

University of Pardubice  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Variation on a Greek String:  
Medea according to Robinson Jeffers and Marina Carr

Master Thesis

2023

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Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
Akademický rok: 2020/2021

# ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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Osobní číslo: **H20461**  
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Téma práce: **Variace na řeckou strunu: Médeia podle Robinsona Jefferse a Mariny Carrové**  
Téma práce anglicky: **Variation on a Greek String: Medea according to Robinson Jeffers and Marina Carr**  
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

## Zásady pro vypracování

Divadelní hry *Medea* Robinsona Jefferse a *By the Bog of Cats* Mariny Carrové se vracejí k mytickému vyprávění o kouzelnici Médei, pokaždé však z jiné perspektivy. Práce se pokusí o komparaci těchto dvou dramát se zaměřením právě na rozličné uchopení podstaty tohoto řeckého mýtu.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Rozsah grafických prací:

Forma zpracování diplomové práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

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Datum zadání diplomové práce: **30. dubna 2021**  
Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **31. března 2022**

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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2021

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Petra Huková v. r

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Michal Kleprlík, Ph.D., who steered my attention towards Greek mythology and its modern adaptations. Also, I want to thank him for his guidance, especially at the beginning of the writing process, his valuable comments and patience.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unlimited support throughout my studies.

## **ANNOTATION**

This diploma thesis deals with the Greek myth of Medea and its depiction in modern tragedy, namely in the dramas *Medea* by Robinson Jeffers and *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr. The thesis is structured into four chapters. The first chapter is devoted to tragedy and myth. The primary focus is on the theoretical framework related to tragedy, the theories of Aristotle, Hegel, Nietzsche and Steiner are discussed. The next section introduces Greek mythology and the following section offers an overview of the development of tragedy as a literary genre. The second chapter is dedicated to the myth of Medea and it offers an overview of its gradual development from Ancient Greece to the brink of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The two remaining chapters contain the practical analysis. The aim of the thesis is to compare the two different approaches to the myth of Medea and also to determine the role and viability of tragedy and myth in modern society through the analysis of the selected plays.

## **KEYWORDS**

Medea, Robinson Jeffers, Marina Carr, Greek myth, tragedy

## **NÁZEV**

Variace na řeckou strunu: Médeia podle Robinsona Jefferse a Mariny Carrové

## **ANOTACE**

Tato diplomová se věnuje řeckému mýtu o Médeii a jeho ztvárnění v moderní tragédii, jmenovitě v dílech „Medea“ Robinsona Jefferse a „By the Bog of Cats“ Mariny Carrové. Práce je rozdělena do čtyř kapitol. První kapitola pojednává o tragédii a mýtu. Primárně se zaměřuje na teoretický rámec tragédie, představeny jsou teorie Aristotela, Hegela, Nietzscheho a Steinera. Další část se zabývá řeckou mytologií a následuje přehled vývoje tragédie jako dramatického žánru. Druhá kapitola je věnována samotnému mýtu o Médeii a nabízí rámcový přehled jeho postupného vývoje od antického Řecka až k prahu 21. století. Dvě zbývající kapitoly obsahují praktický rozbor vybraných děl. Cílem práce je porovnat dva odlišné přístupy k mýtu o Médeii a také určit roli a životaschopnost tragédie a mýtu v moderní společnosti, čehož se snaží dosáhnout prostřednictvím analýzy vybraných divadelních her.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Médeia, Robinson Jeffers, Marina Carrová, řecký mýtus, tragédie

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## INTRODUCTION

Greek myths developed in Ancient Greece thousands of years ago, their roots can be traced as far as 1700 BC and it can be presumed, that they stretched even deeper into the past. For centuries, they existed only in the oral form. One myth was living several lives simultaneously as the Ancient Greeks retold and innovated the stories to their liking. When writing was introduced, it tightened artistic freedom, at the same time, it stabilised the individual stories and helped with their preservation for future generations. A great number of the original myths survived to the present day witnessing the rise and fall of numerous empires and even whole civilisations. Such a long tradition suggests there must be something absolutely universal about Greek mythology as it found its way into literature and other artistic forms not only across centuries, but also across nations.

In the realm of dramatic literature, especially the genre of tragedy has been intertwined with mythical stories. The duration and seeming invincibility of the genre indicate that tragedies have not been written merely for the sake of writing or performing. The combination with mythology represents a powerful artistic form that provides insight into human nature, culture and psychology. Perhaps it is even able to alter human lives. However, not only playwrights have been interested in tragedy, it also attracted the attention of philosophers who noticed the potential of the genre and wanted to address it. Undoubtedly, the most famous and influential among them is Aristotle and his *Poetics*. The oldest surviving literary theory offers an insight into the genre of tragedy in its prime and even today much can be learned from the ancient philosopher.

This diploma thesis will focus on the myth of Medea in modern adaptations by Robinson Jeffers and Marina Carr. The thesis strives to explore their plays in relation to the general modern approach to tragedy and determine whether they indeed represent the shift from the classical focus on the physical outside world as they dive deep into the inner world of their characters. Firstly, the general framework of tragic theories will be established and developed. The primary focus will be on Aristotle's complex theory of tragedy and the individual parts that are crucial, according to him, for a functional and successful tragedy. Structure, plot, fear and pity, characters and other aspects will be introduced to create a solid background for the final analysis. Together with Aristotle, newer theories will be introduced, namely those by Hegel, Nietzsche and Steiner for the gradual development of tragedy did not go unheeded in the theoretical sphere.

Next comes a section dedicated to myth and mythology to offer an insight into the society of ancient Greeks whose way of life gave rise to the mythical phenomenon influencing the whole world. It will also be discussed how it is possible that their stories survived the transformation to a modern society based on science and rationality. The last part of the first chapter will provide an overview of the development of tragedy as a dramatic genre. The most influential tragic authors and their work will be briefly discussed to illustrate the gradual shift from its original form.

Secondly, the myth of Medea will be introduced and the general plotline summarised. Part of the second chapter will also discuss Medea in relation to the theory of archetypes by Jung. Five adaptations were chosen to help illustrate the evolution and transformation of this particular narrative. The works by Euripides, Seneca, Pierre Corneille, Jean Anouilh and Christa Wolf will be mentioned particularly as representations of the individual steps on Medea's journey from the savage murderess to the pitied woman calling for sympathy. These adaptations were chosen to cover the time span of the whole period from Ancient Greece to the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Finally, the dramas *Medea* and *By the Bog of Cats* will be analysed in the main section of the thesis. They will be discussed in terms of Aristotle's theory of tragedy in order to determine whether they follow the ancient. The main aim of the thesis is to compare the two completely different approaches to the original myth, as retold by Euripides, and to ascertain the purpose of tragedy in modern society, trying to uncover the reason why the modern audience still seeks this specific dramatic form. These two plays will be also examined from a psychological perspective with an emphasis on filicide and catharsis.

The spelling Medea is used throughout this thesis for it seems to be the most popular form of the infamous enchantress's name.

# 1. TRAGEDY AND MYTH

This chapter aims to follow the development of tragedy as a genre and its associated theories throughout the centuries to show whether it nowadays represents a dead genre, which is indeed living on a borrowed time, or whether it is still full of potential and ready to thrive at the hands of authors with innovative minds.

The basic presupposition of this chapter is that after George Steiner pronounced tragedy dead in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there would be no point in returning to the dramatic genre and producing tragic narratives and plays any further. Yet there certainly were and still are authors working with this genre and adapting it to their cultural needs and identities, such as Marina Carr whose *By the Bog of Cats* was published at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One of the criteria used to determine the viability of tragedy in this thesis is the aspect of change and movement. As D. H. Lawrence put it in his essay *Why the Novel Matters*:

There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another. (...) If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the essence of the novel, nature or life generally is constant change, a flowing quality that resists stagnation. Following Lawrence's approach, it can be suggested that the genre of tragedy can be pronounced to be "alive" when specific changes and innovations are found in the works of modern authors.

At this point, the interconnection of tragedy and myth needs to be addressed. Supporting the above statement, Alan H. Sommerstein explains that retelling a myth inherently includes a certain degree of innovation and that "the flexibility of myth was an invaluable resource to the tragedian."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, tragedy has always been connected to change, innovation and unexpectedness and the degree of its viability cannot be measured by no less than the element of innovation.

## 1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TRAGEDY

Tragedy as a dramatic genre explores serious and "heavy" themes through the narrative of suffering, downfall and frequently death of the hero or other main characters. As a starting

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<sup>1</sup> David H. Lawrence, "Why the Novel Matters," University of Toronto, accessed November 29, 2021, [http://individual.utoronto.ca/amlit/why\\_the\\_novel\\_matters.htm](http://individual.utoronto.ca/amlit/why_the_novel_matters.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Alan H. Sommerstein, "Tragedy and Myth," in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 169.

point, the Online Etymology Dictionary was consulted for understanding the terms *tragedy* and *tragic*, before immersing in the works of major philosophers who commented on tragedy. This approach was chosen for the etymology can provide deeper insight into the journey of the word and the genre respectively.

The meaning of *tragedy* as we know it today, namely “play or other serious literary work with an unhappy ending,” emerged in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century from French, which borrowed it from Latin and/or Greek. The most important part concerning the development traces back to Greek “tragodia,” which similarly referred to a poem/play with an unhappy ending. However, the origin of the term itself could be described as hazy since the meaning would be “apparently literally “goat song.”” As one of the possibilities, the dictionary suggests a connection with satyric drama, during which the actors were dressed in real goatskins.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the adjective *tragic*, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century referring to “calamitous, disastrous, fatal (resembling the actions in a stage tragedy)”, traces its roots through Latin to Greek “tragikos” (again in the sense of relatedness to tragedy) which literally meant “goatish, of or pertaining to a goat.” Since 1913, tragic is also used in the translation of the Greek term “hamartia” as a tragic flaw.<sup>4</sup> Not even Aristotle, whose work on tragedy is discussed in the following paragraphs, managed to provide a clear explanation of the origins of tragedy for he simply states that tragedy “developed from improvisations,” namely from “the leaders of the dithyramb.”<sup>5</sup>

Following the introduction to tragedy through the linguistic origin of the term itself, Aristotle’s *Poetics* is presumably the best starting point of the journey across centuries, nationalities and approaches to the genre of tragedy, also in connection with myth. Since Aristotle was a near contemporary of the classical Greek authors, he sheds light on the original form and structure as developed by Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. In essence, Aristotle laid the foundation for the critical study of poetry and drama not only of his time, but also of the works of authors who are yet to come.

Euripides’ *Medea* stands as an inspiration and representation of the tradition with which the latter authors led dialogues trying to capture the essence of the narrative while adopting various new approaches and strategies for telling the story of lovelorn Medea.

Firstly, Aristotle explains that among other mimetic genres, such as epic poetry,

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<sup>3</sup> “Tragedy (n.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, last modified June 30, 2019, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/tragedy#etymonline\\_v\\_16855](https://www.etymonline.com/word/tragedy#etymonline_v_16855).

<sup>4</sup> “Tragic (adj.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, last modified February 13, 2014, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/tragic#etymonline\\_v\\_16856](https://www.etymonline.com/word/tragic#etymonline_v_16856).

