts are also alluded to, gracefully, but gratuitously, at 3.866-7.

When Medea beautifies herself after deciding to help Jason, the description notes her attending to the freshness of her skin, and the appearance of her hair, both reliable indicators of youth (3.828-35). Her beauty is also here intrinsically connected to her inevitable grief (3.835-7). Later, Jason will use her natural female pride in appearance to artfully flatter her, stating that he can tell from her “lovely form” that she is possessed of a “gentle civility” (3.1006-17).

More constant in descriptions of Medea’s natural qualities are direct reference and indirect allusion to her magical powers. While her youth and beauty are apparent, her character is far more complex, even contradictory. The lengthy description in Book 3 (3.843-66) of the drug she will use to help Jason overcome the bulls implies the great expertise required to have gathered and processed it. Her instructions to Jason on its proper use, and the ritual preparation he must undertake, are amazingly intricate, informed by her confident knowledge of the supernatural (3.1025-62). His faith in her expertise is always unquestioning, and he is rewarded for his obedience to her instruction; upon anointing himself with the salve, he is filled with “terrifying prowess, inexpressible and unflinching”,

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38 On whiteness as a marker of female attractiveness see Ch.3, n.64.
39 Contrast the lack of divine assistance here for Medea, compared with Hera’s beautification of Jason (*Od*. 18.188-96).
40 Hunter (1987:129-130) notes: “Whether or not homicidal sorceresses can also be impressionable virgins (and vice versa) is a subject about which people may reasonably disagree.” One answer to this question may be found in Dyck’s (1989:456-7) view that Apollonios’ Medea is narratively compartmentalized, as the romantic maiden of Book 3 who becomes the frightening sorceress of Book 4. There is no return journey, however.
while his hands swell with power, and his leaping exultation is likened to that of a war-horse (3.1246-64). It is explicitly stated that the girl’s drugs protected Iason from the searing fire of the bulls’ breath (3.1303-5). And again, it is Iason’s recall of πολυκερδέως “cunning” or “very crafty” Medea’s instructions, which saves him from the teeth-born warriors (3.1363-4).

In Book 4 it is Medea herself who casts the guardian serpent into a sleep, through incantation and her use of a magic drug (4.139-66). Later, Iason acknowledges her invaluable help to his crew, calling her “the noble savior of all Achaia”, and urging the crew to protect her, while declaring that he himself will lawfully wed her (4.191-7). As book 4 progresses, however, Medea’s powers are deemphasized, and then minimized.

Medea’s transformation is foreshadowed early in Book 4 when she, fearfully fleeing her home, is likened to a war-captive, afraid and barefoot in the night (4.34-46). After the respect paid to her magical powers by Iason, the narrator’s mixed message in “she was not ignorant of the ways, having often in the past wandered in search of corpses and noxious roots from the earth, as sorceresses do, but her heart was throbbing with trembling dread” not only implies her skills as contemptible and hideous, but that, despite such powers, she is as afraid as any other girl would be in such a situation (4.50-4). This is followed by the bitter mockery of the rising Moon, who has resented Medea’s past incantations to her; her comments, echoing the war-captive imagery above, suggest that love is an obsession which enslaves, and which, for all her skill and expertise, Medea cannot escape (4.54-66).

Later, when the stranded expedition have almost succumbed to the adverse conditions in the Libyan desert, the prophecy concerning the carrying of the ship overland, that Pindar’s Fourth Pythian gave to Medea, is transferred by Apollonios to Peleus (4.1365-80). The prophecy concerning the clod of earth that will become the island home for Euphemos’ descendants, in Pindar the main indication of Medea’s puissance, is here placed in the mouth of Iason, when he interprets the dream of one of his crew (4.1550-63; 4.1755-8).41

As well as this instance of disempowerment, apparent to any Hellenistic reader familiar with Pindar’s work, Medea is incongruously powerless in the desert, unable even to attempt to ameliorate a snake-bite, fearful and shrinking from the event in a most feminine manner, along with her maids (4.1521-2). The very last mention of an utterly transformed Medea and her magic comes, conspicuously without the use of magical drugs – and

41 Braswell’s (1988:104) study of Pindar’s Fourth Pythian also points out that the powerful archaic Medea is later cut down to appropriate (that is, feminine) size through this transference of prophecy. See also this chapter, n.12.
Apollonios comments on this – when a frightening Medea succeeds in defeating the bronze giant Talos (4.1649-77). Thereafter, there is no direct mention of her, not even in the epic’s close, when Apollonios praises the success of the quest and farewells the heroes (see further discussion below). The sudden narrative disappearance of such a focal figure is jarring, forced even.

While female characters as autonomous and powerful individuals abound in this tale, their roles are circumscribed by literary convention, audience cultural expectation, and narrative design. The Argonautika, while exploring female but unfeminine powers and, as argued above, safely neutralizing them, also presents a more typical depiction, or perhaps fantasy, of female attractiveness from the male point of view. The internally contradictory standards of female attractiveness do not appear to have changed through the centuries; good women both know that their place is in the home, yet, as in the case of Hypsipyle, freely offer unknown men immediate sex.

The active Aphrodite of the Homeric epic and tragedy, for instance, is recast as the diminished Mrs. Hephaistos, the domesticated wife and isolated mother of an unruly and insolent boy-child (3.43-7; 3.91-9). The widowed Khalkiope, separated from her sons by her own father, also meekly sits at home, in proper obedience to Aietes’ paternal wishes. The exceptional Medea of Book 3 is conversely described as typically not at home (as any ‘normal’ female would be). Apollonios states that she is only in her father’s palace through the intervention of Hera, in order to meet Iason (3.247-52).42

The Lemnian women are also modeled as attractive in terms of male standards. Iason’s progress through the Lemnian city as he walks from the palace of Hypsipyle, for instance, presents an almost stereotypical male fantasy; the hero surrounded by “countless young women full of joy”, who, after bestowing wagons full of guests-gifts upon the Argonauts, each willingly lead the men to their homes for a blissful evening, inspired by Kypris to repopulate the island (1.843-52).

Evolutionary psychology predicts that males are prepared to relax their standards depending on short or long term mating decisions, and, arguably, Iason does relax his mating standards, given the ambiguous and potentially threatening nature of the helpful Kolkhian maiden who is also a dangerous sorceress. As I argue below, however, Iason fails to exhibit genuine interest in Medea, in contrast to his earlier union with Hypsipyle. Apollonios is not

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42 See this chapter, p.102, for a discussion of Khalkiope’s exceptional loyalty to father and family values.
only aware of the one-sided dynamic between Iason and Medeia, but it uses it deliberately to foreshadow to the audience their ‘later’ acrimony.\textsuperscript{43}

One behaviour associated with male short-term mating strategy is the tendency of males to avail themselves of opportunistic mating. In the narratives of ancient Greece this is evidenced in the not uncommon scenario in which men mate with foreign women while journeying, with ensuing offspring. Herakles berates his shipmates for falling into an easy life with the Lemnian women and forgoing their mission. He asks his fellows if they have come to Lemnos seeking new wives due to distaste for their own women (1.865-74).\textsuperscript{44} While this is not the case for the Argonauts, his comment suggests that in similar circumstances it might well have been. Herakles even mocks Iason’s union with Hypsipyle, proposing that Iason should be allowed to stay “all day long in Hypsipyle’s bed until he populates Lemnos with boys and gains a great reputation!” (1.872-4).

His words are hyperbole, of course, but beneath them lay the cultural experience of the wandering group of adventurers who take advantage of sexual opportunity when possible, and the glory (increased offspring) that follows. Herakles, at least, acknowledges the likely outcome and ultimate goal of such behaviour. In Greek terms, a multitude of sons is preferred, as another means to personal glory. In practice, just as many girls would be born as a result of their reproductive opportunism. But few daughters in such a situation are ever valued, or reclaimed by their fathers, in Greek literature.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Concepts of earlier and later are necessarily complicated by the composition of the \textit{Argonautika} as a ‘prequel’ to a work written two hundred years earlier. A good many scholars have argued that Apollonios intended his epic poem to figure as the ‘prequel’ for Euripides’ tragedy. Cf. Nelis 2005:359-360, 362; Allan 2002:103; Mastronarde 2002:66; Hunter 1993b:59; Nyberg 1992:90; Dyck 1989:5. And, as Sharrock and Ash (2002:156) describe it: “Apollonios plays with the way in which [the epic poem] is, in a sense, both before and after Homer... there is always a sense of ‘not yet’, of something even older than the Homeric poems – but referring to them, backwards in poetry, forwards in chronology.” Apollonios clearly intended the events of his story to be properly placed amongst those already inscribed. There is, however, a certain unfortunate dyschronology: Euripides’ Medeia enables the future conception of Theseus. Apollonios’ earlier Medeia was created after this episodic sequencing, yet in Book 3 Medeia learns of that same Theseus’ previous exploits. Apollonios in another sense also attempts to provide the epilogue to Medea’s story, even as he has with this ‘prequel’: her marriage to the antihero Iason, destined for an unhappy ending, is only a step on the path to her true destiny, immortality in the Elysian fields, married to Greece’s greatest hero, in Beye’s (1982:133) view, “a man as bold and overbearing as herself and hence finally her own true mate.” Cf. Hunter 1987:133. Dyck suggests that Medea is, in fact, Akhilleus’ “feminine equivalent” Dyck 1989:464. Cf. Ibycus and Simonides (P.M.G. \textit{Frr.} 291 and 558 = sch. Ap. Rhod. 4.814-15). One can only imagine what a forever marriage between the ruthless and irresistible Akhilleus and the proud and immovable Medea might have been like, there in paradise.

\textsuperscript{44} This passage contains a number of interesting references, and will be revisited as required.

\textsuperscript{45} See Ch.1, n.111f., and Ch.3, n.85, on value of sons above daughters. Cf. Gottschall 2003.
The outcome of opportunistic matings was also of interest to the women themselves. Part of the impetus for the hospitality of the Lemnian women was their desire to repopulate their island. Hypsipyle, aware of her own potential fertility, specifically consults Iason on what she should do if she bears him a son (1.886-98). His answer suggests that while he will not participate in the rearing of any child, he is prepared to benefit from it (1.900-9).

Apollonios also identifies the opportunistic mating efforts of the Lemnian husbands as the specific reason for their demise at the hands of their own wives (1.609-19). While Apollonios is careful to create some sympathy for the husband-murdering female Lemnians through his attribution of the event to the revenge-motives of Kypris, whose honours were neglected by the Lemnian men (and, typically, women are the instrument of her divine revenge upon men), this does not obviate the point of cultural reference: men can and do take more attractive women to displace and replace their wedded wives, who are with good reason jealous, due to the threat to the resources they consider belong to themselves and their offspring.

Foreign adventurer Iason’s opportunistic seduction of Medeia eventuates as a result of her own nephew Argos’s suggestion, a strategy put forward and accepted only under the aegis of the quest (3.474-80). This implies that Iason has not already developed a spontaneous attraction to Medeia himself. The text certainly contains no evidence that Iason has even noticed her existence to this point, despite the fact that she has been present throughout the feast and interview, and for part of the time has been staring at him while overwhelmed with desire for him. His manipulation of her emotional attachment to him is inarguably opportunistic, necessary to the retrieval of the fleece, and the regaining of his throne.

As a virgin princess resident in the palace of a strong king, Medeia is neither likely to suffer the typical fate of female war-captives (rape, sexual slavery, and forced labour in another land), nor would she willingly abandon her position and family, if in her right mind.\(^46\) It would hardly be in her reproductive interests to do so. It is only through divine intervention that she is weakened enough to yield to the persuasion of the foreign adventurer, to assist him and flee with him, as sexual partner and potential mother of his children.

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\(^46\) As Schaps (1982:205) claims: “the normal fate of women in a sacked city was slavery. This was true whether the men were killed or enslaved; once the town was taken, nobody decreed wholesale execution of women and children... When her city fell, a woman of Greece had to presume that she would never see another free day.”
Apollonios appeals to the predictable literary denouement of heroic epic: the sexual union of the principal hero with the principal female ‘prize’. In the *Argonautika*, Iason manages to achieve this twice, once in his own right, as it were, while his second, doomed union with Medeia is entirely the result of others’ design. Iason is depicted as the noble but unwilling participant in the process, bound by narrative expectation and, more importantly, by forced oath.