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 8.

comedy or music for pipe or lyre, tragedy is also an imitation, but it differs from the other by the medium, object or mode that the author chooses. In terms of medium, there can be variation from unaccompanied usage of language, for which Aristotle had no name, to a combination of all possibilities at once, for example, “rhythm, melody and verse.” Even though tragedy can make use of all of them as well, they cannot be used simultaneously, one must always follow the other.<sup>6</sup>

“Those who imitate, imitate agents; and these must be either admirable or inferior. [...] The very same difference distinguishes tragedy and comedy from each other; the latter aims to imitate people worse than our contemporaries, the former better.”<sup>7</sup> Thus Aristotle describes the objects that can be imitated in the abovementioned genres, namely stressing that tragedy aims to imitate people, the agents, who are better than us. Nevertheless, in the following paragraphs, it will be explained that the objects of imitation are only secondary when it comes to the plot, the action itself. The mode in which the objects are imitated can differ, either it can be expressed by narrating “or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity.”<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle states that once comedy and tragedy appeared, poets immediately adopted one of the two forms and preferred them over the predecessors for they were perceived as “greater and more highly esteemed.” During its gradual development, tragedy has inevitably undergone a series of changes, additions or reductions of various aspects, until it reached its “natural state.” Among the authors who significantly influenced the progress are Aeschylus and Sophocles. After Aeschylus added a second actor and „reduced the choral parts” thus making the spoken dialogue more prominent, Sophocles took the structure one step further and introduced not only the third actor, but also the scene-painting. Especially the emphasis on the spoken word helped the genre to gain its seriousness through the change of verse type as the iambic verse was closer to the speech.<sup>9</sup>

The phrase “natural state” seems to suggest that already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the time when Aristotle lived and composed his works, tragedy was perceived as complete and therefore with no need for further requisite evolution. However, as the second chapter will show, the changes came gradually even many centuries later that Aristotle could not foresee.

Aristotle’s comprehension of tragedy clearly stresses the importance of action and also performance of the actors who are responsible for it. Although the actors represent an important

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 8.

part of the whole, Aristotle is more concerned with the plot.: “Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.”<sup>10</sup>

For a tragedy to work as a whole, it needs “six component parts, which determine the tragedy's quality: i.e. plot, character, diction, reasoning, spectacle and lyric poetry.” These are the features that can be found in all tragedies, but, as he emphasizes, the construction and the plot are what can make a tragedy basically immortal or stillborn as “well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity”.<sup>11</sup> This is one of the reasons why certain modernist authors, such as Virginia Woolf, could have never written a tragedy in compliance with Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Modernists experimented with the form and plot, two fundamentals that are crucial for a well-written tragedy according to Aristotle. The flow of time in modernist writing is to a degree unpredictable, though there are certain patterns, such as subjective perception of time when one is bored or contrarily running late, and the unity of time is often stretched or outright broken. Considering action, the plot is usually rather uneventful or the individual affairs lack proper structure and gradation leading to a resolution.

It needs to be stressed that the plot, comprised of the beginning, middle and end, is perceived by Aristotle as “the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy,” which puts the character in the second position and reasoning in the third. By reasoning, he means the way people argue or “put forward some universal proposition.” Simply, the possible tools they can use to speak their mind.<sup>12</sup> The plot cannot reach beauty solely through perfect structure, it also requires a certain “magnitude,” though the ideal length is hard to define. Again, an “adequate” definition is provided: “the magnitude in which a series of events occurring sequentially in accordance with probability or necessity gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune.”<sup>13</sup> Focusing also on the inner logic of the story, for no length or structure would provide a pleasurable experience if the audience would not be able to follow or believe the performance before their eyes.

Sommerstein points out that the duration of tragedy could not embrace extended periods of time and simultaneously “the characters had to be left at the end in a position consistent with their future fate” for the audience knew the characters and their status and destiny within the

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 12–13.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 14.

mythical sphere. *Antigone* by Sophocles is introduced as the creative solution to this problem. Sophocles freely changed the “route” of the narrative in order to reach the known destination. In other words, without changing the outcome, he managed to surprise the audience and create an original piece of work. In addition, his *Antigone* became so popular that “his innovations” broke the tradition and actually became “the constitutive elements of a new Antigone myth.”<sup>14</sup>

Aristotle explains that the “poet says what would happen, not what happened [...]. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars.”<sup>15</sup> However, seeing the bigger picture from today’s modern standpoint, Sommerstein argues that the distance between what would or precisely could happen – a myth – and what happened – real history – was in fact “far from clear-cut” in Ancient Greece. He refers to historian Thucydides who was certain that the myths were built upon and around genuine historical people (Minos), places (Troja) and events (Trojan War), of course, enriched with “poetic exaggeration” and “supernatural element”. Although, Aristotle drew a strict line between the themes the poets could choose from, today it is much harder to distinguish between the real and probable. Sommerstein believes the reason why Aristotle noticed that tragedies tend to opt for mythical events over the fictional ones is that myths “are *known* to be the sort of thing that could happen because they *did* happen.”<sup>16</sup>

For common Athenians at that time, the mythical characters were more real, or at least as real as, their predecessors and other people only “of four or five generations back.” On the other hand, the nature of myth equalled variability. “There was never any single, authoritative, canonical version of the traditional stories,” Sommerstein highlights, thus supporting Aristotle’s lecture on the creative approach to the storyline. Mythology also had an immense impact on people from early childhood as myths were “learned by children literally at their mother’s knee” and later memorized at schools in various forms of poetry.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, they knew the stories very well and could tell when the innovation did not fit into the mythical universe, or to put it differently, when the innovation caused an inconsistency in the highly developed system of relationships and actions for “*any element may be altered, so long as the alteration does not impact severely on other stories which are not, on that occasion, being told.*”<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the myth of Medea, the unalterable element seems to be the crucial act in

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<sup>14</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 165.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 163.

<sup>17</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 164.

<sup>18</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 167.

which she murders her children. Interestingly, the murder itself was one of the innovations added by Euripides as in the previous versions the children died as well but not by Medea's hand, meaning the myth underwent a similar process to Antigone and Sophocles' innovations that became canonical. Sommerstein also notes that even though the change of plot was "drastic," it was "consistent with Medea's traditional persona" for she "murdered and dismembered her brother, duped the daughters of Pelias into killing their father, and later plotted to destroy the young Theseus."<sup>19</sup> Taking her violent actions into consideration, it comes as no surprise that the audience did not struggle to accept Euripides' development of the story.

Turning back to Aristotle, as abovementioned, he appeals to writers and poets not to keep repeating what had already been said a thousand times, to break away from tradition and realise that beauty lies within the new inventions of the plot, not in the linguistic form.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, he recommends the following strategy for building a tragedy: "The construction of the best tragedy should be complex rather than simple; and it should also be an imitation of events that evoke fear and pity, since that is the distinctive feature of this kind of imitation."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Aristotle strictly narrows down what type of a person and what exact events must be present in order to provoke emotions. He makes a connection between pity and "undeserving suffer," while fear arises when the audience can identify with the character. The shift towards "bad fortune" is the ideal result of the tragedy.<sup>22</sup> Especially the phrase "evoke fear and pity" should be highlighted for another term related to this concept is *catharsis*. Catharsis is the emotional effect that tragic drama has on the audience and it is crucial to allow a *cathartic release* when the audience can feel and purge their emotions. In modern psychology, it is believed that catharsis can lead to better mental health and well-being.

Instead of a "decent," "deprived" or "wicked" man, the storyline needs an "intermediate" character who would not stand out as a "moral excellence." The bad fortune should be based on a significant mistake which is not, however, caused by a "moral defect." The character should come from one of the closed circles of families that proved to be popular with the authors as well as with the audience, namely "Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus" and some others, in order to put the character at the beginning into a position of a highly respected one enjoying the merits of life.<sup>23</sup> Sommerstein states that "virtually all ancient Greek tragedy was based on myths." Supporting Aristotle's claim, that the

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<sup>19</sup> Sommerstein, "Tragedy and Myth," 168.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 21.



stories were focused on a closed circle of families, and even agreeing that the same narratives were recycled “over and over again.” He points out, that only Sophocles himself wrote three tragedies on Thyestes.<sup>24</sup>

Such structure of the plot, making use of an “intermediate” type of character, can be found among others in the works of Euripides who was even criticised for it. However, Aristotle defends him and insists that this is the “correct” way of assembling a tragedy labelling Euripides “the most tragic of poets.”<sup>25</sup>

Leaving neutral relationships and enemies aside, Aristotle advises to focus on distress and misery that occur in intimate relationships, naming for example fratricide, patricide and the like. Speaking of the “traditional stories,” he explains that the original storylines cannot be radically altered, however, the authors have more than one possibility of how to approach and use them. First of all, they can follow the traditional style of “old poets” when the characters are “acting in full knowledge and awareness.” Euripides’ Medea is highlighted as an illustration since she is fully aware of the fact that she is killing not only children, but her own children for that matter. In the other two possibilities, ignorance comes into play. The difference lies within the moment when the character awakens and realizes the truth, it can come before or after “the terrible deed.” In the former case, the character realizes for example the identity of the near victim on time and can stop the action. In the latter, the “irreparable deed” is completed while the person is still ignorant only to realize the horrible truth afterwards. Aristotle sees no other possibility for “the agents must either act or not act, either knowingly or in ignorance.”<sup>26</sup> However, not only the characters were kept in ignorance. Sommerstein adds that the authors were “holding its audience in a varying combination of knowledge and ignorance, creating and frustrating their expectations.”<sup>27</sup>

Concerning the characters, Aristotle names four areas that the artist should “aim at.” The stress is put on “goodness,” which depends on “a deliberate choice; the character is good if the choice is good.” The remaining factors are “appropriateness,” “likeness” and “consistency.” All of these terms seem to be rather self-explanatory. For instance, the character is expected to act according to their usual ways, reflecting their background and their distinct attributes even if it should mean being “consistently inconsistent.”<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Aristotle suggests that the chorus should be approached as one of the

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<sup>24</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 163.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 177.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 24.

characters, as an actor, thus ensuring it indeed becomes a part of the whole and contributes to the production. He explicitly names Euripides as a bad example of such an approach while Sophocles is praised.<sup>29</sup> The role of the chorus in tragedy is quite unique for its purpose is trying “to illuminate the story being enacted by referring or alluding to a different story that can be seen as in some way related to it.” For example, Medea murders her children and afterwards, the chorus takes the stage to sing about Ino because, with Medea, they were the only mothers who killed their children. Sommerstein also adds that the mention of this fact, as presented in the tragedy about Medea, helps to date Sophocles’ *Tereus*, since it also features a woman killing her child, which implies that there existed a different version of the story at the time Euripides was writing *Medea*.<sup>30</sup>

On the grounds that tragedy is actually “an imitation of people better than we are,” Aristotle invites the authors, to “imitate” as well, he wants them to try and follow the lead of other artists, namely “portrait painters” who “paint people as they are, but make them better looking.” This does not mean they should depict their characters as perfect and flawless, they should not hesitate to mimic some flaws, but at the same time, they should make the characters for example “decent” despite the flaws.<sup>31</sup>

“The best recognition of all is that which arises out of the actual course of events, where the emotional impact is achieved through probable events, as in Sophocles’ *Oedipus* and the *Iphigeneia* (her wish to send a letter is probable). Only this kind does without contrived tokens and necklaces.” Once more emphasising the inner order and probability of the actions, Aristotle promotes this type of recognition as the best compared to the one arising from interference, which he puts in second place, while tokens and poet’s interference he deems “inartistic.”<sup>32</sup>

As for certain types of classification of tragedy, Aristotle distinguishes four kinds, namely “complex tragedy,” “tragedy of suffering,” “tragedy of character” and “simple tragedy.” Since “every tragedy consists of a complication and a resolution,” Aristotle suggests that if any tragedies are to be contrasted, it should be based on the comparison of both the complication and the resolution, basically on the plot.<sup>33</sup>

Aristotle also pays close attention to “diction.” Leaving aside the formal aspects of utterance forms, he lists features that comprise diction: “phoneme, syllable, connective, noun,

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<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Sommerstein, “Tragedy and Myth,” 174.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 26–27.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 29.

verb, conjunction, inflection, utterance.”<sup>34</sup> Aristotle’s final and crucial point concerning diction in tragedy stresses the importance of “clarity” but only without the loss of “dignity.” Clarity is connected to “current usage,” indicating the words and phrases meaning of which is not in any way obscure, while dignity is achieved through the usage of “exotic words” that disturb the ordinariness, for instance, metaphors, ornaments, abbreviations or lengthening. However, dignity should never prevail as it would lead to a “riddle or gibberish.” Therefore, “what is needed is some kind of mixture of these two things: one of them will make the diction out of the ordinary and avoid a loss of dignity (...), while current usage will contribute clarity.”<sup>35</sup> Although it is necessary to use all the non-standard forms “appropriately”, the greatest emphasis is put on metaphor for it is “a sign of natural talent”.<sup>36</sup> A summary of this advice can be found in a simple word – balance. The story should be clear but at the same time, it needs means that will bring the out-of-the-ordinary element. Aristotle underlines metaphors in particular on purpose, as they cannot be learned. They either occur to the author/poet automatically and with ease, or they do not and then the story lacks one of its core foundations.

To finish with Aristotle’s theory of tragedy for the moment, two more concepts need to be highlighted: episodization and complication together with resolution. Episodization is basically about creating the backbone of any story, more importantly also of any new adaptation of an already existing one, that the author decides to (re)tell. Aristotle insists that all stories “should first be set out in universal terms”. This means that whatever story the author chooses, the first step should be identifying crucial parts of the plot, in other words, the integral pieces of the story that cannot be omitted. These universal terms are the basis for creating individual “episodes” of the story that are then further elaborated.<sup>37</sup> The key episodes of Medea’s myth relevant to the scope of the two adaptations analysed in this thesis are: Jason’s betrayal of Medea and his marriage to the Corinthian princess, Medea’s elaborate revenge resulting in the tragic end and Medea’s escape.

The proper Aristotelian tragedy is also never complete without “complication and resolution”. These two terms essentially divide the story with the breaking point being “the change of fortune” – complication covers everything from the beginning up to it, while resolution encompasses the rest of the story from the change to the end.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 29.

Moving from the tradition of Ancient Greece to more recent approaches to tragedy, the well-known and often studied works on tragedy by two German philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche will be introduced and discussed. Lastly, George Steiner's views on tragedy and its end in the modern society will finalise this chapter concerned with tragedy and its theoretical background.

To introduce Hegel's theory of tragedy the works by Mark W. Roche will be used. He begins his account by stating that Hegel's theory gained popularity to the extent that is now "the most studied and quoted in the West."<sup>39</sup> Roche points out that "Hegel lived in an era of transition" and during his life, he experienced the French Revolution, the ensuing "movement of terror" and even the Industrial Revolution. Perhaps due to the times he grew up and lived in, Hegel's work did not focus solely on thought or theoretical contemplation, he incorporated also history and subsequently brought a "greater realization of reason, self-consciousness, and freedom."<sup>40</sup> Within this mindset, he focused on the "absolute" and tragedy that comes out as "the inevitable consequence of the absolute realizing itself in history." Roche explains the parallel between history and "tragedies of collision" simply by highlighting the fact that these tragedies have a tendency to "arise during paradigm shifts," which logically connects them to "historical conflicts, crises, and transitions."<sup>41</sup>

Concerns with the historical aspect and the tragedy's position therein is one of the most prominent differences between Aristotle's and Hegel's approaches to tragedy. As stated above, Aristotelian tragedy focuses on suffering, which provokes feelings of pity and fear, and more importantly it exists outside of history. Meanwhile, Hegel believed that "through [tragic heroes] a new world dawns." The choices the heroes face bring them into conflict with tradition and only after their choices are made can anything change. The claim that "many tragic heroes stand for truths that are too new to have a majority behind them," is used to explain that when a "new principle is in contradiction with the previous one, [it] appears as destructive; the heroes appear, therefore, as violent, transgressing laws." Even though the individual heroes may disappear from collective memory, "this principle persists, if in a different form" and influences and shapes the views of not only the past but also the present and future.<sup>42</sup>

Roche further claims that "the history of the philosophy of tragedy is marred by an overemphasis on reception, an undue focus on the (emotive) effect of the tragedy at the expense

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<sup>39</sup> Mark W. Roche, "Introduction to Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," *PhaenEx* 1, no. 2 (fall/winter 2006): 11.

<sup>40</sup> Mark W. Roche, "The Greatness and Limits of Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 51–52.

<sup>41</sup> Roche, "Introduction to Hegel's Theory," 12.

<sup>42</sup> Roche, "Introduction to Hegel's Theory," 13.

of tragic structure.” As already discussed in connection with Aristotle, tragedies are usually interpreted from the recipient’s perspective, how it affects the audience and how they react to it. However, Hegel together with several scholars, for instance, Schelling or Szondi, chose to focus rather on “the core structure of tragedy” – the plot, which of course does not deny Aristotle’s “interest in organic plots”. Roche emphasises that both of them shared this interest, yet “Hegel’s aspirations for organic structure may be said to exceed Aristotle’s: Hegel places far more emphasis on the way in which the hero’s flaw must be intertwined with, and, in a sense, result from, her greatness.” As mentioned above, Hegel was interested in tragedies of collision and his fascination with the structure brought a “new angle on the traditional motifs of fear and pity. For Hegel the audience is to fear not external fate, as with Aristotle, but the ethical substance which, if violated, will turn against the hero.”<sup>43</sup> Hegel basically takes attention and responsibility for the downfall away from an abstract and intangible, instead, he places it in the hands of the person who can either abide by ethical rules or break them. Roche draws attention to the fact that Hegel re-visits the idea of pity in order to show it as “sympathy” with the protagonist “who, despite her fall, is nonetheless in a sense justified,” not just a mere “sufferer”.<sup>44</sup>

“Thus, Hegelian tragedy has an emotional element: we are torn between the values and destiny of each position; we identify with the character’s action but sense the inevitable revenge of the absolute, [...]” Considering Euripides’ Medea, the audience would feel sympathy for Medea in her situation, yet at the same time they would realise that her actions cannot go without punishment. They can see also the other side of the coin, in this case, her husband’s point of view, the ethical wronging and the inevitable crash that stems from Medea’s doing. “The hero is both innocent and guilty: innocent insofar as she adheres to the good by acting on behalf of a just principle; guilty insofar as she violates a good and wills to identify with that violation.”<sup>45</sup>

The last point remaining to be made about Hegelian tragedy circles back to tragedy and its position in history, this time in relation to the inner psychology of the hero. As for the ancient tradition of the genre, “the characters completely identify with the substantive powers and ideas that rule human life,” there is no pressing need to challenge or explore the characters’ inner world. Contrarily, the modern approach allows “greater internal development of characters as

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<sup>43</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 54.

<sup>44</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 54.

<sup>45</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 54.

well as the elevation of more particular concerns.”<sup>46</sup> Roche points to this development as follows:

Whereas the most dramatic form of tragedy arises when the poles are embodied in two characters or institutions, Hegel also discusses the possibility of a tragic collision within an individual’s consciousness. An internal collision of this kind may become less dramatic because of the unity of two positions within a single self; however, internal collisions tend to be intellectually and psychologically more differentiated. They allow for richer characterization, a trait Hegel admired in modern drama.<sup>47</sup>

Though on the surface the modern tragedy may seem less intriguing due to the lack of the individuals’ influence on their surroundings, the “complexity and the contingency of circumstance” undoubtedly bring a rich and powerful experience to the audience as well.<sup>48</sup> Roche also suggests terminology to clearly distinguish between these variations and provides also one example for each: Sophocles’ *Antigone* represents “external collision”, while “internal collision” focused on the character’s awareness “of competing obligations” can be found in *Hamlet* by Shakespeare.<sup>49</sup>

Although there is no ultimate recipe for the best tragedy, the general consensus nowadays seems to be that “the artist should present full, whole and concrete characters, and the artist who presents abstractions – be it Corneille, Racine, or Ernst – falls short of the aesthetic ideal. The best tragedies avoid this danger by focusing on character as well as conflict.” There are several ways the author can draw near the ideal, the suitable method seems to be “presenting strong if complex individuals, and rendering the conflict not only complex and multifaceted in its ramifications and consequences but also immediate and existential.”<sup>50</sup>

Next, the philosopher to be discussed in relation to tragedy now is Friedrich Nietzsche who elaborated on this topic in his *Birth of Tragedy*, which was “bound to cause a sensation.” Scholar James Porter points out that the work was “speculative in the extreme, the work contained a good deal of modern mythmaking.”<sup>51</sup>

Porter argues that Nietzsche “gave new life to the modern reception of tragedy, especially in its Greek form” and that it was Nietzsche who enabled tragedy to “not only [rise] to prominence as a supreme literary and cultural achievement” but at the same time to become

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<sup>46</sup> Roche, “Introduction to Hegel’s Theory,” 17.

<sup>47</sup> Roche, “Introduction to Hegel’s Theory,” 16.

<sup>48</sup> Roche, “Introduction to Hegel’s Theory,” 17.

<sup>49</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 55.

<sup>50</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 65.

<sup>51</sup> James I. Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 70.

“a clarion call for modernism and a benchmark by which to measure the claims and aspirations of the modern world against the classical past.”<sup>52</sup> Undoubtedly, Nietzsche brought a new and unique perspective to studies of tragedy, and even though Porter recognizes Hegel’s influence in terms of “[locating] tragedy within the evolution of the human spirit as one of its key transitory stages,” he immediately follows with the claim that “it was Nietzsche who made tragedy into a touchstone of the future, and consequently of paramount importance for the present, [...], a form, [...], that had once struggled to come to life and that was now on the verge of being born again.” It is stressed that even though tragedy was once considered “a dry article of history”, at this point it became a “sign of possibilities [...] a sign and symbol of life.”<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the idea of tragedy as a fading, unimportant or even dead genre is not sporadic in the academic circles, this issue will be discussed in greater detail in the section dedicated to George Steiner.