Iason’s union with the foreign Lemnian women ended entirely on his own terms. The outcome of his union with the Kolkhian girl will end very differently. Apollonios could not overlook the mythological tradition of their flight, exile, and production of children, but he could and did make constant reference to that other great story of the hero’s quest aided by the exotic princess who betrays her family, the very model of opportunistic male sexual behaviour: the story of Theseus and Ariadne.

Iason’s repeated reference (3.973-1007; 3.1079-101) to the tale of Ariadne and Theseus omits one crucial aspect, however: Theseus’ abandonment of Ariadne. While Ariadne played (perhaps even established) a similar narrative role – the helpful foreign princess – Medeia had the good Greek sense to bind the questing hero with oaths, ensuring his continued support of her after she had severed all ties with family and country.

In Iason’s judicious editing of the story of Ariadne he magnifies the personal glory that she wins (3.1001-6), and states that her father Minos made an agreement with Theseus who let him take the girl (3.1100-1). But he entirely omits the fact that she woke alone on the island of Naxos, abandoned by the questing hero: Medeia’s caution is proved well founded, as audiences of the *Argonautika* would have been well aware.

To throw in one’s lot with the foreign hero is clearly, for any young woman, taking a dangerous risk. Committing to a hero who lies by omission about the doings of your family, in order to achieve his goals, is as good a reason as any for insisting on his swearing by the gods not to abandon you. In case this point is not clear enough (to the audience, at least), Apollonios very deliberately makes reference to Theseus’ abandonment of Ariadne on Dia in

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47 Medea has been previously recognized as a geras ‘prize’. As Hunter (1993b:66.) states: “Medea is a ‘prize of war’, even if in Apollonius’ poem the Greeks and the Colchians do not at this point come to blows.” Cf. Propp 1968.

48 That the relationship between Iason and Medeia is one of ‘romantic’ exploitation is deliberately emphasized through the repeated reference to the parallel tale of Theseus and Ariadne. Cf. DeForest 1994:130; Hunter 1988:449; Beye 1969:50.

49 It is also difficult to reconcile her apparent ignorance of the tale with the fact that Ariadne is her cousin, the daughter of Helios’ daughter Pasiphae (3.1074-6). Her insistence on Iason’s oath suggests she was not so ignorant of her cousin’s story as she claims.

50 Apollonios identifies the island as Dia, 4.434.
his description of Dionysos’ fabulous cloak, among the many gifts later used by Iason as a
treacherous lure for Apsyrtos (4.423-34).

Indeed, Medea’s worst fears of abandonment are confirmed when the Argonauts plot
to abandon her when threatened by Apsyrtos’ forces (4.345-9). The agreement Iason and his
crew make with him cedes the stolen fleece to the Argonauts, and the maiden to an
independent judge to pronounce her fate. Medea’s fury at this betrayal is immediate and
intense when she insists that Iason hold to his oaths, and she threatens him with terrible
curses should he fail to do so (4.355-90). Medea is not prepared to play the compliant and
exploited maiden to Iason’s opportunistic adventurer.

Iason’s frightened response is placatory, and introduces the Argonauts’ intention to
murder her brother so as to ensure their escape. He does not, however, offer Medea any
evidence of his personal attachment to her as a reason to allay her fears (4.393-409). In fact,
Iason’s freely given affection may well still reside with another: Hypsipyle, a more properly
feminine and compliant woman, who alone of the Lemnian women respected and saved her
father’s life. Additionally, in true helper-maiden manner, she gives herself to the foreign
hero without restraint, offers him the throne of Lemnos, and then lets him go without a single
protest, despite knowing that she might bear his child, but never see him again.

The evidence for Iason’s romantic preference for Hypsipyle is in his undertaking of
the preparation ritual prescribed by Medea. While he is scrupulous in following her
instructions, he adds one of his own: after cleansing himself he dons the robe ‘which
Lemnian Hypsipyle had previously given him as a memento of their fervent lovemaking’
(3.1201-6). Race (n.101.) suggests “frequent” as an alternate reading of ἀδύνατος “fervent”,
which in no way diminishes the argument that while Iason is reminding himself of Hypsipyle
and their love together in this his ultimate heroic test, he can hardly be enamoured of
Medea.\footnote{Fisher’s (2004:6) study of limerence notes “the human inability to feel romantic passion for more
than person at a time.” See Ch.1, nn.86, 87, for a discussion of limerence generally.} Iason’s relationship with the Kolkhian princess does not spring from an
overwhelming emotional attachment, as she feels for him, but through a pragmatic sense of
utility.

While the heroes in the Argonautika generally fulfil the narrative and evolutionary
stereotype of sexually opportunistc adventurers, the female characters, whose reproductive
interests do not neatly align with those of the men, do their best to counter male strategy,
evidencing the evolutionary finding that male and female mating strategies are in essential conflict.\footnote{Iason’s inclusion of Medea as integral to his long-term plan undermines his success, in evolutionary terms. Beye (1982:160) argues: “It would have been better for Jason if he had jettisoned Medea.” Obviously, it might have been better for Medea too, better still if Iason had not involved her in either his short- or long-term strategies in the first place. As Byre (1996:7) astutely observes: “Medea’s accusation that Jason has gained everything through her assistance – success in the contest, possession of the fleece, return home – whereas she has lost everything through giving it – home, parents, reputation – is patently, and pathetically, true, and reminds us of her later desolation and dependence on the faithless Jason in Greece.”}

While Iason’s affection for Hypsipyle may be genuine, and the woman herself depicted as more attractively feminine in nature and behaviour, even she is presented in the narrative as inherently deceptive, despite her appearance of modesty (1.790-2). The Lemnian women in assembly conclude quite correctly that they must conceal from all the Argonauts the treacherous murder of the Lemnian men and their new wives (1.657-66). When the Argonauts leave Lemnos they are still unaware of the true story. However, the hyper-masculine hero Herakles is well aware of the threat posed by the Argonauts’ submission to female distraction and deception, and it is only his harsh reproaches that rouse them from this (1.862-4). In this instance, the masculine imperative of the Argonauts’ quest ensures that Hypsipyle’s strategic goal, which is to secure Iason as her mate and King of the Lemnians, is not achieved.

It is also evident that the gods in Greek mythology exploit the conflict between male and female sexual strategies in order to achieve their desired ends. Iason’s intention in undertaking his quest did not include finding a wife. His aim is power, and the restoration of his throne. Medea’s assistance is secured only after she is psychologically broken, pushed to the point of suicide. The gods from the first time she is introduced disregard whatever she herself might believe to be in her interests. In Hera’s proposal to Athene, Medea is described solely in terms of the two important elements of her identity: she is “Aietes’ daughter, expert in drugs” (κοῦρην Αιήτου πολυφάρμακον, 3.23-9). There is no suggestion here that Medea would likely fall in love with Iason of her own accord. Nor is there any divine expectation that Iason will fall in love with her, let alone want to take her back to Hellas as his wife. Hera’s revenge plan entails only the successful capture of the fleece in order that punishment may be enacted upon Pelias.\footnote{Campbell 1994:83.} Medea is intended merely to be the instrument of this, as is clear when Hera states, “I think that with her counsels he will take the fleece back to Hellas” (3.28-9). Medea’s ultimate destiny properly lies elsewhere,
as Hera informs Thetis in Book 4: she is to be the future mate of Akhilleus, in the Elysian Fields (4.814-15).

But Iason, having secured Medea’s help, is suddenly and unexpectedly moved at the sight of her distress, and becomes subject to ὀδόλος “destructive” love (3.1078). A few lines later, he introduces her to the hope of paternal approval, in his lie about Minos and Ariadne (3.1100-1). Medea in reply hastens to disassociate herself from Ariadne (4.1107-8), adding suggestively that, unlike Ariadne, she herself will even go as far as to follow after the wandering hero, appearing “unexpectedly at the hearth in your palace” (3.1117). It is only then, in assuring Medea that the people of Hellas will venerate her “like a goddess” (3.1124), that he yields a proposal of marriage: “in our wedding chamber you shall share our bed, and nothing shall come between us and our love” (3.1128-30). Iason attempts to give Medea the commitment she desires, without forgoing his task. This necessarily requires that she forfeit her family links, an important factor determining female reproductive success.54 As anyone familiar with the mythic tradition of this couple knows, the gendered conflict in their future is inescapable, despite the love that might now be shared between them. Iason will continue to pursue the mating strategy that best facilitates his production of many sons. Medea will resist this, even to the point of maternal disinvestment in their children, which is a biologically legitimate female response to unavoidable paternal abandonment.55

The Argonautika is particularly interested in the role falling in love has to play in the story of Medea and Iason, and in the psychological transformation of Medea from obedient to treacherous daughter.56 The third book of the poem is almost a separate narrative,

54 See Ch.3, n.92, and this chapter, nn.79, 92, for a discussion of the tensions between a Greek woman’s loyalty to family and husband. As Bremmer (1997:99.) observes, “The loyalty of Athenian males was first to their parents and kinsmen, only after that to their wife and children.” Cf. Visser 1986:149-65; Dover 1974:272, 302ff. Herodotus (3.119) also evidences the loyalty of the wife to her natal family: “I can always have another husband... but in no way can I ever have another brother.” Apollonios’ Medea is from the beginning torn between her family and the foreigner Iason, and this is the unresolved origin of her mental disintegration and narrative diminishment. That she will live to regret it by the time of the events Euripides’ play is the point of Apollonios’ repeated use of the motif. Cf. Phinney 1967:340. Medea’s fratricide severs her from all kin support, and Medea in Book 4 shows her growing awareness of this. Cf. DeForest 1994:129; Beye 1982:152, 161. Cf. Soph. Ant. 909-912.

55 See Ch.1, n.101, for a discussion on maternal disinvestment in parental investment.

56 Beye (1982:89) believes Apollonios was, in his creation of a ‘romantic’ tale in Book 3, attempting to introduce a new narrative theme: “Love means having to submit... [Apollonios] is trying something radical in this poem when he tries to show a man in a heterosexual love relationship.” The heroes of mythology might obtain women’s willing assistance in return for abduction and marriage, but the emotional swooning is all on the female side. As he (1969:54-5) argues: “No self-respecting male would either be so handsome or so needlessly interested in the female sex... To the Greek mind it is not masculine... A Phaedra might be love-sick in tragedy, a Medea might go mad for love, but no man
detailing the destruction of Medea through the power of eros. Apollonios’ treatment of the theme is in one sense not unique. His characterization of Eros, however, is arguably original, in terms of the mythic tradition.

In fact, the narrator pauses in the action of the fourth book to address the undesirability of love and its terrible consequences. Eros is depicted in the Argonautika as having the power to wreak havoc, setting individuals against friend and family. Worse, the natural power relation between parent and child is reversed, so that Eros’ cowered mother is reduced to begging and bribing (3.148-50). Personified Eros is described as “cruel”, and as a “great affliction, great abomination for humans” (4.445). The narrator expresses the hope that love - the experience of “abominable madness” - will fall upon his enemies’ children, rather than upon his own (4.448-9).

While the poem may be atypical in its lengthy examination of the female internal process of falling in love, the process itself is not at all unique to the time and place. Falling in love is a diachronic and universal experience, with identifiable psycho-physiological markers, and cross-cultural studies provide empirical evidence of this. The literature on the process of limerence all agrees on one point; the point of romantic love is the engineering of

shows this passion.” Beye (1982:158) explains further: “Very rarely in extant Greek literature does one find a male-female relationship which is explored in depth. Males either seek a woman to exploit and discard, or are drawn into a woman’s power and destroyed.” However, it is arguable that the falling in love that takes place in the Argonautika is primarily on the female side. Medea the sorceress is powerless to resist the effects of Eros’ arrow, and Eros does ‘strike’ Jason in the same manner, though hardly to the same degree. Cf. Nyberg 1992:107; Beye 1982:128. Knight (1991:250) argues the narratorial description of Eros’ contribution to the love match as destructive clearly indicates “the course of Jason’s and Medea’s marriage will not be happy.” See Ch.3, n.59, for discussion of female sexuality and negative views of eros.

58 As Lightfoot (2000:243) notes: “The love-theme looks very new in epic, but has to be set beside a certain amount of earlier mythographic evidence about the Argonautic legend, and above all beside the great escalation in erotic themes across the field of Hellenistic poetry.” Campbell (1994:133) describes the god of erotic passion as “a grabby, hyperactive child making a thorough nuisance of himself.”

60 As Campbell (1994:134) observes, Kypris “has learned that she cannot afford to be uncivil to him.” She (1994:271) also observes that Eros at 4.445ff. is “an agent of pure destruction.” Further, the personalised Erotes of Book 3 are “fearsome creators of misery, generating in their victims acute anxiety, brazen deceitfulness, excruciating pain” (Campbell 1994:370).

61 Interpretation of the process of falling in love as military engagement, with winners and losers, can be found in the critical tradition. Campbell (1994:248) likens Eros’ shooting of the arrow of love to Pandaros’ treacherous attack upon Menelaos (II. 4.116ff.)” Byre (1996:5) notes that the “havoc wrought by love” will eventually result in the treacherous murder of the military commander Apsyrtos. Griffiths (2006:89) points to the portrayal of Medea in Book 3 as a vulnerable innocent, the victim of Eros’ “violent, military” attack. Byre (1996:14) argues the narrator, ultimately, is condemning Eros, not Medea, for her brother’s death.
emotional receptivity to reproduction, and the cycle of infatuation followed by disengagement is an evolved mechanism facilitating both parental investment and genetic variation.\(^{62}\)

Insofar as Apollonios was deliberately constructing a ‘prequel’ to Euripides’ Medeia, in which Medeia and Iason have successfully reproduced, and in which Iason seeks disengagement from his wife in order to pursue further mating opportunity, then the intensely detailed description in the Argonautika of Medeia’s falling in love (incidentally a process in no way mirrored in Iason), serves to confirm the relation of character development to socio-biological patterning, and to constitute a baseline frame for analysis of individual author manipulation of the trope.\(^{63}\)

While the symptoms of love as they manifest in Medea in Book 3 may be familiar to anyone who has ever ‘fallen in love’, Apollonios’ description of the process as it affects her is uncannily accurate, in terms of the findings of researchers into the phenomenon.\(^{64}\) As soon

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62 See Ch.1, nn.86, 87, and this chapter, n. 64, for findings for the universality of falling in love, or ‘limerence’.

63 Note, however, that Euripides’ Medeia does not want to ‘disengage’ from their union. Her agonies instead follow very precisely those experienced by those who have been recently abandoned, as found in several studies. Cf. Fisher 2004:15, 168-9. It is therefore of interest again, in terms of narrative and characterization, that Medeia’s bloody revenge both does and does not follow the path predicted for women in this model of cyclic limerence. Fisher (2004:177-8) found that women experiencing abandonment rage “are far less likely to maim or murder when they are jealous of a rival and fearful of abandonment. They tend to berate themselves for their own inadequacies and try to lure and seduce instead, hoping to recapture their mate’s affections and rebuild the relationship.” Euripides’ Medea will both maim and murder, exploiting Iason’s expectations in her pretended attempts to ‘recapture [her] mate’s affection and rebuild [their] relationship’.

64 There are numerous findings on the symptoms of falling in love that are directly relevant to Apollonios’ Medeia specifically. Lindholm (1988:25-6) found that Western-style romantic love is typically between two people, and implies complete psychological commitment, with the sense “that life without the other seems not worth living.” Romantic love also occurs spontaneously, the result of “irrational and irresistible forces.” Generally, sexual passion is de-emphasized in favour of “the transcendent quality of the relationship itself.” Fisher’s (2004:6) studies found that limerence begins when the romantic object is suddenly imbued with special meaning. The limerent person experiences an intensive and exclusive focus of attention on the limerent object (Fisher 2004:6-7), and there is an irrational perceptual aggrandizement of the limerent object (Fisher 2004:7-8). Infatuation then usually develops in a predictable psychological pattern, beginning with “intrusive thinking”, during which infatualts spend up to 85 to 100 percent of their time obsessively reviewing every detail of their experience of the romantic object (Fisher 1995:25; Fisher 2004:8; cf. Tennon 1979). There is a strong determination to overcome obstacles to the union with the beloved, while obstructions only serve to inflame attraction (Fisher 1995:27; Fisher 2004:16), and lovers crave emotional union with their beloved (Fisher 2004:13). Fisher states that lovers are often willing to completely rearrange their lives, and life priorities in order to attain union with their beloved (Fisher 2004:15), and the most common internal experiences of those in the earliest stages of romantic love include; “elation; hope, apprehension, uncertainty, and fear” (Fisher 1995:26). Others agree, adding to these symptoms “giddiness [and] optimism” (Jankowiak and Fisher 1992:150); “euphoria, intense focused attention on a preferred individual, obsessive thinking about him or her, emotional dependency on and craving
as “Cruel” Eros shoots the arrow into her breast she is struck dumb (3.284). Her heart burns, and her sight is immediately fixed on the object of her passion; all good sense leaves her, while feelings both sweet and painful block her awareness of anything else (3.287-90). “Destructive love” alternately pales her cheeks and flushes them red (3.297-8). Medea goes over and over her memory of that first meeting, reviewing every detail of his appearance and behaviour, filled with fear for his safety (3.451-62). She is paralysed by intense internal conflict, between desire and shame (3.645-55). She feels her separation from him as a burning pain, even before she has actually spoken with him, before she has any evidence that he even knows she exists (3.656-64).

After agreeing to assist Iason in his quest, Medea is racked with sleeplessness, obsessed with thoughts of him; her heart flutters and trembles and Apollonios’ description of her inner torment is almost anatomical:

Tears of pity poured from her eyes, and deep within a pain tortured her constantly as it smoldered through her body and along the delicate nerves and deep down beneath the nape of the neck, where the sharpest anguish penetrates whenever the tireless Loves inflict pains upon the spirit. 3.749-65.

She vacillates between wanting to help him on account of desire, and wanting to kill herself on account of shame (3.766-801). It is only the thought of a dismal afterlife that forestalls her suicide, and only the intervention of Hera that closes the debate for her (3.802-21).

Reflecting the ancient Greek cultural view that love is an unwelcome affliction, Medea’s falling in love is, in the Argonautika, an unpleasant experience; her mind cannot

for emotional union with this beloved... exhilaration, excessive energy, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite” (Aron et al. 2005:237-8). Fisher (2004:10) observes that “Loss of appetite and sleeplessness are directly related to another of love’s overwhelming sensations: tremendous energy.” Kim and Hatfield (2004:174) argue that “Romantic love is inevitably a mix of bitter-sweet... not only positively related to positive emotions but also often related to emotional distress... a strong emotional state in which people experience continuous interplay between elation and despair, thrills and terror.” Less pleasant sensations of passionate love can involve; “trembling, pallor, flushing, a general weakness, and overwhelming sensations of awkwardness and stammering... Shyness, fear of rejection, anticipation, and longing for reciprocity [as well as] the feeling of helplessness, the sense that this passion was irrational, involuntary, unplanned, and uncontrollable” (Fisher 2004:22; Fisher 1995:26). There may also be overwhelming mood swings, “ranging from exhilaration when one’s love is returned to anxiety, despair, or even rage when one’s romantic ardor is ignored or rejected” (Fisher 2004:12). Fisher (2004:10) notes that limerent persons are frequently tormented by intense emotions: “Some become painfully shy or awkward when in the presence of the beloved. Some turn pale. Some flush. Some tremble. Some stammer. Some sweat. Some get weak knees, feel dizzy, or have “butterflies in the stomach.” Others report quickened breathing. And many report feelings of fire in the heart.” Almost all of these symptoms may be discerned in Apollonios’ Medea.
settle on anything, and she suffers from obsessive thoughts about Iason (3.948-55). The “lovesick distress” which afflicts Medeia upon their first meeting deeply affects her:

her heart dropped out of her breast, her eyes darkened with mist of their own accord, and a hot blush seized hold of her cheeks. She had no strength to raise her knees and go backwards or forwards, but her feet were stuck fast beneath her. 3.962-5.

In addition, she is rendered “speechless” (3.967). After Iason’s first flattering speech of persuasion, although Medeia still cannot speak, “she would even have drawn out her whole soul from her breast and given it to him, exulting in his need for her” (3.1015-16). Alone again, she is strangely abstracted, oblivious to outside stimuli, inwardly focused to the point of pathological self-involvement (3.1155-62).

While the evolutionary purpose of romantic love is to establish an enduring union between two prospective parents, in evolutionary terms, the purpose of marriage (with or without the benefit of limerence), is primarily reproduction, and secondarily the inheritance of resources. As a social institution enabling the transmission of inherited property through approved channels, marriage is primarily a political instrument, typically in the hands of the male heads of the families concerned. Ancient Greece is a very clear example of this.65 This is also evidenced in the Argonautika.

Apollonios takes the opportunity on several occasions to describe the social norms for marriage, the first of which is when Iason in Lemnos sets out for the palace. Unperturbed by the surge of admiring women around him, he is fixed upon his destination, his meeting with Hypsipyle, likened to the shining star which young girls, “confined in newly made quarters”, gaze upon, each maiden rejoicing at the thought of her intended husband adventuring among foreign peoples, “for whom her parents are keeping her to be his bride” (1.775-81). The imagery is apt, insomuch as Hypsipyle is awaiting Iason, and they will indeed mate, although they will not wed.

Adventurer Iason also visits the newly wed King Kyzikos, whose marriage models the ideal royal union: the exchange of a beautiful virgin (here described with another conventional epithet of desirable appearance, “fair-haired”) for “marvelous bride-gifts”. The recent marriage of Kyzikos and his wife Kleite is coupled in the narrative with the definition of them as potential reproducers; he is ”not yet” a father, while she is “still untouched” by

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65 See Ch.2, n.60, on the economic nature of marriage in ancient Greece. See also Ch.3, nn.68, 70, 85, for discussions of the role of reproduction in marriage.
labour pains. His generosity in hosting the Argonauts is presented in light of his overwhelming nuptial concern – the begetting of children on his wife (1.972-9).66

Upon the unfortunate and accidental death of her new husband, Kleite hangs herself, an act rewarded by the naming of a spring in her honour (1.1063-9). It is not directly stated whether this suicide was for love. E. V. Rieu’s translation of this passage reiterates her glory as “a peerless but unhappy bride.”67 It is possible, even probable, that the self-sacrifice of a beautiful and very young (and blonde) woman, with the whole of her fertile potential ahead of her, is universally and diachronically perceived to be more tragic by an audience, and that Apollonios deliberately exploited this for pathetic effect.68

Just as the hypothetical, star-gazing, nubile maiden expected the details of her marriage to be managed by her parents (1.775-81), so the second imaginary bride properly wed in this instance but also deprived of her husband, has been correctly bestowed by parents. Here, this arrangement also involved the maiden’s brothers – perhaps hinting at the improperly subverted family relationship between Medea and her own brother. Ironic, too, is the image of this properly married but lonely bride burning at the sight of her empty bed, as grief-stricken as the suicidal Kleite, compared with the love-sick Medea, mourning in her chamber (3.656-64).

By taking her marriage into her own hands, Medea is an absolute contrast to these two idealized and unnamed nymphai, who, while both yearning alone for absent husbands, are nonetheless admirable models of female compliance with familial interest in marriage, their behaviour motivated by a sense of filial obedience (1.780) and wifely modesty (3.658-9). Medea, in her time, will fulfill neither of these feminine characteristics, in relation to her own marriage.