Nietzsche’s framework concerning tragedy can be again compared to his predecessors, especially Aristotle’s. While Aristotle focused on the formal aspects, structure and inner functioning of the dramatic work and the subsequent performance on stage, “Nietzsche’s model is constructed not from the viewpoint of the tragic hero but rather from that of the observer.”<sup>54</sup> As Porter explains, in Nietzsche, the “emphasis [is] on the spectator which is also why tragedy is at bottom a metaphysical experience – or, rather, an experience of metaphysics. Tragedy shows us the illusion that we are.”<sup>55</sup> Here it can be also seen that Nietzsche is taking the effect of tragedy on the receiver one step further into the nonphysical realm than Hegel, who focused more on the moral or ethical impact. Nonetheless, the individual models are not to be compared in order to choose the best among them, rather, the aim is to understand the gradual progress in the theoretical framework surrounding tragedy. The insight will then be used to analyse the chosen re-workings of the myth in the modern sense.

The core of Nietzsche’s theory of Greek tragedy builds on “the opposition between the two Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus, who in turn stand for two antagonistic aesthetic principles that are nonetheless complementary and equally vital to the production of the highest art.” These two streams can be simplified as Apollonian equalling harmony and order while Dionysian represents chaos and emotion. Porter brings to our attention the fact that Apollo is associated with the “traits that are typically Hellenic and classical, at least to the modern

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<sup>52</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 68.

<sup>53</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 69.

<sup>54</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 77.

<sup>55</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 74–75.

imagination (simplicity, harmony, cheerfulness, tranquillity, and so on), while Dionysus and the Dionysian represent hidden metaphysical depths, disturbing realities, intoxication, music, and traits that are typically exotic and therefore unclassical (ecstasy, disorderliness, dance, orgy).” In tragedy, the Apollonian characteristics can be found for example in the structure of the plot, characters’ description that goes into great detail or the overall artistic representation of the world; contrarily, Dionysian aspects present in tragedy are best seen in the emotional intensity and connection to primal instincts, even dance would fall in this category.<sup>56</sup>

The synthesis of the two elementary diverse approaches undoubtedly can give rise to an interesting blend that may draw the best out of the mutual tension, trying to find harmony in the harsh reality of everyday life or heartless natural forces. It is understandable why Nietzsche praised and admired the dynamic union that made the audience and their feelings oscillate between harmonious beauty and ferocious chaos. Nevertheless, almost in the same breath, Nietzsche complains that this lively synthesis was lost in modernity:

Our whole modern world is caught in the net of Alexandrian culture, and the highest ideal it knows is theoretical man, equipped with the highest powers of understanding and working in the service of science, whose archetype and progenitor is Socrates. The original aim of all our means of education is to achieve this ideal; every other form of existence has to fight its way up alongside it, as something permitted but not intended. It is almost terrifying to think that for a long time the man of culture was to be found here only in the guise of the man of learning; even our poetic arts had to evolve from learned imitations, and the main effect of rhyme still shows that our poetic form originated in experiments with a non-native and, in the true sense of the word, learned language.<sup>57</sup>

Nietzsche complains not only that tragedy began to decline, but that it happened already with Socrates when its chaotic component was pushed aside by rationality and logic. The Apollonian element prevailed and tipped the scales in favour of the precise form and unbiased observation. The final blow seems to have come with Euripides who “innovated” tragedy by “rationalizing the imaginary devices of tragedy.”

Not only Nietzsche, but also Hegel claimed, that tragedy was on the decline, Roche provides the following summary: “For Hegel, like Nietzsche, tragedy vanishes in an age of self-consciousness and enlightenment. For Nietzsche, however, the obstacle to tragedy is the abandonment of irrationality; for Hegel, the problem is the dissolution of objective values.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 72.

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss, ed. and trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 86.

<sup>58</sup> Roche, “Greatness and Limits,” 58.



The last scholar to be introduced in this section is George Steiner. Following the pessimistic note set by Hegel and Nietzsche, also Steiner considers tragedy a dead genre with little to no hope of revival.

In “Tragedy and Myth” Steiner expresses his views on tragic drama, specifically its “sharp decline”. He claims that due to the historical development in Europe between 1914 and 1945 there is a “stiffening of the bone” distinguishable also in “the habits of language in our culture [which] are no longer fresh or creative responses to reality, but stylized gestures which the intellect still performs efficiently, but with a diminishing return of new insight and new feeling.” Steiner believes that tragic authors have lost the ability to create and innovate the genre and they are in fact incapable of bringing anything new and shocking to the reader/audience. “Words no longer seem prepared to assume the burden of new meaning and plurality which Dante, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Luther placed upon them.”. At the same time, he demonstrates his negative opinions on the “sociologists, mass-media experts, the writers of soap operas” and many others including even contemporary scholars and “teachers of ‘creative writing’”.<sup>59</sup> Steiner feels that especially “political inhumanity [...] has demeaned and brutalized language beyond any precedent” for it was used to “justify political falsehood, massive distortions of history, and the bestialities of the totalitarian state.”<sup>60</sup>

Steiner carefully draws examples of brilliant and famous authors from the span of centuries, thousands of years even, of the European literary history to represent the times when literature and, by extension, tragedy still flourished. However, it should be noted at this point that the time span Steiner refers to is incomparable to the antiquity that could be considered the golden age of tragedy. As Steiner himself later admits, it is still too early to judge the viability of a whole genre and he recognises the possibility of “a master of verse tragedy [who] may arrive on the scene tomorrow.” Nevertheless, Steiner is concerned that because of the prolonged misuse of words, they lost the ability to stretch and fully express their potential in meaning, Simultaneously, people are no longer able to listen thoroughly enough to notice the subtle nuances even if the authors managed to summon them. Steiner fears that humans are oversaturated with violence to the point where they grow “insensible to fresh outrage”. Steiner wonders whether it is still possible for the authors to think of “adequate” or even worse terrors to compose into art. He claims that “numbness has a crucial bearing on the possibility of tragic style” and that is why the “last war has had neither its *Iliad* nor its *War and Peace*”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> George Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” in *A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 159.

<sup>60</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 159–160.

<sup>61</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 160.

Steiner sees a glimpse of hope in Yeats, though not sufficient in his eyes to solve “the problem of full-scale drama.” He also has an idea of what needs to be done in order to bring tragedy to life: “It demands that that [sic] style be brought into contact with the ordinary everyday world. [...] The work of art can cross the barriers that surround all private vision [...] only if there is in live force what I have called a mythology.” A crucial part ensues: “Greek tragedy moved against a background of rich, explicit myth. The landscape of terror was entirely familiar to the audience, [...]” He points out that even Shakespeare worked with “a close yet liberal conjunction of the antique and the Christian worldview. But it still gave to reality shape and order.” Unlike modern authors who failed to “construct a mythology for the age” which is connected to “withdrawal from imaginative commitment which occurs after the seventeenth century.”<sup>62</sup> The topic of mythological background in the chosen works by Jeffers and Carr will be addressed in respective chapters.

Steiner explains the crises of modern mythology as follows:

After Milton the mythology of animate creation and the nearly tangible awareness of a continuity between the human and the divine order – [...] – lose their hold over intellectual life. [...] Where the artist must be the architect of his own mythology, time is against him. He cannot live long enough to impose his special vision and the symbols which he has devised for it on the habits of language and feeling in his society.<sup>63</sup>

Circling back to the topic of time, Steiner emphasises the extensive periods necessary for the development of profound mythology. He lists authors who tried to establish new mythologies and failed, for instance “D. H. Lawrence [who] worshipped the dark gods and the fire in the blood.”<sup>64</sup> Even though these attempts were unsuccessful, there is no cardinal reason not to believe that one day a “blanket” mythology will develop and these “personal” mythologies will fit into the bigger picture as a “mythology crystallizes sediments accumulated over great stretches of time. It gathers into conventional form the primal memories and historical experience of race.”<sup>65</sup>

However, not all scholars who deem tragedy in decline or even dead are utterly pessimistic. As stated above, Steiner sees a possibility of revival – though complicated. On top of it, Nietzsche announced “the arrival of a second tragic age.” Although Porter stressed that it “in effect never arrived,” the “prophecy” has been pronounced and it does not include a time stamp or expiration date, meaning it can still come true: “I promise a tragic age: the supreme

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<sup>62</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 161–162.

<sup>63</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 163.

<sup>64</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 163.

<sup>65</sup> Steiner, “Tragedy and Myth,” 164.

art in the affirmation of life, tragedy, will be reborn when mankind has behind it the consciousness of the harshest but most necessary wars without suffering from it.”<sup>66</sup>

After all, nature and life in general are full of patterns, cycles and repetition. Also, history repeats itself in longer or shorter intervals, empires rise and fall only to be either reborn or replaced by a similar system. Robinson Jeffers himself was a supporter of the “cyclical theory of history”, he refused the classicist narrative and did not believe that the ancient authors held the ultimate truth and power, instead, he challenged them and only used their work as a source of inspiration in order to create something new.<sup>67</sup>

## 1.2 MYTH

Myth and subsequently mythology have almost always been intertwined with the genre of tragedy. In order to understand tragedy in its entirety, myth needs to be addressed as it greatly contributes to the relevance and timelessness of tragedy as a genre. Tragedy in combination with mythology provides profound insight into human nature, culture and psychology. Mythology not only provides stories that inspire tragic narratives, they are also rich in symbolism and archetypal characters that allow the incorporation of hidden meanings while maintaining relevance for the audience by representing fundamental experiences or emotions. The universality of myths builds upon themes such as morality, power or love, which is again something that the audience can relate to. Myth can also greatly enhance the catharsis, or the emotional effect, that the tragedy has on an audience.

The term *myth* itself developed in 1830 from the French “mythe” to which it came through Modern Latin “mythus” and from the Greek “mythos”. However, Beekes believed it could have existed already before the Greeks used it in the sense of “speech, thought or story, tale”. In J. Simpson and S. Roud’s *Dictionary of English Folktale* from 2000, myths are defined as “stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion.”<sup>68</sup> Traditional myths can be defined as stories that are passed down across generations and often hold cultural or religious significance. However, these stories have never existed in isolation, on the contrary, they influenced and inspired each other and, eventually, they formed a coherent

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<sup>66</sup> Porter, “Nietzsche and Tragedy,” 82.

<sup>67</sup> Kevin Batton, “Jeffers and the Politics of Classical Reception,” transcript of speech delivered at Carmel Woman’s Club, Carmel, California, February 25, 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/36016460/Robinson\\_Jeffers\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_Classical\\_Reception](https://www.academia.edu/36016460/Robinson_Jeffers_and_the_Politics_of_Classical_Reception).

<sup>68</sup> “Myth (n.),” Online Etymology Dictionary, last modified March 28, 2019, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/myth#etymonline\\_v\\_19354](https://www.etymonline.com/word/myth#etymonline_v_19354).

system – mythology.

Jean-Pierre Vernant explains that the roots of mythology can be traced to the Mycenaean civilisation (roughly 1700 – 1100 BC). Only after the fall of this civilisation and the disappearance of the palace and the divine king, begins the era of *polis*, rational thinking and democracy.<sup>69</sup> Then theology and psychology of the Greeks changed, mythology lost its incomparable prominence and society went through significant transformations. Mythology precedes even such key notions as democracy that are inseparably associated with Ancient Greece today. This is the reason why already Euripides was able to not only rely on common knowledge, but also felt the need to experiment and bring something new into play. His *Medea* was written in 431 BC – hundreds of years after the formation of mythology. This is also the source of fascination with modern adaptations of Greek mythology – the stories are thousands of years old and yet modern authors are still drawn to them and the general public is ready to appreciate them.

Vernant stresses the fact that *Mythos* initially did not contradict *logos* – in fact, both initially meant word or speech. Only later did *logos* evolve and take on the meaning of understanding and reason. At one point, myth was even used pejoratively – it labelled anything groundless, testimony without proof. Yet even then there was no specific category of oral narratives solely associated with myth. It was purely abstract and virtually intangible.<sup>70</sup> However, Greek myths today are available only in their fixed forms, be it epical, lyrical or tragic. They are artistic reiterations by particular poets who used the themes freely. Therefore, there is a need to use reason in order to understand the stylistic differences, theological, semantic and structural nuances that distinguish the intangible from its literary adaptations. Only by comparison of versions produced by artists and philosophers/historians can the original be determined.<sup>71</sup> That is also the approach used in modern analysis in general and in this thesis – by virtue of the comparison with the theoretical framework the unique features and ideas come to light. Lowell Edmunds adds that since the “poetic performance was the primary mode of the communication of myths,” the best sources for scholars interested in Greek mythology are verbal, for they are often not available, he recommends focusing also on information contained in other sources “such as inscriptions and historians.”<sup>72</sup>

Apart from reason, also the birth of philosophy is associated with the end of mythical

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<sup>69</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Počátky řeckého myšlení* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1995), 15.

<sup>70</sup> Vernant, *Počátky řeckého myšlení*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Vernant, *Počátky řeckého myšlení*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Lowell Edmunds, “General Introduction,” in *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 3.

thinking. Mythology used to shed light on everyday life and related struggles or mysteries. It also explained the divine creators whose adventures and battles were once central to the Greek way of life. All events used to be caused by several divine beings and their actions that took place back at the very beginning. However, myth is no longer needed to explain the beginning of the world or weather phenomena. The philosophers of reason took the opposite direction – everything that happens can somehow shed light on the beginning of the world and its principles. This shift in thinking was so sudden that sometimes it is referred to as the “Greek miracle”.<sup>73</sup>

Greek mythology was built around an extended family of gods, changing of generations, transitions and it worked on the basis of a strict hierarchy. The system, though similar to human society, was rather complex. Time and space were pushed into the background, while the exercise of power and mutual relationships between the agents were dominant.<sup>74</sup> In Ancient Greece, everybody was aware of the gods, their relations and adventures. Edmunds explains: “[...] myth-telling was a practice that went on at all social and intellectual levels. [...] To know the myths and to be able to tell them was normal.”<sup>75</sup>

Since the common ability to retell myths precedes the extant written source, for example even Homer himself cannot be labelled as an “inventor” of myth. “His characters always assume their addressees’ knowledge of the myths they recount. [...] What is called ‘invention’ is therefore variation and would have been perceived as such.”<sup>76</sup> There seems to be a general consensus that already Ancient Greeks approached mythology with creative energy and did not insist on codification or defining a single correct version of individual myths.

As already mentioned, the perception of both myth and mythology underwent significant changes throughout history, beginning already in Ancient Greece after the fall of the Mycenaean civilisation. Karl Kerényi cites Thomas Mann to explain modern interest in myth. The connection is simple since modern society is focused on psychology, which is innately fascinated by mythology. Psychology explores the fundamentals of human existence within the deepest realms of the human soul, myth comes naturally into play as it forms the basis of life. A myth exists out of time and rises to life when the divine scheme is grasped and filled with features of everyday life – either consciously or stemming from the unconscious.<sup>77</sup>

When psychology or psychoanalysis are mentioned together with mythology, the first

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<sup>73</sup> Vernant, *Počátky řeckého myšlení*, 68–69.

<sup>74</sup> Vernant, *Počátky řeckého myšlení*, 74–75.

<sup>75</sup> Edmunds, “General Introduction,” 1.

<sup>76</sup> Edmunds, “General Introduction,” 5.

<sup>77</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Mytologie Řeků I: Příběhy bohů a lidí* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1996), 11.

thing that comes to mind is Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, particularly the theory of the *Oedipus complex*. However, Robert Segal suggests that "the psychologizing of myth does not begin with Freud or with Jung." He believes that the understanding of myth as projecting human characteristics "onto gods goes back to at least the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes." Already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Xenophanes realized that different ethnicities tended to imagine their gods with their respective appearances and distinctive features.<sup>78</sup> Even though the focus was on the outer features and not the abstract inner world, the continuity is clearly visible.

Modern use of myths does not rely on the divine aspect the way it used to. The development of mythology and human society took the direction of separating the abstract essence of humanity from the physical, making divine dominance virtually impossible: "Nevertheless, Freud and Jung alike, the key intellectual accomplishment of modernity has been the disentanglement of the inner from the outer. Projections onto the outer worlds, which had taken the form of gods and of myths about gods, have largely been withdrawn."<sup>79</sup> However, this does not mean that they disappeared completely. Modernity is trying to address the issues within the human mind, yet the separation is still not and may never be absolute. The projection of especially inner fears is natural to humans and as a form of coping mechanism may exist for many years to come. Additionally, "when Freud observes that modern audiences, who no longer believe in Fate, are still moved by the play of Oedipus, he takes for granted that the myth is not about the external world."<sup>80</sup> This means that myth can offer more than gods and their adventures as it must have absorbed universal and eternal themes. Kerényi also explains that to understand any nation, words and language are not enough. There needs to be a deeper understanding of the essence of thinking visible through the stories, poems and sayings that can be traced back to mythology.<sup>81</sup> Even though consciously and rationally societies shifted away from mythology, it is still an inseparable part of their existence.

Moreover, Kerényi takes the parallel between psychology and mythology one step further. He claims that disregarding the artistic aspect of mythology allows mythology to be perceived as a form of collective psychology. However, mythology is closely related to the aesthetic and creative process – the artistic aspect in fact makes mythology unique and clearly distinguishable from theology. The core object of mythology must be a "supra-individual",

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<sup>78</sup> Robert A. Segal, "Greek Myth and Psychoanalysis," in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 409.

<sup>79</sup> Segal, "Greek Myth and Psychoanalysis," 409–410.

<sup>80</sup> Segal, "Greek Myth and Psychoanalysis," 413.

<sup>81</sup> Kerényi, *Mytologie Řeků*, 14.

going beyond, captivating the listener, but at the same time it cannot exceed the ability of human imagination. Myth should insert images in the receiver's soul. Kerényi calls these images the substance of mythology and he compares them to tones in music.<sup>82</sup> Despite the fact that myths are not always tragic, tragedy is undeniably one of the artistic forms suitable for myth adaptations. The unique combination usually results in stories with multiple levels addressing not only general themes but also the complexity of human characters.

Segal claims that “psychoanalysis, as a theory of the mind, [...] is anything but dead or dogmatic.”<sup>83</sup> Since psychoanalysis is closely related to mythology, and mythology is even in modern authors still combined with tragedy, this claim indirectly supports the idea that tragedy as a genre is not completely lost. Also, it needs to be emphasized that from everlasting each myth lived in several forms simultaneously. Artists approached them individually and in a unique way.<sup>84</sup> Therefore it is not surprising that every literary or dramatic adaptation of the same myth is slightly different in terms of plot or characters, contrarily, it is expected and desirable. The nuances and diverse processing help with understanding not only the authors themselves, but also the society and period of history they lived in.

To summarize, humankind has always struggled to understand the workings of life and the reason why it began in the first place. Mythology offers answers based on divinity. God or gods were the originators, there was something beyond human comprehension that could explain every aspect of life and much more. This certainty had a calming effect on the human psyche. This constant has been gradually diminishing with scientific progress and the growth of atheism. Yet, it seems that humanity is still not ready to abandon divinity or mythology completely. That alone indicates there still must be something relevant in myths and because of that authors continue to seek inspiration in the abstract sphere.

### **1.3 DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF TRAGEDY**

This section will briefly comment on the dramatic development of tragedy as an introduction to the following chapter dedicated entirely to the myth of Medea. The theatrical development can be also divided into two major segments: ancient and modern, neither of which will be discussed in its entirety – the span is too vast. This section covers also the medieval and classicist authors so as not to give the impression that tragedy was written only in antiquity and

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<sup>82</sup> Kerényi, *Mytologie Řeků*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Segal, “Greek Myth and Psychoanalysis,” 445.

<sup>84</sup> Kerényi, *Mytologie Řeků*, 16.

modernity.

Firstly, it needs to be established what drama generally means in the literary sphere. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines drama in literature as follows: “a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue and typically designed for theatrical performance.”<sup>85</sup> This definition can be easily applied both to all authors and plays discussed in this thesis since it is broad enough. “Conflicts and emotions” are particularly relevant to the genre of tragedy as already explained above.

Paul Cartledge claims that “theatre as we understand it in the West today was invented in all essentials in ancient Greece, and more specifically in classical Athens.” He describes the overall theatrical experience in Athens as “a mass social phenomenon”. Athenians reportedly enjoyed drama not only in theatres, but they also brought it outside and it was especially prominent in the “communal ritual of animal blood-sacrifice.” Cartledge also stresses the importance of tragedy: “Tragedy, rather, was itself an active ingredient, and a major one, of the political foreground, [...]”<sup>86</sup> Since the theatre was such a dominant aspect in Ancient Greece, it is no wonder that especially Athens set the course of global drama and that the foundations are still strong and applicable today.

The primary focus of drama and consequently tragedy in Ancient Greece was on the relationship between people and the society they lived in. Edith Hall explains that “through some recurrent types of plot-pattern tragedy affirmed in its citizen spectators’ imaginations the social world in which they lived.” One of the patterns the authors used was “mythical Athenians interacting with outsider.” Alongside women and slaves, “non-Athenians” were generally excluded from the most significant aspects of life in the polis.<sup>87</sup> This is one of the themes in the myth of Medea, who was considered a barbarian because she came from Colchis, she was not born in Athens.

In Ancient Greece, there were authors writing tragedies, however, only a small segment of which survived to the present day. Out of the extant authors, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are often cited and their plays used as sources of inspiration.

As already mentioned, Aeschylus introduced “the second actor”. His plays “possess a

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<sup>85</sup> “Drama,” Merriam-Webster, last modified August 19, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/drama>.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Cartledge, “‘Deep Plays’: Theatre as Process in Greek Civic Life,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>87</sup> Edith Hall, “The sociology of Athenian tragedy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93.



poetic depth and intensity [...] [his] primary interest is in religion and theology.” One of his most prominent works is *Oresteia* – the only Greek trilogy that still exists in its complete form today. Interestingly, *Oresteia* already features more than two actors, and it was in fact Sophocles who added the third actor. This proves that like mythology, the evolution of tragedy was actually a work of collaboration.<sup>88</sup> Sophocles is the author of more than 100 plays and he can be praised for example for mastering the “ability to use with overwhelming effectiveness the device of dramatic irony,” which he demonstrated for example in his *Oedipus the King*.<sup>89</sup>

Ancient authors participated in a competition held in Athens, the topic was tragedies and satyr plays. Euripides was the least successful author among his peers as far as we know: “Euripides presented approximately eighty-eight plays [...]. In the contests, he was successful only four times, probably because of his somewhat new and unorthodox views.” However, his “unorthodox views” brought him popularity several centuries later. They were also the source of “profound influence upon the drama.” In his plays, the role of the Chorus was weakened and overall reduced, “but above all he raised to supreme importance the study of character.” He focused on the “ethical problems” through “penetrating psychological analysis”. Euripides managed to “reinterpret the traditional legends” – among them also the myth of Medea in his eponymous play.<sup>90</sup>

Moving on to the British contribution to the development of tragedy, namely, the theatre of the English Renaissance, which “set one of the high-water marks in the history of tragedy’s ebb and flow.” Rebecca Bushnell refers to the large number of skilled writers, among them of course William Shakespeare and William Marlowe. She claims that “these men and their actors brought to the stage a new tragic language, titanic heroes and villains, and inventive plots that mingled kings and clowns.”<sup>91</sup>

Bushnell emphasises the themes prominent in the British tragedies of that time, namely “the fall from prosperous to wretched”, “the role of ‘Fortune’ in causing that fall” and last but not least “the idea that the tragedies only happen to ‘mighty men’ [...] and not common people.” Based on this list she calls the plays “fundamentally political” and the approach “critical”. She also explains that *hamartia* is not present in tragedies anymore. Simultaneously, the loss of

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<sup>88</sup> Whitney J. Oates, “General Introduction,” in *The Complete Greek Drama: All the Extant Tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the Comedies of Aristophanes and Menander*, ed. Whitney J. Oates, and Eugene O’Neill, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1938), xxix.