King Alkinoos’ point of decision over Medea’s fate rests on the essential connection between marriage and childbearing. As he states, “If she is sharing a bed with a man, I will not separate her from her husband, nor will I hand over to enemies any offspring she bears in her womb” (4.1106-9). Thus, if her potential fertility is unaffected, and is still of value in a

66 Males in the Argonautika are frequently aware of the need to secure the begetting of heirs. Kyzikos, for example, foregoes this duty in order to entertain his guests. Cf. Beye 1969:42.
68 Compare the modern media practice known as “Missing White Woman Syndrome”, in which widespread media outlets, claiming to respond to audience demands and ratings, prefer to give massively disproportionate coverage to women who are young, white, and attractive by conventional standards, on the grounds that this is demonstrably preferred by news audiences. Cf. Anderson et al., 2008; Swami et al., 2008; Wanzo, 2008; Stillman, 2007; Chia et al., 1998. It seems very probable, if such an audience bias does indeed exist, that literary authors of all eras would avail themselves of it. See also Ch.3, n.64, on cross-cultural preference for paler-than-average females.
male-controlled socio-political context, he will allow her to be reclaimed by her family. Arete, acting in the interests of Medea, and not of her family (nor even of her husband, given the likely wrath of the powerful Aietes), informs them of his decision, advising them to immediately marry, which they do (4.1128-60).

Alkinoos’ decision appears to create a happy ending for them, but the narrator wryly concludes the lavishily detailed marriage scenes with the observation that both Iason and Medea originally wanted to wait to wed in proper fashion, only then consummating their union, within the family halls of Aeson at Iolkos (4.1161-9). This adherence to proper form, entailing sexual restraint, seems odd to a modern reader, especially given the fact that the pair were willing to murder kin to succeed in their elopement, and had no intention of returning to Kolkhis. It underscores, however, the importance of the innate apprehension of the connection between marriage and fertility, in the experience of Apollonios, at least, and, arguably, in that of his audience(s). Medea and Iason’s recognition of the importance of correct marital procedure demonstrates the cultural endurance of marriage as the realization of overwhelming biological drives, most importantly the male control of female sexuality and fertility.

Male sexual jealousy, the inevitable response to paternity uncertainty, underlies the sociopolitical control and exchange of this female sexuality and fertility, and is explained by evolutionary psychology. Male preference for chaste females has been selected for, along with extreme male vigilance over and suspicion of females’ sexuality, which men control through violence and threat of violence. Conversely, as previously noted, emotional jealousy is primarily a female quality, a response to loss of resources. Some have argued that females can tolerate polygamy when necessary, others point to polygamy as potentially disastrous. There is evidence in Book 1 of the Argonautika supporting all of these predictions.

In terms of male valuation of female chastity, part of Medea’s argument to win Arete’s favour incorporates her claim that she is still a virgin “undefiled and untouched” (4.1011-29). As it happens, Alkinoos will choose to protect Medea only if her sexuality, and specifically, her fertility, is safely under the control of a man, her husband (4.1096-109).

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69 For the discussion of polygamy as either acceptable, or unwillingly endured by women, see Barrett et al. 2002:103; Campbell 2002:248, 255-6, 258; Daly and Wilson 1984:501; Symons 1979:145, 224-5, 245-6. See also Ch.3, nn.72, 80.

70 Apollonios cleverly draws attention to the future kin of Medea, in making the existence of any unborn children the criterion for Alkinoos’ decision. This is doubly ironic: in the first place, his pronouncement is swiftly followed by his wife's strategic manipulation of Medea’s fertility status, and secondly because despite his wish to protect any such child from its enemies, it is Medea herself who is destined to become their final, fatal enemy. Cf. DeForest 1994:131; Hunter 1993b:74. In one
Female sexuality is also explored in part through the jealousy of the Lemnian women, which at first reading appears to be sexual. On closer examination it is clear that part of their anger lies in the threat to their marital dignity and security, and the exclusive access of their legitimate offspring to paternal favour. The Lemnian women clearly were not prepared to accept their husbands’ captive girls, but their rejection of the second marriages is arguably founded on the husbands’ practice of socially unacceptable concubinage.

While many individual characters within the *Argonautika* are monogamously ‘married’, there are also instances of males’ serial mating.\(^7\) Aietes, for instance, has produced a son with his earlier union with Asterodeia (3.242). Iason himself, who will produce children with Medeia, has in all probability fathered at least one child with Hypsipyle (1.898). Herakles points this out at 1.872-4, after asking the crew if they seek wives in Lemnos because they now scorn their own women in their native lands (1.866-7), women who have borne some of the Argonauts’ legitimate children. Apollonios and his audience were probably familiar with Euripides’ tragedy *Hypsipyle*, in which Hypsipyle has not one but two sons by Iason, one of which, Eunoios, became king of Lemnos.\(^7\) Engendering of children must have been common for many of the Argonauts during their protracted delay at the island, each willingly entertained by a Lemnian woman. Some of these men would have already been married. Others might well have married after their return home, fathering further offspring.

The Lemnian husbands, divinely inspired to set aside their legitimate marriages, have exercised masculine privilege and captured foreign women as second wives. The *Argonautika* appears to offer a lesson on the folly of this, as the Lemnian women react as displaced real wives must often have fantasized was possible; by murdering the men and captive women both (1.607-32), and later taking second husbands themselves (1.853-64). Far from disparaging the male taking of second wives per se, the problem is clearly presented here as excessive concubinage, with the displacement of first wives and their offspring

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\(^7\) Examples of ‘happily’ monogamously married couples in the *Argonautika* include Aeson and Alcimede (1.46-47), Aietes and Eidya (3.243), and Alkinoos and Arete (4.1013). All of these husbands, however, would have enjoyed the support of their culture had they decided to discreetly enter into other unions (and we know Aietes already has).

\(^7\) Race 2008:75, n.88.
In terms of the Euripidean Medea’s focus on her husband’s ‘adultery’, Apollonios’ expansion on the theme of polygamy or serial marriage is of interest.

Hypsipyle’s carefully edited version of events to Iason must play up the obvious aspects of concubinage that most distress first wives: their legitimate children are disrespected while the offspring of second wives proliferate, vulnerable women go unprotected by fathers and brothers and sons, daughters are murdered by their “savage” new stepmothers, and the Lemnian women themselves are entirely ignored in favour of the new young women (1.809-19). But Hypsipyle’s account also describes how, before the curse of Kypris descends upon the men, the bringing home of captive girls was not an issue for the women. It is only after the husbands begin to ignore and disrespect their first wives that the trouble begins.

Serial marriage for women, however, is depicted as unacceptable, even problematic. Apollonios, as gentle narrator, may sympathize with the displaced wives (while still invoking stereotypes about their sexuality): “O wretched women, sad victims of insatiable jealousy!” (1.662-3). But their crime is also introduced by the same narrator as a υπερβασις “transgression, trespass” (1.609). The women themselves know their behaviour has indeed transgressed cultural bounds, and unanimously agree to Hypsipyle’s plan to conceal the murder of their husbands from Iason and his men (1.662-98). Presumably, the Argonauts would not care to mate with women who are prone to murdering their sexual partners. The Lemnian women’s union with the Argonauts is, in fact, a dangerous distraction, and only the idealized hero Herakles can see this (1.865-75). His opinion is immediately persuasive to all the men, who without a second thought abandon the women, ignoring all their entreaties to return (1.879-85).

The evolutionary prediction that women do not exhibit the same violence toward spouse and offspring when faced with their ‘loss’ because aggression is necessarily inhibited in the female sex, is complicated by the fact that these Lemnian women must have also killed at least some of their male children since all Lemnian men, including the unmarried, were “ruthlessly slain” in order for the women “to avoid paying any retribution later for the atrocious murder” (1.609-19).

The women have undoubtedly behaved in a manner more associated with male response to threat of loss of mate and children, but their revenge is also gender-specific, for

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73 The narrative, however, depicts their situation not as a fault not originating in male nature, but in divine retribution.

74 It seems likely Apollonios is alluding to Medea’s jealous and violent retribution against her husband. She too avoids all punishment for her murders.
their daughters have been spared. But the murder is a class action, almost dispassionate in its clinical execution, and therefore very unlike the typically narcissistic revenge killing of children by an estranged husband, and the furious and typically male murder of an ex-wife who takes another lover.75

While the relationship of the Lennian women as mothers capable of deliberately dispatching their children is of considerable interest in terms of Medeia’s later mythic characterization, the Argonautika has a variety of other interesting approaches to the parent-child relationship. While parental investment selection research frequently focuses on those children who suffer disinvestment, and the sociobiological reasons for this, the Argonautika offers multiple references to the reasons for positive parental investment, especially in sons.76 With regard to whether females are necessarily selective about which offspring to invest in, although the mother-daughter connection is less depicted, there are several instances where the ambivalent nature of the mother-son relationship, frequently centred on female response to male ambition, and inappropriate levels of maternal protectiveness is examined.77 The list of Argonauts, for instance, approvingly notes that Zeus-begotten Polydeukes’ and Kastor’s mother Leda “did not oppose their pleas to go, for she had aspirations worthy of Zeus’ bed” (1.149-50).78

Apollonios has Medeia exploit Khalkiope’s maternal devotion to the four sons from whom she has been forcibly parted, introducing the idea that Aietes may execute them. Khalkiope’s motherly heart is flooded with “utterly unbearable pain”, and she declares to her sister that if Medeia does not assist them she (Khalkiope) will die alongside her sons, and

76 Beye (1982:89) points to the relation of ancient literature to sociobiological concerns: “Epic poetry is male poetry. The Iliad, like Gilgamesh, focuses on the problem of death as it is experienced by males who have no obvious link with the biological means of achieving a kind of genetic immortality.” See this chapter, n.66, for a discussion of Greek male attitude to engendering male heirs. The Argonauts are introduced in terms of their lineage, in Book 1, firstly to the audience (1.23-233), then to the king of Kolhiss (3.356-66). Hierarchy of descent is of constant concern to the characters, especially the aristocracy (3.365-6; 3.402-3). As Campbell (1994:174) notes, “It is always a good thing (in civilised dealings anyway) for xenoi to be able to point to an illustrious lineage.”
77 The difficult relationship of mothers to sons is also treated on several occasions. One example is the unseemly grief of the emotionally dependent Alkimede for Iason, and his literal brush-off of her as he leaves Iolkos (1.295-316). Cf. Beye 1982:81-8. Another is Hypsipyle’s anxious concern for the fate of the son she has probably conceived, and Jason’s cavalier reply concerning their utilitarian function (1.900-10). Cf. Beye 1982:93. A third is Khalkiope’s desperate manoeuvring on behalf of her exiled sons, best described as indifferent to their mother’s agonies (3.265-7). Cf. Campbell 1994:236. And, of course, Kyris’ resorting to bribery in order to enlist her son’s grudging assistance (one hesitates to describe it as obedience) (3.131-44). See also this chapter, n.34.
78 Race (2008:15, n.26) observes of this passage, “This compressed phrase can mean ‘worthy of one who shared Zeus’ bed’ or ‘worthy of the offspring of Zeus’ bed’.”
become for Medea “a horrible Fury from Hades” (3.687-708). Medea’s response to this
genuinely frightening threat is to swear a great oath, assuring Khalkiope of her intention to
help her save her sons (3.710-17). In this way, the need of the mother to save her beloved
sons is neatly tied to Jason’s dependence on Medea’s magical assistance; to help Jason is
now the only way to save her sister’s offspring (3.718-23).

While the evolutionary finding that males’ investment in their offspring is contingent
on the quality of their relationship with the offspring’s mother is a central issue in Euripides’
Medea, there is also arguably one instance of this behaviour in Book 1 of the Argonautika.
Jason has no intention of returning to Lemnos, even if Hypsipyle is pregnant. Instead, his
only thought of future relationship with any engendered offspring expresses their utility when
grown to his aging parents (1-904-9). He has never intended for his union with Hypsipyle to
be an enduring one. This is demonstrated when he regretfully refuses the kingship she offers
him, saying “for my part, I do not refuse out of disdain, but because grievous trials hasten me
on” (1.840-1). Jason has real feelings for Hypsipyle, however, and it is only his duty that
urges his departure. While he does not see himself as her husband, he can imagine his sons
being accepted into his family household. Given the peculiar sequencing, narratively and
creatively, of the events of the Argonautika and the Medea, Jason’s intertextual paternal
utilitarianism is of some analytical interest.