<sup>89</sup> Oates, “General Introduction,” xxxiii.

<sup>90</sup> Oates, “General Introduction,” xxx–xxxii.

<sup>91</sup> Rebecca Bushnell, “The Fall of Princess: The Classical and Medieval Roots of English Renaissance Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Tragedy* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 289.

prominent divine presence can be tracked in British tragedies at that time.<sup>92</sup>

The shift from divinity mentioned by Bushnell is present in Shakespeare's plays in the form of free will – his characters cannot blame any greater power entirely as their own actions and decisions at least contributed to their fall. However, one of the most notable changes within the tragic genre is perhaps the most dominant in Shakespeare's work. His characters are rather complex and he added psychological depth. *Hamlet* is an excellent demonstration of the shift from the ancient style to the modern one: Prince Hamlet has an inner world and prominent conflict raging within.

Lastly, the influence of classical France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century remains to be covered. Richard Goodkin points to a specific approach to tragedy, referred to as “the most prestigious theatrical form of the day”, which was “the development of a highly codified set of rules that is generally held to apply to all serious dramatic output.” The authors tried to adhere to the principles described in Aristotle's *Poetics* which led to profoundly structured plays.<sup>93</sup>

Goodkin claims that “the legacy of French tragedy” is the way the authors combined “strong emotion with hyperrationalism [sic]”. The authors managed to fuse “a hyperawareness of clarity, coherence, and logic, with plays that deal with irrationality, blind passion, and contradiction.”<sup>94</sup> The era was close-knit with two authors – Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. The former of which will be discussed in the following chapter for his play *Médée*.

The journey tragedy as a genre in combination with myth underwent was undoubtedly long and enriching. Each nation that discovered the beauty of this genre contributed and built upon the fundamentals set in Ancient Greece. The outcome of the development will be seen in the following parts dedicated to the myth of Medea – firstly in general, then in the two chosen plays.

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<sup>92</sup> Bushnell, “The Fall of Princess,” 293.

<sup>93</sup> Richard E. Goodkin, “Neoclassical Dramatic Theory in Seventeenth-Century France,” in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 373.

<sup>94</sup> Goodkin, “Neoclassical Dramatic Theory,” 390.

## 2. MEDEA

The purpose of the following chapter is to properly introduce the myth of Medea. Firstly, a general summary of the storyline will be provided. Secondly, Medea as a tragic archetype will be discussed and thirdly, a selection of plays about Medea will be introduced in order to highlight the transformation of the myth in time. Medea has come a long way from a savage murderess to a pitiable woman.

### 2.1 MYTH AND ARCHETYPE

Medea's story begins in Colchis where she was a princess, her father was King Aeetes. The turning point in her life came when she met Jason who came to Colchis to acquire the Golden Fleece. Here the myth of Medea meets the myth of Argonauts – Jason was one of the members of the expedition. Once she fell in love with him, she did not hesitate to betray her own blood and nation. When her father assigns Jason impossible tasks to complete, to prove that he is worthy of the precious item, she secretly helps him using her magical powers. Medea then must flee her home and everything she knew, while trying to escape, she kills her own brother Apsyrtus. Not only does she kill him, she also scatters pieces of his body along the way hoping it would distract her pursuers. Jason brings Medea to Corinth where they get married and have children. However, Medea's happiness does not last. The theme of betrayal appears for the second time when Jason opts to marry the princess of Corinth, usually called Creusa. This plan hurts Medea and triggers her vengeful side – she starts plotting her revenge. With the purpose of hurting Jason, Medea sends the bride cursed gifts. When Creusa puts them on, she dies (together with the king of Corinth who tries to save her). This angers Jason and he confronts Medea. The tragic end varies greatly. Sometimes Medea and Jason's children die accidentally, but since Euripides' play, the killing is typically deliberate and more or less planned. Afterwards, Medea flees again, in older versions in a golden chariot gifted to her by the god Helios who is her grandfather. Medea is not punished and goes to Athens where she marries King Aegus and bears him a son Medus.

To explain the universality of the myth and the character of Medea herself, Emma Griffiths comments on “the key idea, that human nature remains constant and that Greek myths speak to that core humanity.” She refers especially to Jung and his *archetypes*. “Jung believed that we all inherit a mental set of patterns which we use to create our own place in the world, assigning roles to ourselves and others.” According to him, this “mental pattern book” is a

constant, it has not changed across space and time.<sup>95</sup> Medea is a rather complex character in all the versions of her myth, therefore, it is nearly impossible to choose only one archetype that would fit her. The most easily identified ones include: the mother – her motherly role is present in its intricacy concerning love, protection and the lengths to which the mother is willing to go; the wronged woman – Medea was abandoned and she reacts emotively which leads to dramatic situations; the (savage) foreigner – as already mentioned, she comes from Colchis and it causes cultural clash; the vindictive wife the murderess – she commits an act of extreme violence; or the typical tragic heroine – the motifs of downfall and self-destruction are present in her story.

To support Jung's theory, Griffiths presents also a theory based on anthropology "which argues that all human cultures progress via the same stages, so that similar motifs develop independently." However, she adds that even though it is possible to read the plays written thousands of years ago while "ignoring the details and focusing on emotions," the importance of cultural context should not be disregarded.<sup>96</sup>

Plays written and presented during a period of peace will simply resonate differently with the audience than those that draw inspiration from direct experience with violence that the whole society is painfully aware of. Moreover, the same narrative will have a completely different effect on spectators who have personally experienced something tragic, traumatizing or simply heartbreaking, like a war battle or infidelity. The emotions and reactions triggered by virtually anything depend greatly not only on the story and its form, but also on the sociopolitical and cultural context as well as on the status of the psyche of the individual members of the audience. The previous chapter showed that over the centuries all of the presented factors were gradually realized and scrutinized in relation to tragedy. The following lines will touch upon this progress once more, this time specifically from the perspective of Medea.

## **2.2 MEDEA IN DRAMA**

### Medea by Euripides (431 BC)

*Medea* by Euripides was chosen for this overview because it is the oldest play featuring Medea that has survived to the present day. It was also the source of inspiration for numerous authors including Marina Carr and Robinson Jeffers.

Euripides *Medea* technically follows the general outline of the myth as it had been

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<sup>95</sup> Emma Griffiths, *Medea* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

<sup>96</sup> Griffiths, *Medea*, 5.

known long before Euripides was born, but he changed one crucial aspect of the tragic end. It is believed that before his version, Medea and Jason's children usually died, but it was not a deliberate act of vengeance and it was not always by their mother's hand. Deborah Boedeker suggests, that in alternative *Medeas*, the children could have been "killed in retribution by the Corinthians" for Medea's actions against their princess and king. She further explains that there is a hypothesis of Euripides being inspired by Neophron.<sup>97</sup> Even if this were the case, the fact remains that it is Euripides's version that was powerful enough to survive centuries and it can be said that it became to a degree canonical.

Another point concerning Euripides' invention skills comes already from Aristotle: "From Aristotle's comments on the matter, one concludes that invention on the part of the tragedians took place within adherence to the received myths. Even Euripides, held to be the most 'creative' of the tragedians, when he is not instead a 'debunker' of myths, follows this rule."<sup>98</sup> Even though Euripides' Medea deliberately killing her children has been always perceived as shocking, it was actually within the scope of the myth. The beginning of the play is also worth mentioning for Medea is not visible on stage when she utters her first words which adds to the dramatic effect of the first encounter. Notably, one of the reasons why Medea kills her children in this version, which is specifically mentioned, is the fact that Jason wants to take her children away from her and raise them with his new wife – a solution Medea naturally cannot accept.

Generally, (Euripides') *Medea* can be labelled as a "tragedy of stubbornness". Roche explains that this type of tragedy is "less admirable than [its counterpart] tragedy of self-sacrifice but formally and, in most cases, dramatically richer." Of course, the hero's characteristic is not reduced to stubbornness only, she simultaneously shows honourable qualities, such as "courage, loyalty, or ambition." However, "the greatness of the tragic hero of stubbornness lies in the consistency with which she adheres to a position, false and one-sided though it may be. The hero will not yield; [...] there is something impressive, even inspiring, about this intensity and perseverance." Even though Medea could and even is prompted to regain her composure in order to find a compromise that would benefit her as well as the other parties involved, she is not willing to budge as "she remains steadfast in her hate, consistent in her desire for vengeance."<sup>99</sup> The stubbornness is clearly visible in Medea's passionate speech

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<sup>97</sup> Deborah Boedeker, "Becoming Medea: Assimilation in Euripides," in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, ed. James J. Clauss, and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>98</sup> Edmunds, "General Introduction," 14.

<sup>99</sup> Roche, "Greatness and Limits," 58.

in which she lays out her plan: “A murderess, flying from my darling children’s blood. / Yes, I can endure guilt, however horrible; / The laughter of my enemies I will not endure.”<sup>100</sup> Under no circumstances is she willing to get humiliated any further, she will do whatever it takes to fulfil her vengeance.

Lastly, David Stuttard brings to attention an interesting fact. “To judge by his later works, Euripides was probably cautious of Athens’ escalating conflict with Corinth and her Peloponnesian allies, and it may be that he was hinting at these cautions in *Medea*.”<sup>101</sup> This particular claim, though hypothetical, when considered together with Jeffers’ and Carr’s respective stories hints at an interesting pattern. The production or popularity of the myth in its tragic form seems to rise in connection with a major traumatising event in society. If this assumption is correct, it would mean that not only the myth itself but also tragedy as a genre might be granted virtual immortality. As long as there are wars and major conflicts among people, there is space for tragic authors to process the happenings and help people come to terms with their reality in a safe form of artistic representation.

#### *Medea* by Seneca (circa 50 AD)

Seneca’s adaptation was chosen for this outline as a representative of Ancient Rome as both Pierre Corneille and Jean Anouilh drew inspiration not only from Euripides, but also from Seneca. Seneca’s *Medea* is obviously torn, her inner conflict is fuelled by rage and overall, the emphasis is on emotionality. Like Euripides, Seneca follows the general storyline and *Medea* kills her sons at the end of her rampage.

In contrast to Euripides, there was a different approach in the performance of the play by Seneca. As Mary E. Frisch points out, “Seneca’s plays were not acted; they were recited.”<sup>102</sup> His version contains longer and fuller monologues, clearly focusing on the rhetorical aspect probably in order to give the audience access to more of her thoughts and the inner conflict. Another difference is the role of the chorus – in Greece, its role was dominant, and although Euripides made a significant reduction, Seneca’s chorus is even less prominent. Interestingly, the chorus consists of Corinthians and not only women, as in Euripides, who directly engaged with *Medea* and she managed to win them over. Seneca also features fewer characters leaving

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<sup>100</sup> Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 41.

<sup>101</sup> David Stuttard, “Introduction - *Medea* in Context,” in *Looking at Medea: Essays and a translation of Euripides’ tragedy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), 1.

<sup>102</sup> Mary Enrico Frisch, “The *Medea* of Euripides and Seneca: A Comparison” (Master’s thesis, Loyola University Chicago, 1941), 1.

out for example Aegeus (the king of Athens) who promised refuge to Medea in Euripides, in Seneca, she escapes solely owing to her divine connection.

### *Médée* by Pierre Corneille (1635)

Medea's myth rose to notable literary attention again in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France. Pierre Corneille's *Médée* has become quite influential and it features several innovations, despite its importance, it was not utterly successful and there are not many translations to English or Czech available. The English version that is available to the public was translated by Susan Kalter on the grounds of "the absence of any other available English-language translation" that she could use during her lessons.<sup>103</sup> The Czech translation by Michal Zahálka should be highlighted for the same reason. His work is unique in the Czech Republic and at the same time it is also of high quality as it was awarded second place in the Jiří Levý Translation Competition organised by the Czech Literary Translators' Guild.

Zahálka points out that Corneille's Medea is sarcastic and snide. As if she felt that the only character entitled to tragedy is herself, she mocks others' attempts at tragic tone or gestures. Zahálka argues that *Médée* could be read also as a very black comedy about a woman who kills everyone to find happiness and inner balance.<sup>104</sup> The condescending tone can be seen for instance in the last scene where Medea appears. Jason tries to threaten her: "What! Thou darest to defy me, and thy brutality / Thinks to escape again my outraged arm? / Thou redoublest thy suffering with this insolence," to which Medea retorts: "And what can thy feeble valiance do against me?"<sup>105</sup> Shortly after this exchange Medea flees in her chariot. The ending of this play differs from the usual development. After Medea's departure, Jason gives one last speech and then kills himself – Medea's vengeance was successful, Jason has nothing left that would be worth living for.

Two more significant innovations can be pointed out. Firstly, Corneille changed some of the characters featured in the play – he completely omitted the chorus and contrarily added for example Pollux, one of the Argonauts. He is presented as Jason's friend and his confidant. His presence helps bring out Jason's thoughts and gives his character a greater depth. Secondly, Corneille decided to break the Aristotelian unity of place. Medea has her own space in this play,

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<sup>103</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Médée: Pierre Corneille's Medea (1635) in English Translation*, trans. Susan Kalter (Lexington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), Translator's Note.

<sup>104</sup> Michal Zahálka, "Co se stalo, než Médeia opustila manžela," *PLAV - Měsíčník pro světovou literaturu*, December 1, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Corneille, *Médée*, 66.

her magic cave, in which she can contemplate and plan her revenge.

### *Médée* by Jean Anouilh (1946)

Jean Anouilh is another representative of French drama, however, his plays represent the modern approach to tragedy and myth, there is no or very little left from the classicist work of Pierre Corneille or Jean Racine.

Anouilh is said to have “frequently turned to mythological, legendary, or historical material as a framework for dramatizing his concerns.” His tragedy about Medea was written under the influence of German occupation in France. Medea is portrayed as “a rather shrill one who, if lacking in dignity, is not lacking in intensity. [...] in the catastrophe she appears as her passionate, primitive self.”<sup>106</sup> This Medea seems to be a true embodiment of the savage foreigner archetype in combination with the betrayed woman. This is enhanced by the setting Anouilh chose for her – she is not portrayed in a palace, but in a wagon. The setting perfectly emphasises her unenviable position which, nevertheless, does not break her spirit: “I am Medea, all alone in front of this wagon; abandoned on the shore of this strange sea, expelled, disgraced, hated! But nothing is too much for me!”<sup>107</sup> In her hatred, she again chooses violence and revenge. She kills her children in the wagon representing her banishment and then sets it ablaze. Medea dies in the flames while Jason leaves unharmed, walking towards his new life.

The whole narrative is condensed into only one act, in spite of, or perhaps because of this fact, the play is swift and the psychological depth with the sudden unravelling of the plot catches the audience/reader off-guard and therefore makes an immense emotional impression on their own psyche.

### *Medea* by Christa Wolf (1996)

Christina Wolf’s novel is through and through a modern adaptation of Medea’s story. Out of all the various works presented in this thesis, preceding or following this section, only this narrative is not presented as a stage drama, it is written in the form of a novel. Yet it was chosen on purpose. It can be used to demonstrate that although myth and the theatrical genre of tragedy are habitually combined, it is not a rule that authors should blindly abide by. The course of any

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<sup>106</sup> Jean Anouilh, “Medea: A ‘Black’ Play in One Act,” in *Medea: Myth and Dramatic Form*, ed. James L. Sanderson, and Everett Zimmerman, trans. Luce and Arthur Klein (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 95.

<sup>107</sup> Anouilh, “Medea,” 102.



adaptation and its form need to be chosen purposefully.

The form of a novel allowed Wolf to incorporate a greater number of characters whose psychology and motifs can be scrutinized thoroughly and even more so owing to a changing perspective of the first-person narrative. Individual chapters are written from the point of view of Medea, Jason or even a representative of the Colchians – Agamedea, Medea’s former student who now hates her.

Margaret Atwood points out that Wolf’s work is extremely complex:

At one moment we’re identifying the dark-skinned Colchians with, perhaps, the Turks in Germany, or those of African descent in Europe and North America, or the Jews; at another, we seem to be in the atmosphere of distrust and betrayal that characterized the collapse of the East German hegemony, when to back-stab first appeared to be the only defense against having the knife plunged swiftly into your own spine. Yet again, we’re in the era of big business—our own time and place, here and now, when capitalist mini-kingdoms form and dissolve unseen within the walls erected around them by large corporations, [...].<sup>108</sup>

Among the sociopolitical themes that can be found in the story, one important detail that causes a shift in sentiment towards Medea is hidden in this work. Wolf chose to return to one of the alternate endings preceding Euripides. Medea does not murder her children, it is the crowd of citizens that went into the final rage: “We’ve done it. They’re gone. Who, the fellow asks. Her goddamned children. We’ve freed Corinth from that pestilence. And how? asks the fellow, with a conspiratorial expression on his face. Stoned them! Many voices bellow. As they deserved.”<sup>109</sup> However, they did not stop there. Medea, who is deeply saddened by the death of her children, reflects that “they’re at pains to assure that even posterity will call me a child-murderess.”<sup>110</sup> Not only did they take everything from her, the Corinthians even ensured that the whole world will forever believe that she was the one to commit this heinous crime. The reader is left with no other choice than to pity Medea, at least to a certain degree.

After the brief but enlightening excursus on the myth of Medea and the overview of its evolution illustrated by the carefully selected literary works, the focus of this paper will now return to the myth of Medea in the tragic form in modern interpretation. The works of Robinson Jeffers and Marina Carr will be analysed within the context of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, psychology and modernity.

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<sup>108</sup> Margaret Atwood, introduction to *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, by Christa Wolf (New York: Doubleday, 1998), Introduction.

<sup>109</sup> Christa Wolf, *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, trans. John Cullen (New York: Doubleday, 1998), chap. Ten: *Leukon*.

<sup>110</sup> Christa Wolf, *Medea*, chap. Eleven: *Medea*.

### 3. *MEDEA* BY ROBINSON JEFFERS

The following chapter will analyse the play *Medea* by Robinson Jeffers which was published in 1946. Firstly, the author himself will be introduced and also his motivation for writing a tragic play will be explained. Secondly, the play will be analysed using Aristotle's theory of tragedy to determine whether it can be classified as a Greek tragedy. The terms and aspects introduced in the first chapter will not be defined again unless the analysis requires a broader scope of the phenomenon. Thirdly, the play will be discussed in relation to symbolism reflecting the social or cultural situation in America after the Second World War. Throughout the analysis, any potential deviations and innovations will be addressed.

Although Jeffers' adaptation of *Medea* by Euripides "was just an unalloyed critical and popular success upon its initial debut on Broadway in 1947" and "it has remained one of the most popular versions of the play for performance in America," it is in fact an anomaly in his work.<sup>111</sup> Robinson Jeffers was a dedicated poet who was living a solitary life with his wife Una in coastal California. He was not a playwright and the idea of writing a tragedy was not his, nor his wife's. The initiative can be traced to Judith Anderson, who played a part in some of Jeffers' dramatic poems and grew to like his work enough to desire a bigger part in one of his pieces. However, it took several tries to find a producer. Finally, she found one who refused to undertake the risk of a poem production, but was willing to "consider" a play written by Jeffers, specifically *Medea*. Jeffers also agreed to pursue the project as he in return admired Anderson's performance on stage and he already had a firm connection to Greek antiquity.<sup>112</sup>

Jeffers was a well-educated man and he was greatly familiar with Ancient Greece, it constituted an immense source of inspiration to him. As Edmund Richardson highlights, "[Jeffers] was taught Greek by his parents from the age of six." Owing to his knowledge of the environment, he, from the beginning, insisted that "[he] must be allowed large freedom of adaptation," since he believed that certain passages and aspects of Euripides's play were not suitable for a modern audience and he wanted to transform it into a "poetry that might be interesting to an intelligent but not learned contemporary audience" by putting emphasis on "the essential values of the play."<sup>113</sup> Solely this statement proves his understanding of the Greek myth and tragedy in their natural state. As already mentioned, Greek mythology was not bound by strict rules, contrarily, it invited authors to retell and innovate the stories into a form they

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<sup>111</sup> Batton, "Jeffers and the Politics."

<sup>112</sup> Alex A. Vardamis, "Medea and the Imagery of War," *Jeffers Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 8.

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Richardson, "Re-Living the Apocalypse: Robinson Jeffers' 'Medea'," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 370.

deemed the most adequate to their purpose, audience or aesthetic. Jeffers himself commented on the fact that he did not merely translate Euripides' play, but transformed it in a confident connection to Neophron's Medea, whose existence was only hinted at by Deborah Boedeker: "I speak of Neophron's Medea because it is vaguely comforting to me to know that—if I have ventured to adapt a Greek tragedy to modern uses—Euripides did it first."<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, the fact that aimed at an "intelligent but not learned audience" supports Steiner's argument that modern society does not share a common mythical background, there is no set of stories that everybody across social hierarchy, from the poorest to the richest, would know by heart. Nevertheless, it did not stop Jeffers and he managed to approach the matter in a way that still resonated with the audience and which brought the play an immense success.