The importance of extended kin is paramount in the unfolding of Medea’s story, and
her disinvestment in her blood relations is tracked through Book 3.79 She lives at home with
her mighty father Aietes, her mother Eidya, her older half-brother Apsyrtos, and her older
full sister Khalkiope (whose four sons have been banished by their grandfather, for fear of
treachery) (3.239, 246-8).80 Race notes that the ages of these principal characters has been
calculated; Medea and her nephews are all between sixteen and twenty, Khalkiope around
thirty-five, Apsyrtos around forty, and Aietes over sixty.81

79 Byre (1996:8-9) describes Medea’s unenviable situation; “What is at issue in Medea’s inner
conflict, however, although it was half-obscured in the third book by the intensity of her erotic
feelings for Jason, is a moral and legal code to which the ancient audience certainly subscribed: the
code whereby a woman remains under the power and protection of her father or guardian until she
passes into the power and protection of her husband... implicitly rejected by Medea when she tells
Jason that she is now his daughter, wife, and sister... her real family, Apsyrtos included, is now
nothing to her.” See Ch.3, n.92, and this chapter, nn.54, 92, for a discussion of women’s conflicted
relationship to both natal and married families.
80 Medea’s mother does not make any direct contribution to the narrative, per se; Medea’s primary
affective relationship within the family appears to be with her sister Khalkiope. Cf. 3.239-46.
81 Race (2008:275, n.59) notes concerning the ages: “By Vian’s calculations, Medea and Phrixus’
sons are between sixteen and twenty, Chalciope around thirty-five, Apsyrtus (by a previous marriage)
around forty, and Aietes in his sixties.”
The relationship between Medea and Apsyrtos is therefore not one of equivalency between siblings, in terms of either age or parentage. Medea has more in common with her nephews: similar in age, they all were suckled by Khalkiope (3.732-5); and all live in desperate fear of Aietes (1.1202-6; 3.613-4; 4.379-81). Apsyrtos is predominantly his father’s son and support, a paragon of filial dependability, his father’s trusted rein-bearer (4.224-5) and commander of Aietes’ forces (4.305-6). It is into his custody that Medea will be delivered, should Iason fail her (4.376-8; 4.395-407).

It is little wonder then, that Medea, having cut her ties with her blood kin, should easily agree to the plan to remove the threat that Apsyrtos represents. They no longer enjoy, if they ever did, a brother-sister relationship of the close and mutual type enjoyed by other famous brothers and sisters in literature. The plan to assassinate Apsyrtos is contrived by Iason (4.395-407), but Medea herself embraces it without debate, offering both persuasive lies and air-borne enchanting drugs to lure Apsyrtos to his death (4.410-20; 4.435-44). Apollonios has no trouble attributing equal, perhaps even principal blame for the slaughter of Apsyrtos “by wicked murder” to his sister. The ultimate cause, however, is the deliberate infection of Medea with madness by “Cruel Eros” (4.445-51).

Despite her attempts to protect herself from the consequences of kin murder (e.g., covering her eyes as he is slain), Apsyrtos’ last act is to catch up his own blood to stain her silver-white raiment, ensuring that “the all-subduing, pitiless Fury” observes the crime (4.475-6). The actual killing of Apsyrtos is particularly horrific, and in an attempt to avoid

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82 Importantly, Medea’s brother Apsyrtos in Apollonios is very much older than she is, the trusted commander of his father’s forces, sent to forcibly extract his abducted sister (Campbell 1994:219). Cf. Hunter 1993b:66; Dyck 1989:461. Bremmer (1997:100) argues that Apollonios followed Sophokles (Fr. 546 Radt) in making Medea and Apsyrtos more genetically distant half-siblings, in order to “‘soften’ the crime of fratricide.”
83 Bremmer (1997:95-6) notes the close brother-sister relationships typical in the ancient world. Historical records indicate that parents encouraged this closeness, and conflicts were unusual. He points to the important role of the brother in protecting the sexual honour of their sisters. Bremmer (1997:100) points to the importance of the fratricide in all readings of Medea’s future actions: “By killing her brother, Medea not only committed the heinous act of spilling familial blood, she also permanently severed all ties to her natal home and the role that it would normally play in her adult life. Through Apsyrtus’ murder, she simultaneously declared her independence from her family and forfeited her right to any protection from it... Once Apsyrtus was gone, Medea was brotherless. There was only one way for Medea to go, then; she had to follow Jason and never look back.” Pavlou (2009:196) agrees that Medea’s murder of her brother renders her separation from her family “permanent.”
84 Euripides’ Electra and Orestes being perhaps the best, or most extreme example. C. F. Bremmer 1990:94.
85 Pavlou’s (2009:198-9) discussion of the semiotic role of Medea’s changing veil as an important contribution to her characterization observes that as she prepares to kill Talos, her manipulation of her veil, purpled with the stain of brother Apsyrtos’ blood, enhances the sinister atmosphere of the scene.
pollution, Jason “cut off the extremities of the dead man, licked up some of his blood three times and three times spat out the pollution through his teeth, which is the proper way for killers to expiate treacherous murders” (4.477-9).

But the social opprobrium attached to kin murder is widespread, and culturally assumed. Herakles implies this as he goads the Argonauts into renewed commitment to the quest, incredulously asking them “Does a kinsman’s spilled blood keep us from our homeland?” (1.865-6). Neither Jason nor Medea can escape the inevitable pollution associated with the murder of kin, and the murder of Apsyrtos angers even Zeus, who decrees that they, and therefore the Argonauts, should “suffer countless woes before returning home” (4.560-1). Moreover, they must seek to be cleansed by Kirke alone (4.558-9). Hera causes the ship’s beam of Dodonian oak to advise them of this requirement, sending a storm to force the ship in the right direction (4.576-80).

Upon their arrival at Kirke’s house, they do not need to articulate their crime to her; their shame is visible in their demeanour, and she immediately perceives the true nature of their “sin” (ἀληθεοῦσας, 4.699). Without further discussion, she proceeds to enact the very detailed ritual of purification, although she has yet to discover the identity of the murdered party (4.691-717). She appears not to recognize Medea personally, but can clearly tell she is close kin, as they both bear the characteristic eyes of one of the descendants of Helios (4.725-9). Medea’s tale of the Argo’s expedition admits she went astray “on the advice of her distraught sister” (4.733), and that she and the sons of Phrixos were forced to flee Aietes’ anger. But her powerful aunt discerns the hidden truth (4.730-7). Yet, for all her sympathy, her respect for Medea’s supplication of her and the acknowledgement of their blood connection, Kirke will not give refuge to one who has shed the blood of a relative (4.737-48). This rejection, by her last remaining relation, creates “boundless sorrow” in Medea, and she has to be led from the house, weeping and terrified (4.749-52). Part of Kirke’s reluctance to harbour the pair may be inferred from her statement: “I do not think that you will escape Aietes’ heavy wrath for very long, for he will quickly go even to settlements in the land of Hellas to avenge the murder of his son, because you have carried out intolerable deeds” (4.740-2).

The righteous wrath of the gods seems almost superfluous beside the fury of a king deprived of his son. Yet part of Aietes’ anger probably derives from the unexpected breach of trust displayed by his daughter. When we first meet Aietes, we learn of the prophecy

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86 Race (2008.73, n.86) notes of this: “Punishment for killing a family member was permanent exile.”
concerning his future betrayal by his family. Aietes, trusting in the filial obedience of his more closely related offspring, believes this warning can only refer to his grandsons (3.597-605). But, as soon as his plans for the defeat of Iason have failed, it is his daughters who are the first to be suspected, given the cultural expectation that they would have succumbed to male persuasion (4.6-10). While evolutionary theory predicts kin-based altruism in terms of degree of relation, 87 Greeks believed in the natural immorality of women, coupled with women’s inability to resist their sexual craving, which was believed to be much greater than that of the male. 88 Aietes’ suspicions were in this sense inevitable, in cultural terms. 89

Medea’s fear of her father also proves well founded. Aietes’ anger is all the greater for being provoked by the very children who were once close to his heart. His desire to inflict full punishment upon Medea is so overwhelming that he threatens to deflect that wrath upon his own people, should they fail to locate and return her to Kolkhis (4.228-35). This is no empty threat, as is demonstrated through the Kolkhians’ willingness to abandon all thought of returning home when it is obvious that Alkinoos will not let them seize the girl (4.1206-10). The knowledge of what would await them is enough for them to sever all ties of their own with their families and homeland.

Arete confirms the likelihood of Aietes’ harsh reception of his daughter, citing other examples of fathers angered by daughters, who inflict cruel and unusual punishments upon them (4.1068-95). For as she states: “fathers are exceedingly jealous of their own daughters” (4.1089). Even Alkinoos, a famous king in his own right, who has never met Aietes, knows enough to fear him (4.1098-103).

We never hear in Apollonios of the fate of Khalkiope, whose contribution to the plot against Aietes was hardly insubstantial. We are told that even before Argos visits to enlist her help, Khalkiope herself had considered seeking Medea’s help to assist Iason (3.609-615). Hyginus’ Fabulae 254, however, places her on the list of “Those who were exceptionally dutiful”, stating “Chalciope, daughter of Aetetes, did not desert her father, though his realm was lost”, even though his Fabulae 3 reports that Aietes had killed Phrixus, and banished his and Khalkiope’s sons, fearing the prophecy of familial betrayal. 90 If Khalkiope did remain

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87 Hamilton 1964a, 1964b.
88 See Ch.3, n.59, for a discussion of Greek attitudes to female sexuality and eros generally.
89 Note, however, the contradictory view of many scholars that women maintained family ties in preference to allegiance to husband and husband’s children. See this chapter, nn.54, 79, and Ch.3, n.92.
90 Hyginus Fabulae 3 states of Aietes, “he had been warned by prodigies to beware of death at the hands of a foreigner, a son of Aeolus. Therefore he killed Phrixus. But Phrixus’ sons – Argus, Melas,
with her father after the affair of the Golden Fleece, it suggests either he did not punish her too severely, or that her filial attachment to him withstood his anger.

One of the most surprising modeling of familial relationship in the *Argonautika*, in terms of parental investment predictions, is the distinct emphasis on filial investment in parents, a phenomenon relatively unimportant in modern socio-biological analysis. Book 1 opens with several examples of proper filial devotion to the care of aging parents. This is illustrated in the selflessness of the aged Alkon, who sends Phaleros on the expedition, “in spite of his being his much beloved and only son” (1.95-100). The potential glory for the bloodline that may be earned by Phaleros outweighs even the comfort and security of the aging father. Also in the list of heroes that opens the poem is the family of the elderly Aleos, who, having lost two sons to the expedition, unsuccessfully attempts also to hinder his grandson Ankaios by hiding his armour. Ankaios’ father Lykoorgos stays behind to care for Aleos (1.161-7). Here the family avails itself of the opportunity of gaining familial glory, while also ensuring that the elderly patriarch receives filial support.

While Iason’s father Aeson makes only a pathetic appearance in this tale (1.262-4), Iason’s position at the end of the list acknowledges his maternal descent from Minyas (1.232-3), and Alkimede herself expresses most succinctly the gain that parents expect of their children, which she fears to lose:

How I wish that on this day when I heard to my sorrow King Pelias announce his evil command, I had immediately lost my life and forgotten my cares, so that you could have buried me with your own hands, my son. For that was the one hope still remaining for you to fulfill, because I have long enjoyed all the other recompenses due a parent. But now I – once so admired among Achaean women – shall be left in an empty palace like a servant, miserably wasting away out of longing for you, on whose account I enjoyed so much splendor and fame until now, for whom alone, first and last, I loosened my girdle in childbirth, because to me above all others the goddess Eileithyia begrudged many children. What distress is mine! Never once, not even in my dreams, did I imagine that Phrixus’ escape would mean woe for me. 1.278-291.

The narrator makes the sad observation that it is ever the fate of the old to be left as the young hasten away (1.315-16). The Lemnian Polyxo outlines the dependence of the elderly on the young to provide food, hard-won from the soil, as a woe “worse than war” (1.681-8).

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and Cylindrus – took ship to go to their grandfather Athamas.”

91 Compare this with the chorus’s intense consideration of the costs and benefits of parenting in Euripides’ *Medea* (1090-115).
Later, Khalkiope remonstrates with the very sons who have been restored to her, reminding them of her grief at their abandonment of her (3.260-7).

Iason himself is noted for his proper attitude toward the elderly; it is this admirable quality that has secured for him the ceaseless high honour accorded him by the goddess Hera (3. 59-74). Iason’s hope is that any potential children he may get from Hypsipyle will support and protect his own aging parents, should he not return to them (1.899-909). Hypsipyle herself is another example of good filial attachment; she is the exceptional Lemnian woman who alone saves her aged father from the slaughter that befalls all other Lemnian males (1.619-26).

Divine Helios’ relationship with his descendants is, however, one of continuing but selective parental investment. Helios will never age and falter, never succumbing to dependence on his semi-divine offspring. It is they who will depend on him, through the generations, for essential support and protection. His famous assistance to Medeia at the end of Euripides’ play is alluded to on three occasions in Apollonios’ Argonautika; first when the descendant of Helios – Aietes – is rewarded for the favor Helios did in rescuing Hephaistos in his chariot (3.232-4); secondly when Aietes recalls his ride in the chariot as Helios conveys Kirke to her home (3.309-13); and thirdly, when Aietes benefits from the use of horses Helios has given him, in his own chariot (4.219-21).

While Aietes has benefited by his relationship to his father, Helios’ later decision, in the mythological tradition, to assist the woman who has harmed Helios’ favoured son, seems problematic. The Greek valuation of glory above familial obligation explains it. The fame of the grandchild will far eclipse that of the son, and Helios will recognise this, loaning his chariot at the crucial moment to rescue his descendant, and enable her absolute revenge against the man who would threaten her own honour, and thus that of the family. The supremacy of glory vis-à-vis family and patriotic obligation is highlighted in Iason’s encouragement of the Argonauts as they depart from Kolkhis, treasure and maiden secured upon the Argo:

And now in our hands we hold our children, our dear homeland, and our aged parents; and on our great venture depends whether Hellas wins dejection or else great fame. 4.202-5.

All of these examples of the respect due to parents make the negative depiction of the naughty Eros, who wilfully defies his own mother Kypris (3.90-9), more apposite in the framing of the overthrow of Medeia’s proper filial devotion. It is entirely at the prompting of
Eros’ arrow that she begins to shift her loyalty from family to romantic object. It is wicked Love then that threatens to overthrow proper filial attachment and support, and Apollonios has created a complex illustration of this on several levels.

Medea’s first experience of love is intrinsically bound up with the necessity of separation from her beloved parents. Her dream of love finds her taking up the task in Iason’s stead, causing strife between her father and the Argonauts. This action results in having to chose between them, and she chooses Iason, causing her parents — a singular appearance here by Medea’s mother — “measureless grief” as well as anger. Medea wakes with a cry, horrified that she might so betray her family (3.616-35). In one sense she justifies her betrayal by the transference of her loyalty to her sister Khalkiope, also her “mother”, having nursed Medea as a baby, while Khalkiope’s sons become her “brothers” (3.724-38). Nevertheless, after Medea’s transfer of allegiance, she is aghast, stricken with regret for her filial treachery, seized by “shame and terrible dread” at the thought of deceiving her father (3.741-3). She suffers from unresolvable cognitive and emotional dissonance, from which her only escape appears to be suicide (3.770-801). The root of her agony is the inevitability of an irreversibly tarnished reputation, which even self-murder cannot mitigate:

... may I die, either by attaching my neck to a roof-beam or by swallowing life-destroying drugs. But nonetheless, even though I am dead, people will hereafter look askance and reproach me, and far and wide the entire city will shout out my fate and the Colchian women will savagely revile me as they bear my story on their lips hither and yon: ‘She cared so much for a foreign man that she died; she disgraced her home and her parents by yielding to lust.’ What disgrace will not be mine? Alas for my obsession! Truly, it would be much better for me to quit this very night in my room and by a mysterious death flee all evil reproaches before carrying out these shameful and unnameable deeds. 3.789-801.

Her mental anguish and her terrible treachery are all at the bidding of a goddess slighted of honours by a man far away; the “poor girl” is merely an unwitting instrument in Hera’s merciless contrivance against Pelias (3.1131-6). Medea’s disinvestment in her parents, her brother, and even her sister, for whom she expresses sincere love as she departs the family home (4.32), is thus in one sense unnatural, leaving her bereft of kin, and dangerously dependent on her husband’s goodwill and support thereafter; the mythological record

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92 Apollonios’ Medea is from the beginning torn between her family and the foreigner Iason, and this is the unresolved origin of her mental disintegration and narrative diminishment. As Phinney (1967:340) observes, that she will live to regret it by the time of the events of Euripides’ play is the point of Apollonios’ repeated use of the motif. Cf. Fisher 2004, on the role falling in love has in the process of maturation and separation from parents. The impossible tensions between a Greek woman’s loyalty to family and husband have been discussed in Ch.3, n.92, and Ch.4, nn.54, 79.
demonstrates the terrible consequences of this for her. But the fate of Apollonios’ Medea now hinges solely upon Hera’s design for the destruction of Pelias, made explicit as Hera intervenes yet again to ensure its swift execution by sending the Argonauts a fair wind to aid their escape from Kolkhis (4.241-3). Detached from her familial locus, Medea the sorceress becomes an isolated and lessened figure, her powers and presence greatly reduced as the *Argo* and its inhabitants pay the price in the Libyan desert for her treacherous kin-slaughter.

One of the kin relationships most fraught with the danger of kin-slaughter, albeit kin by marriage, is that of stepparent to child. Despite feminist concerns that the literary trope of the malevolent stepmother is gender-biased and damaging to the social perception of women, others have noted that the stereotype is grounded in historical reality, and is universal, as partly predicted by evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology argues that males and stepfathers, but *not* stepmothers, are more likely to commit very violent infanticide. The problem, then, lies in the emphasis given in literature to the violent nature of the stepmother, whereas the sociological evidence points clearly to the converse reality; while stepmothers can and do injure, even kill, their stepchildren, infanticide (and filicide) is much more likely to be committed by males, and male violence is more extreme.

Apollonios’ *Argonautika* follows on three separate occasions the narrative pattern found in many Greek texts in its negative depiction of stepmothers. It is first used when Jason’s mother Alkimede, facing his departure, weeps just like

> a girl in her solitude fondly clutches her gray-haired nurse and sobs, a girl who no longer has others to care for her but leads a wretched life under a stepmother who has just mistreated her with many rebukes, and, as she cries, the heart within her is bound fast with misery, and she cannot sob forth all the groans that well up. (1.268-77).

Apollonios again exploits this cultural assumption in Hypsipyle’s claim (undisputed by Jason) that the Lemnian girls suffered brutal treatment, even murder, from their savage stepmothers, while their fathers did nothing to help them (1.813-15). Finally, we learn that the Golden Fleece’s present location in Kolkhis is the result of Zeus’ need to intervene and save Phrixos from his murderous stepmother Ino (2.1179-84).

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93 Evolutionary anthropologists and psychologists also observe this disadvantage. Cf. Buss 2008:349; Barrett et al. 2002:126; Hrdy 1999b:xxv. See also Ch.1, nn.95, 106, 108, 109, and Ch.3, nn.93, 94.
95 Bourget et al. 2007:78; Daly and Wilson 1998:34, 60-1; Mesnick 1997:242; Scrimshaw 1984:449. See also Ch.1, n.122.
96 Watson 1995:18
Despite this liberal use of the ‘wicked stepmother’ motif, in Apollonios’ epic the Argonauts’ most dangerous relations are all, in fact, male; the sons of Phrixos all fear the “murderous cruelty” of their maternal grandparent, Aietes (2.1202-6), while Jason himself fears that his uncle Pelias would have had him torn limb from limb (2.624-6). The use of the motif, although founded in socio-biological reality, is seriously undermined in the narrative by the reality of the dangers facing these heroes, dangers entirely derived from the dynastic threat posed to the old by the young.\textsuperscript{97} The proper relationship of the young to the old – filial piety – is one of the Argonautika’s principal themes. But as both Greek mythology and modern sociology suggest, the young have much to fear from the old. Any post-Pindaric mythic version of Medea’s story references or alludes to the specific danger of parental infanticide.

One of the findings of a recent meta-study reviewing infanticide and filicide of relevance to Apollonios’ Argonautika concerns filicide committed by the mentally ill. While Medea does not become a filicide until ‘later’ in her mythological characterisation, the creation of the Argonautika post-dated other accounts of her murder of her children, and the writing and reception of it is clearly influenced by (and is intended to ‘explain’) these earlier versions of the story.\textsuperscript{98} As a coherent psychological phenomenon, then, the roots of Medea’s ‘future’ filicide are arguably present in the poem, pre-determining the filicide most associated with mental illness.\textsuperscript{99}

Typical symptoms displayed by filicides, especially mothers who kill older children, in the years leading up to the act include “major depression”, “psychotic illness”, “intense psychosocial distress”, “disorganized thinking and [an] unstable mental state”, and “suicidal ideation”, while women who commit ‘retaliating filicide’ “typically have personality disorders and a high incidence of suicide attempts.”\textsuperscript{100} While clinically rare, retaliatory filicide is demonstrably the type of child-murder occurring in Euripides’ play, and there is evidence that maternal retaliating filicide focuses preferentially on sons.\textsuperscript{101} Interestingly, mothers diagnosed with psychotic illness were also more likely to commit violent filicide

\textsuperscript{97} While murderous women do figure strongly in the epic, their targets are not the Argonauts themselves, but men who stand (or stood) in the Argonauts’ way: Apsyrtos, and the husbands of the sexually attractive Lemnian women.
\textsuperscript{98} See discussion on the Argonautika as a ‘prequel’ of Euripides’ Medea, this chapter, n.44.
\textsuperscript{99} Bourget et al. 2007:75. All footnote references by page number are to this meta-study.
\textsuperscript{100} Symptoms associated with mental illness, Bourget et al 2007:76-77; “suicidal ideation”, Bourget et al 2007:80; symptoms of retaliatory filicides, Bourget et al 2007:77.
\textsuperscript{101} Bourget et al 2007:77.
with a weapon, an aspect more common in males’ filicide, and to kill multiple victims.\textsuperscript{102} It was also found that depressed women reported thinking about their own and their children’s deaths days or weeks beforehand.\textsuperscript{103}

While Medea’s filicides lie far in her future, the roots of it lie here, delineated by Apollonios with accuracy and a keen appreciation of human mental disintegration.\textsuperscript{104} From the moment she is stricken with Eros’ arrow, Medea manifests numerous symptoms of cognitive and affective decay and collapse. Terrible dreams torment her, and she seems barely unable to control her own physical movement, attempting three times to visit her sister, before collapsing upon her bed (3.635-55). After she has agreed to assist Khalkiope deceive their father and help the Argonauts, Medea is again ravaged with internal turmoil, afflicted with insomnia, her body wracked with ‘psychosomatic’ pains, and her mind with thoughts of suicide (3.749-69). She imagines taking her own life by hanging or with drugs, before realizing that whatever her choices, her reputation will be destroyed if she aids Iason. Yet she cannot forsake him, for his resulting death would be more than she could bear (3.770-801). Unable to endure her quandary, she begins to open the chest that contains her lethal drugs. It is only the intervention of a god, with thoughts of the horrors of a dreadful afterlife and the joys of living that deflects her from carrying out the act of self-slaughter (3.802-21).

Medea’s obsessive mental preoccupation with the object of her passion is demonstrated at the lovers’ secret meeting; oblivious to all dangers, she forgets the time. It is Iason, whose attraction to Medea is almost an afterthought to the story, and in no way comparable to the emotional and mental obsession that afflicts her, who has the mental wherewithal to remind her of the need to return to the city (3.1137-45). Medea’s mental abstraction leaves her almost catatonic in his absence, ignoring those who are speaking to her (3.1155-62). In despair at her realization that her plot will be discovered, she again contemplates suicide, pushed to the brink of physical collapse, as her symptoms of distress demonstrate; “her eyes filled with fire and her ears roared terribly. Again and again she

\textsuperscript{102} weapon, Bourget et al 2007:78; multiple victims, Bourget et al 2007:77.
\textsuperscript{103} prior thinking, Bourget et al 2007:77.
\textsuperscript{104} Campbell (1994:4, 367) argues that through Medea’s descent into mental chaos Apollonios examines the effect of un governable Eros. In Book 3, erotic infatuation is indisputably depicted as a negative experience. He (1994:256-7) observes that, after she suffers the arrow of Eros, a list of Medea’s ‘symptoms’ appears (3.278ff.). Campbell (1994:262) also points to the detached accuracy of the narrator’s presentation of Medea’s condition as a “disorder which entails intense physical discomfort and emotional stress and disorientation.” As he (1994:260, 264-5, 376) notes, the power of eros destroys Medea’s ability to reason and her mental state quickly deteriorates into bleak misery.
clutched her throat; again and again she pulled on the locks of her hair and moaned in woeful pain” (4.16-19). Again, it takes the intervention of a god, filling Medea’s heart with “excruciating fear”, to forestall her self-administering poison and turn her mind once more to Jason (4.11-29).

After subduing the fleece-guarding serpent and fleeing with the Argonauts, Medea is a necessarily much diminished creature, no longer the powerful sorceress who can “suddenly halt the flow of roaring rivers and arrest the stars and the paths of the sacred moon” (3.532-3). She who once could charm the monstrous beast with potion and incantation (4.153-5) is later reduced to shrieking among the rest of the girls at the sight of a mere desert snake (4.1521-2). Her psychological deterioration, so much the focus of extensive detail in Book 3, is otherwise ignored in the latter part of Book 4. But the evidence is clear that Medea is a transformed woman.

Now married, Medea is a far cry from her earlier self. The haunting questions in the dark night of her soul have now been answered, and the answer is bleak. Medea’s heroic behaviour disappears, and Jason’s heroism (such as it is) does not expand to fill the gap. Nor is he by any means a satisfactorily supportive husband. The gift of twelve maids from Arete only serves in the Libyan desert as a frame of frightened femininity for a Medea reduced to mortal level, “a woman much like other women.” She only makes one further contribution to the expedition, in defeating Talos the bronze giant (4.1665-88). Only now does the narrator express astonishment, perhaps even lightly veiled disbelief, at her supernatural abilities, where once her proficiency, so essential to the mission, went unremarked (4.1673-7). The audience’s final direct glimpse of her is in Apollonios’ epithet, “sorceress” (πολυφαρμάκου, 4.1677), a somewhat ironic acknowledgement of her former glory, given her declining narrative importance and her complete disappearance from the latter action of the story. The last indirect mention of the dehumanised and diminished Kolkhian girl is actually at 4.1722, when “Medea’s Phaecian handmaids” laugh and flirt with the crew (4.1719-27). The role of attractive young maiden has passed to others, and Medea’s narrative future is sealed as the monstrous murderer of men’s sons.

105 Beye 1982:154, 159.
107 See this chapter, n.10, for discussion of this episode.
Conclusion

The characters and plots of narrative follow models of behaviour and motivation predicted by evolutionary psychology, as numerous scholars have shown. How do the various mythic versions of the story in the foregoing analysis depict Medea? Which archetypal elements are shared, and which are particular to each author? How does the intertextual Medea comply with or contravene evolutionarily predicted characterization?

Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian* offers relatively sparse material concerning Medea, but this is highly focussed. Relevant aspects of evolved behaviour and motivation based on reproductive maximisation are those concerning mating strategies, attractiveness criteria, and marriage. Material within Euripides’ play *Medea* concerning the eponymous character is ubiquitous, while wider characterization and action throughout the tragedy based on reproductive imperatives enhances understanding of her in context. The predictions concerning characterization relevant in the tragedy are those concerning mating strategies, marriage, jealousy, parental investment, kin association, infanticide, and status issues relating to investment decisions. Books 3 and 4 of Apollonios’ epic *Argonautika* afford abundant material concerning Medea. The findings of evolutionary psychology relevant here are those concerning mating strategies, attractiveness criteria, male opportunistic mating, romantic love, marriage, sexuality, jealousy, kin relationships, and aspects of mental state predetermining filicide.

In terms of mating strategy, Pindar’s Medea is originally reverent toward her parents, and disinclined to indiscriminate mating strategies. Falling in love, and helping Iason are results of divine interference and manipulation. Pindar’s Iason appears to agree quite willingly to marriage with Medea before his success in the tests to gain the fleece, suggesting a less exploitative approach to her help and affection than in Apollonios’ epic.

In contrast to Pindar, in Euripides’ *Medea* there is good evidence dealing with issues of mating strategy. The unending conflict between male and female reproductive strategies is clearly outlined in Medea’s great monologue on the woes of women. Euripides’ Iason epitomizes male relaxation of mating standards based on particular circumstances. He married Medea in order to gain the golden fleece and throne of Iolkos (although he did not succeed in this); he marries Kreon’s daughter solely to gain wealth and status, a typically male preoccupation.
Euripides’ Nurse notes that Medea is afflicted by mad love for Iason. This, perhaps, evoking Pindar’s description, anticipates the narrative development in the *Argonautika* upon the divinely inspired suppression of Medea’s exercise of discrimination in mating selection through the assault of erotic, irrational passion, and divinely inspired transformation in the *Argonautika*. The important difference is that Apollonios details her ongoing and alternating resistance and submission to the involuntary process of falling in love. There is clear evidence in the epic that Iason may be said to relax his mating standards (such as they are), in his need for assistance from the maiden sorceress. While there is good reason to read Iason as authentically attached to Hypsipyle, his romantic involvement with Medea cannot be said to be either immediate or enthusiastic, compared with hers for him.

Important aspects of attractiveness in both Medea and Iason formulated by Pindar were continued in Euripides and Apollonios. Pindar’s inversion of traditional gender attributes must have relied on audience expectation for them to be so remarkable. While Medea’s inclinations cannot be said to be spontaneous, I believe there is good reason to state that Pindar’s depiction of her deliberately inverts a stereotype of gender behaviour and motivation well understood by ancient audiences and confirmed through modern research. The usual female mating criterion of attraction to wealthy males with assured access to resources has in Medea’s case been circumvented through divine contrivance. Nor does Pindar remark on her youth or beauty. Instead, her most notable characteristic is her supernatural ability to prophesy, her powers as *pampharmakos*, and her decidedly unfeminine power of command over men. While her skill in magic is also common to other female characters in Greek literature, her power of prophecy and command are more closely associated with both narrative and evolved standards of male behaviour and attractiveness.

Conversely, Iason displays several problematic failures in heroic propensities, notably his dependence on a girl to achieve his quest, although Pindar does emphasize his physicality more than do Euripides and Apollonios. It is difficult to ascertain if Iason’s attraction to Medea is spontaneous, or related to traditional aspects of attractiveness. The pleasure he takes in their union remains narratively subordinate to his long-term goal of regaining his throne. While he has the leadership skills to assemble a crew, he does not appear to possess the bravery to simply overthrow his usurping uncle and reclaim the kingship.

Euripides’ play is more conventional than Pindar’s ode in its use of attractiveness markers. Audience and characters alike anticipate female interest in resources, while descriptions of female attractiveness are also in line with evolved human preferences. Iason’s new wife, for example, is much younger than his first, and both women are described
as possessing white skin. Jason, however, is not depicted as possessing either power or wealth, perhaps because he would then have no need to abandon his first marriage for another.

Attractiveness criteria in Apollonios’ epic, while continued from the earlier versions of the myth, demonstrate the importance of proper gender behaviour, and the dangers of inverted behaviour. While powerfullness is not one of the attributes of female attractiveness as predicted by the findings of evolutionary psychology, for humans at least, there are uncompromisingly powerful goddesses in the Argonautika. This may account for the fact that the narrative depicts the powers of the semi-divine female characters as conceptually problematic. Medea herself is described by Apollonios principally in terms of her incontestable magical abilities, and the conceptual difficulty in this is resolved through a concomitant darkening and diminishment of her powerfullness.

Despite the problematic and occasional female espousal of attributes of male attractiveness and behaviour (power and wealth), youth and beauty are highly focal aspects in the Argonautika’s depictions of all female characters, as predicted, although female beauty is also framed as distracting and dangerous. The epic offers titillating and dangerous femininity, and then safely neutralizes it. The Lemnian episode in Book 1 serves a similar function.

Jason in the Argonautika offers little in terms of resources or position, in common with the Jason in Pindar and Euripides. His assets are beauty and articulateness, neither found to be evolved elements of male attractiveness. The description in Book 3 of him being beautified by a goddess invites comparison with the Homeric model of enhanced feminine beauty of women through divine assistance. The epic’s concern with the inversion of gendered behaviour in women as dangerous is also evidenced in Jason’s problematic lack of certain heroic qualities, although readings of him as feminized perhaps go too far.

While Jason may not figure as an example of wholesome masculinity, his indulgence in male opportunistic mating is featured in both Pindar and Apollonios. Pindar differs from Apollonios in placing Jason’s visit to the Lemnians after his marriage to Medea. While the text is vague about exactly which of the Argonauts engage in short-term and opportunistic mating behaviour, there is no evidence that Jason, newly married to Medea, fathers any child upon Hypsipyle, as he does in the Argonautika. While Apollonios points to opportunistic mating efforts as the cause of the slaughter of the Lemnian men, the Lemnian episode depicts Jason’s short-term mating with Hypsipyle as both natural and mutual, under proper male control, and ended on his own terms. This is contrasted to his relationship with Medea, who
most atypically refuses to allow the opportunistic Iason to abandon her after availing himself of her necessary help, despite the epic’s repeated and suggestive reference to the tale of Theseus and Ariadne.

Apollonios’ narrative also differs substantially from other treatments of the Medea mythic complex in its serious and accurate examination of the process of erotic infatuation, or romantic love. The god Eros and the effects of *eros* are both depicted as coercive, ungovernable, and antagonistic, and Medea’s experience of falling in love is almost entirely a negative one. Pindar’s Medea, however, is driven by desire not for Iason, but for Hellas, while Euripides’ furious Medea focuses on the injury to her honour, rather than to her heart.

All three texts, regardless of their depiction of love between Medea and Iason, share a concern with contravention of marriage conventions. The most enduring contribution of Pindar to the Medea character complex is the emphasis he places on their self-accomplished marriage, which directly violates both evolved human behaviour and the ideology of ancient Greece (as well as a good many modern human societies). At several levels, this atypical lack of parental (patriarchal, at least) approval and control of their marriage signals the disastrous destiny ahead of them.

Euripides too considers questions of marriage. The most important purpose of marriage is reproduction, and this is confirmed by the prominence and precious estimation of Medea and Iason’s sons in Euripides’ play. The question of strategic reproductive conflict between the sexes is also highlighted by the depiction of issues in the tragedy around male serial monogamy, and female rejection of polygamy. Medea’s feigned compliance with Iason’s ‘polygamy’ is all the more effective in its shocking volte-face because of audience expectation (ancient and modern) of female resistance to any sharing of male investment and resources.

Apollonios’ epic provides several illustrations of ‘proper’ forms of marriage, in which girls are subject to family control, especially male control. In taking control of her marriage Medea continues the dangerous example set in Pindar. Apollonios relies on audience knowledge of her terrible future, as presented by Euripides, to mitigate her offence against custom and expectation. The relationship of marriage to female fertility is emphasized in Book 4 through Alkinoos’ decision that Medea’s fate will rest upon whether she has yet conceived a child.

That enforcement of female chastity as a necessary predeterminant and corollary of marriageability is a primary male concern is evidenced in the *Argonautika* in Alkinoos’ determination to protect Medea only if she is properly married to Iason, and her sexuality
and fertility properly under male control. Apollonios’ Medea is depicted as both contravening and fulfilling conflicting cultural expectations of maidenly self-control and surrender to sexual abandon. Her repeated vacillation throughout Book 3 between refusal and submission to *eros* is used to illustrate the dangers of immoderate lust.

In contrast to Apollonios’ epic, Euripides’ play considers questions of female sexuality through its examination of the motivations for Medea’s jealousy. While Iason continually frames this as sexual, the textual evidence confirms her despair is founded in his disinvestment in herself and her offspring. Her jealous response is, however, atypical in its intensity and in its expression in murderous violence. An evolutionary literary interpretation of Euripides’ *Medeia* supports critical reading of a ‘masculinization’ of the character of Medea, insomuch as the degree of her violent response is more typically found in male behaviour.

While the defining jealousy of the Euripidean Medea has yet to develop in the fictional world of Apollonios’ *Argonautika*, the epic deliberately raises the same question of jealousy in its extensive description of the Lemnian women’s situation. In common with, and as comment on, Euripides’ *Medeia*, the jealousy of the Lemnian women appears on first reading to be sexual. Closer analysis of Hypsipyle’s tale however demonstrates female concern for resource appropriation and lack of respect for ousted wives and offspring. The point of the story is to illustrate the dangers of unrestrained or unwise concubinage, as in Euripides’ tragedy. While Apollonios expresses sympathy with the Lemnian women, their crime does not escape criticism. It is sometimes overlooked that the husband-murdering women also coolly disinvested in their own young sons.

Issues of parental investment and disinvestment in offspring arise again and again in Euripides’ *Medeia*. Choral comment on the positive and negative aspects of bearing and rearing children is frequent, and the play concludes with Iason suffering the worst fate to befall a man: childlessness. The children themselves, however, are callously treated by both of their parents as instruments of potential investment return. Despite this, both parents also love their children, Medea more manifestly before their death, Iason afterward. Medea’s conscious disinvestment in her children in the tragedy is the result of a combination of multiple predetermining factors: paternal abandonment and disinvestment, her separation from maternal kin, and her own relative youth. Additionally, her own reproductive future potential is better optimised through disinvesting in her ex-husband’s existing offspring. Iason’s disinvestment in his offspring follows a similar logic.
Iason’s disinvestment decision comes through his recognition that mating with the royal house of Korinth will enable an optimum future for his bloodline through a younger wife with better social connections. It is only when this scenario is compromised that Iason displays renewed connection with his extant offspring, as the truth dawns on him that sons already gotten are worth more than sons imagined. While it seems likely that this is a comment on political events in 431 BCE, it is also a truth universally acknowledged.

Issues of parental investment run throughout Apollonios’ epic, more specifically the recurrent theme of ambivalence in mother-son relationships involving the undesirability and impossibility of maternal control. There is also good evidence in the Argonautika that males’ investment in their offspring is highly contingent on the quality of their relationship with the offspring’s mother. Iason’s union with Hypsipyle will likely produce a son (and Apollonios’ audience knew that it would), but Iason, about to depart from Lemnos, and with no intention of taking her with him in marriage, sees no reason to invest in his unborn son. In another oblique reference to Euripides’ utilitarian characterization, Apollonios’ Iason is more than willing to profit from his adult son’s existence. Iason’ hope that his future child will care for its aging grandparents indicates that despite his exile, his relationship with his family continues.

Medeia’s withdrawal of parental investment in Euripides’ tragedy, however, is partially motivated by an irremediable discontinuance of kin association. Pretextually, her flight from her Kolkhian home and family has been compounded by her murder of her father’s son and heir. She has placed husband before family and the terrible result is of her own making. Her unexpected rescue by her grandfather in the final scene of the play therefore comes as a narrative surprise, but one that is explicable in terms of evolved kin altruism. Helios is the famous ancestor of famous Greek sorceresses, Medeia most of all. Her pride in his bloodline and her refusal to allow herself to suffer loss of honour is, thus, suitably rewarded.

The Argonautika differs from Euripides’ tragedy in its emphasis upon filial investment in parents, a social phenomenon somewhat overlooked in modern evolutionary psychology, but consonant with the realities of preindustrial culture. ‘Good’ females in the epic exemplify proper attitude to parents, while Medeia is once again framed as contravening expectations. Medeia’s disinvestment in parents is a result of Eros’ attack upon her. Through this, Apollonios focuses attention on the threat to family cohesion from erotic, romantic love. Reference to Helios and his chariot alludes to Euripides’ Medeia, and the important and renewed kin relationship she enjoys with him, despite her earlier rejection of
her family. Greek idealization of glory above even familial loyalty explains the endurance of
this narrative element, a motif also seen in the assembling of the Argonauts in Book 1.

Another aspect of dysfunctional kin relationships raised in both Euripides and
Apollonios is the destructive role of stepparents within family structures. Medea’s ‘mercy’
 killing of her children in Euripides’ play implies their fate under a second wife and
stepmother is enough to justify such an act. The Argonautika on three occasions echoes, and
perhaps questions, the negative depiction of stepmothers found in other Greek literature.
Evolutionary psychology has found that it is stepfathers and males generally (but not
stepmothers), who are more likely to commit murder within the family, yet all of the most
outrageous murders in the epic are, in fact, committed by the Lemnian mothers, sisters and
daughters, and by Medea. While Jason’s most potentially dangerous relation in the
Argonautika is his uncle Pelias, Aietes’ worst enemy is a female, albeit a traditionally
atypical one. As the audience of the epic knew, Medea would become Jason’s greatest foe
as well. Intertextual depiction of Medea as murderer of men’s sons and heirs offers
additional evidence for the argument for her masculinization. But infanticide per se is an
evolved response to circumstances, and perfectly ‘natural’ to females cross-spatially.

Euripidean Medea’s decision to disinvest in her current children, through their
infanticide (more properly filicide) is therefore incontestably pragmatic in terms of strategic
parental investment. Jason and the chorus both insist that the child-murdering Medea is
unnatural, yet her act fits within all of the observed parameters of parental filicide. It is
indisputably a clinical manifestation of retaliatory filicide, with certain elements of mercy
filicide. Medea’s actions and utterances through the play indicate she is suffering from
certifiable mental depression, an empirical predeterminant of the type of filicide she commits.
In terms of the atypically violent nature of the murder, however, Medea’s characterization in
Euripides’ tragedy does support critical interpretations of character masculinization.

There is also evidence in the Argonautika outlining aspects of Medea’s highly
disturbed mental state, which will predetermine the nature of her later filicide. While
Medea’s defining infanticide does not occur in Apollonios’ epic, it is deliberately
foreshadowed and prefigured in the acute description of her descent into psychological
despair. As an intentional prequel for Euripides’ tragic Medea, Apollonios’ epic offers a
detailed description of her psychic disintegration that gives indisputable evidence that she
suffers the same mental disorder found in those committing the same type of filicide depicted
in the tragedy.
There is in Euripides’ tragedy important evidence linking Medea’s disinvestment decision with the unfeminine overvaluation of the status of her personal honour. Medea’s mental deterioration is linked throughout the play with her increasing concern with Iason’s insult to her personal honour. Excessive sensitivity to perceived status is properly a male concern, both in ancient Greek and modern society. Medea’s atypical concern with the restoration of her reputation is another important factor in her masculinization.

While Euripides’ Medea appears to be enraged by the insult to her honour, Apollonios’ Medea is utterly traumatized by Love. The long-lasting negative effects upon her from Eros’ successful assault may be witnessed in Medea’s psychological deterioration in Book 4. Married and tamed, Medea is finally transformed from exotic princess to dependent wife. Cowering in the Libyan desert among her maidservants, she is now indistinguishable from them, in every sense. Her last act of magic, vicious and vituperative, frames her for the next narrative episode in her mythic nexus: the scorned and scornful sorceress of Euripides’ play, whose traumatic, transformative experience has never been fully addressed.

Pindar’s ode is the most widely foundational mythic version of the Medea story. In a sense, the episodes featuring her within the ode, though few, act as a kind of prequel, or ‘backstory’ to Medea’s later experiences, especially in Euripides and Apollonios. Pindar’s characterization of Medea is at variance with the literary character predictions of evolutionary psychology. This variance may be explained as intentional authorial inversion of audience expectation, in order to create a supernaturally powerful and frighteningly unfeminine Medea. This characterization is achieved in part through juxtaposition of her against a less than heroic Iason, and this is a pattern continued in the later mythic versions of her story. Pindar’s Medea also contravenes Greek norms for characterization of noble females. She is not depicted as beautiful, but as excessively powerful. She abets her own abduction, and is married outside of male control. She betrays her royal family in favour of a man without wealth or position, who falls well short of the narrative heroic ideal. This early and formative Medea is herself endowed with a puissance better suited to the narrative hero, a characterization continued in post-Pindaric depiction.

While much of Euripides’ description of gendered motivation and behaviour supports the predictions of evolutionary psychology concerning literary character, other aspects of his characterization of Medea contravene contemporary (and modern) audience expectations. Medea has been a good wife and mother in both Greek cultural and universal evolutionary terms, who is now deeply concerned with the effects of her husband’s second marriage and
accompanying disinvestment in herself and the children. Iason himself behaves in a manner entirely in accordance with evolved male behaviour, engaging in serial marriage to maximize his reproductive success. Euripides’ Medea exemplifies the irresolvable dilemmas faced in the context of a conflict of mating strategies, and the death of the children is tragically but entirely predictable in terms of their biologically (and logical) disinvestment decisions.

The characterization of Apollonios’ Medea, while not corresponding as clearly as Euripides’ to the behaviour and motivation predictions of evolutionary psychology, nonetheless fulfils some important audience expectations. The process of her falling in love, the root of her painful division from her family, is perfectly attuned with the findings of evolutionary psychology. Apollonios’ Medea experiences a complex and necessary change of character between Books 3 and 4. Reversal and internal contradiction not only mark her character, but her actions and motivations, at each step of the story. Iason engages in typical male opportunistic mating behaviour, and his only error in seducing Medea is his inability to successfully shake her off, the inevitable cause of his later catastrophe. Her refusal to play to the script set in myth by Theseus and Ariadne marks her as atypical in terms of female characterization.

Apollonios has also gone to considerable trouble to provide specific background evidence for the actions and feelings of Euripides’ Medea, attempting through the forensic examination of the origins of her painful psychic rupture to address questions raised by her furious insistence on Iason’s upholding of oaths and her vacillation between attachment and pragmatic disinvestment in kin, especially children. Although chronologically later in composition, Apollonios’ Medea underlies Euripides’ Medea, convincingly so.

All of these authors created a Medea who was by turns desirable maiden, loving mother, and murderous monster. At every opportunity she overturns audience expectation, and her unfeminine powers are highlighted through the depiction of Iason’s ambivalent masculinity. While the events of Euripides’ play take place in a single day, Pindar’s ode and Apollonios’ epic both frame the relationship between Medea and the man she made her husband as changing over time. Additionally, in all the texts examined in this thesis, the characterization of Medea is expanded through depiction of other male-female relationships, sometimes incorporating norms of male-female interaction, sometimes presenting unexpected acts transgressing normative gender roles.

All of these ancient writers achieve maximum audience engagement with characters and action through the integration of expected behaviour and thought with unexpected or
transgressive characterization. This is successful because authors and audiences share an experience and understanding of evolved human action and psychology.

The focus of all three works on gender inversion suggests that while elements of Iason and Medea’s conflict lay in their romantically inspired self-arranged marriage, their dysfunctional relationships with kin, and their self-centred view of their children as strategic instruments, the heart of their struggle lies in the human inability to fulfil conflicting reproductive imperatives, expressed in the gender expectations of their culture. While modern audiences idealize a greater degree of gender equity than did the societies of ancient Greece, many elements of gender conflict are still evidenced universally. Modern women and men struggle to survive, reproduce, and maximise the number of their offspring, as much as do Medea, the transgressive, powerful heroine, and Iason, the atypically pacifist hero, sometimes with the same tragic outcomes.
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