Since Jeffers deemed it necessary to make some changes to Euripides' play for a modern production, it needs to be established whether his work can still be referred to as a tragedy. Aristotle emphasised the role of structure and plot of plays that aspired to be received as tragedies. Jeffers' play Medea abides by this rule, the story as a whole is complete and clearly structured, moreover, the individual parts are perfectly aligned with the prominent episodes, in other words, the key points, of the story. In the beginning, Jeffers introduces the individual characters, sets the scene and establishes the conflict and tension by unravelling the story of Jason's treachery, in the middle part, he works towards the climax as Medea plans her revenge and inevitably executes it by killing not only her husband's new bride, Creusa – the princess of Corinth, and Creon – the king of Corinth, but also her own sons. The resolution comes when Medea has fulfilled her revenge and Jason is struck with grief. Medea leaves unpunished carrying her children's bodies so that Jason cannot touch or see them ever again.

In terms of plot, the story of Jeffers' *Medea* follows Euripides' lead and covers only a fragment of her complex narrative. It takes place in Corinth where Medea already lives happily with her husband and their children. The play begins at the moment when Medea learns about Jason's betrayal which sparks her emotional storm. The first part of the play is a *prologue*, its role is to introduce the setting and provide the audience with relevant information. This part is crucial in Jeffers as it can be argued that the majority of the general public in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not familiar with Medea's storyline and therefore, they needed guidance to be able to follow the actions unravelling on stage.

The history is told by the Nurse, she laments over the turn of events and she already

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<sup>114</sup> David J. Rothman, "Robinson Jeffers, Translation, and the Return of Narrative," in *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers*, ed. ShaunAnne Tangney (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 267.

hints at the danger that Medea poses: “[Medea followed Jason] Into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks / and the roofs of Corinth: over which I see evil / Hanging like a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and / the daughter of a king.”<sup>115</sup> Building tension, Medea is not on scene during Nurse’s monologue, next to appear are Tutor and Medea’s children – two young boys. Their innocence is contrasted with the sorrowful tone of the Nurse. Only after the Tutor discloses more bad news in the form of exile that the king of Corinth intends to push onto Medea and her children, does the heroine herself get involved in the scene. However, at first, she can only be heard from the backstage. She utters a single word: “Death.”<sup>116</sup> Were Nurse’s words not enough to convey the doom that is about to occur, Medea completes the anticipation by outlining the course of action the play will take. She in fact summarizes the events of the play: “Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children. Destruction.”<sup>117</sup> The only of her claims that does not come true is her own death in this adaptation.

Already Medea’s first words necessarily cause an emotional response in the audience, which is again in compliance with Aristotle who stressed also the importance of provoking the feelings of fear and pity through imitation. The actions must be possible and probable in order to arouse a fearful reaction. The possibility of Medea carrying out her threat stirs emotions for it is believable in itself and it is supported also by the Nurse who swiftly reacts: “Take the children away, keep them away from her.”<sup>118</sup> The Nurse and probably also the audience knew that, unfortunately, some mothers indeed kill their children. There is a wide range of reasons for this type of behaviour and the issue of *filicide* (killing of one’s children) will be addressed specifically in connection to Carr’s play and applied to Jeffers retroactively to allow direct comparison.

Considering the structure of the play, there is a minor but significant deviation from Aristotle’s “manual”. Within the sections that are “common to all tragedies”, Aristotle lists apart from the “prologue; episode; final” also “choral parts” that should constitute a significant portion of the play.<sup>119</sup> However, Jeffers among his innovations reduced the role of the chorus to a minimum, which he presumably deemed necessary in the modern adaptation. Perhaps, he did not want too much mediation between the characters and the audience. Interestingly, his chorus is listed at the beginning as the whole group despite the fact it consists only of a few, specifically three, women and also despite his handling of these characters. The description

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<sup>115</sup> Robinson Jeffers, *Medea* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1976), 9–10.

<sup>116</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 12.

<sup>117</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 13.

<sup>118</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 19–20.

says: “Chorus: Corinthian women of various types.”<sup>120</sup> Yet, this is the last time in the whole play it is referred to using the general term *chorus*. Jeffers chose to split the group into individuals and from their first appearance they are always named First, Second and Third Woman. Furthermore, he lets them speak individually. This might be a sign of Jeffers’ innate feminism or at least inclinations towards it. Although he never described himself in such a manner (partially because the term did not exist at the time), Shaun Anne Tangney analysed one of his poems (*Roan Stallion*) from the ecofeminist point of view. She argued that “inherent in his philosophy is an understanding that dualism as well as Western patriarchy are bad for both omen and nature.”<sup>121</sup> Not necessarily ecofeminism, but Jeffers’ evident fascination with nature is reflected in the character of Medea, this aspect will be addressed in the following section.

To settle the matter of a reduced chorus, it can be said that the deviation is not alternating the course of the tragedy as Aristotle envisioned it and therefore is not harmful. The women, though individually, still sing and offer the outsider’s point of view. In relation to Medea’s initial outburst, the First Woman sings: “She does not know what she prays for/ Pain and wrath are the singers,” and the Second continues “Never pray for death, never pray for death, / He is here all too soon. / He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk.”<sup>122</sup> The aspect of commentary together with the attempt to steer Medea in the correct direction is present.

The middle part of the play consists of several episodes, where Medea confronts both Jason and Creon, she also talks to the “chorus” and the Nurse. The individual exchanges of course lead to the climax and therefore help build the anticipation for the final blow, however, their function is also emotional. Arguably, the emotional element is embedded and dominant in Jeffers’ *Medea* and it is equally important as the plot if not outright exceeding it. Especially in her dialogue with Creon, it can be seen that she is consciously trying to build her image of a wretched mother worried about her children and a betrayed woman only to buy herself more time for revenge: “And you for mercy. My sons are still very young, / tender and helpless. [...] And as for me, your servant, / O master of Corinth, what have I done?”<sup>123</sup> However, her task is difficult since her passionate pride is seeping through. When Creon falls for her lies and almost regrets sending her to exile, he tells her “and not much time. Move quickly, gather your things /and go. I pity you, Medea, / But you must go,” which causes Medea to lose control for a

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<sup>120</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, description of characters.

<sup>121</sup> ShaunAnne Tangney, introduction to *The Wild That Attracts Us: New Critical Essays on Robinson Jeffers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), xxi.

<sup>122</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 21.

moment: “You pity me? You – pity me? / [...] I will endure a dog’s pity or a wart-frown toad’s. May / God who hear me – We shall see in the end / Who’s to be pitied.”<sup>124</sup> She has already told the chorus and the nurse that she would not “endure pity. Pity and contempt are / sister and brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.”<sup>125</sup> Yet Creon did not recognize this forewarning, did not take her threats seriously and, therefore, did not insist on an instant departure at this crucial moment, indirectly causing his own perishing and the murder of his daughter.

Similarly, neither Jason, nor King Aegeus believe she would be capable of any real harm. They underestimate her determination, which eventually costs Jason his bride, children and generally the future he carefully planned. It seems that Aegeus unintentionally contributed to Jason’s suffering and planted the idea of killing the boys in Medea’s mind (were it not there already firmly established), or at least reinforced the blurred outline of the possibility when he remarks: “It is, for a childless man, utter despair darkness, extinction. / One’s children / Are the life after death,” to which Medea eagerly retorts: “Do you feel it so? Do you feel / it so? / Then – if you had a dog-eyed enemy and needed / absolute vengeance – you’d kill / The man’s children first. Unchild him, ha?”<sup>126</sup> Even after a conversation like this, King Aegeus shortsightedly lets the Nurse and Medea push him into an offer of exile in Athens. Right before the forced offer, Medea again not so subtly hints at her plan to hurt Jason: “Do you not think such / men ought to be punished, Aegeus? [...] If there is any rightness on earth / or in heaven, they will be punished.”<sup>127</sup> The audience might or might not see through Medea’s act straight away, but in either case, these situations inevitably invite the individual spectators to emotional viewing. Another likely reading of the characters’ apparent ignorance is connected to dramatic irony, which arises when “the audience of a play know something that the characters do not know.”<sup>128</sup> This technique is used precisely to heighten various emotions such as despair, frustration or empathy. In the end, the characters were designed to support the emotional turmoil.

At the end of Act I, Medea reacts to the three women of Corinth, who are still fulfilling their reduced chorus duties, and who are at the moment praising Athens and the Greek cities that are a joy to live in and to be alive in general, by declaring “As you say. What a marvelous privilege it is / Merely to be alive. [...] Rather I should rejoice, and / sing, and offer gifts; and

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<sup>124</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 23.

<sup>125</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 15.

<sup>126</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 42.

<sup>127</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 43.

<sup>128</sup> “Dramatic irony,” English meaning, Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August 27, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dramatic-irony>.

as to my enemies— / I will be reconciled with them.”<sup>129</sup> Only the Nurse, who knows her lady well, is not enthusiastic about the seeming change of heart and offering of gifts to the Princess. On the contrary, she is deeply concerned: “But I am terrified. I do not know— I am terrified.”<sup>130</sup>

Up to this point in the play, the expectations of the audience can be still quite varied. Some spectators might be generally worried about the outcome, some perhaps feel compassion towards Medea and her children and hope for a favourable solution, or, like Medea, they can be angry at the situation that Medea found herself in without any fault on her part and they are anticipating the worst. However, the following episodes of Act II leave no doubts about the ending of the play as Medea gets to the point of no return.

“These are the gifts I am sending to the young bride: / this golden wreath / And this woven-gold veil. [...] there is nothing like them in the whole world, [...] the God of the Sun gave them to my father’s father, [...] I have great joy in giving these jewels to [Creusa].” The beginning of her speech seems innocent, however, she continues: “for the glory of life consists of being generous / To one’s friends, and – merciless to one’s enemies – you know what a friend she has been to me.”<sup>131</sup> Then the story proceeds quickly. Medea gives the gifts to Jason who is to deliver them to his Princess. Medea sends her children to Creon’s house as well under the false pretence of trying to persuade Creusa to keep the boys so that they can have a better life. In reality, they are the pretext for sending the gifts and she also wants them to report what happens to Creusa. At this point, Medea is not holding back: “The gifts are given; the bait is laid. [...] she’ll dance, she’ll sing loudly,” she is enjoying Creusa’s pain that is coming, at the same time, she is preparing for the final act. “Before I do what comes next. / I wish all life would perish, [...] and the holy gods in high heaven die, / before my little ones / Come home to my hands.”<sup>132</sup>

There is a little break in the negative emotions when the children come back with good news – they do not leave into exile, they will be accepted in the King’s house. However, right behind them rushes a messenger to warn Medea: “Flee for your life, Medea! [...] You are avenged.”<sup>133</sup> Medea is glad to hear that not only the Princess, but also Creon died in her flames. The Nurse comes running confirming the slave’s words: “Death is turned loose!”<sup>134</sup> Medea remains calm amid the raging chaos. In this moment, Medea shows her vulnerable side:

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<sup>129</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 48.

<sup>130</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 50.

<sup>131</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 51.

<sup>132</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 61.

<sup>133</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 68.

“(Medea sits and puts her head in Nurse’s lap) / Tell me these things in order from the beginning. / As when you used to dress me, when I was little.”<sup>135</sup> Her composure and childlike behaviour, as if asking for a fairy tale, are juxtaposed with the events and reactions among people in Corinth.

The psychological depth of Medea is shown when her inner struggle makes her falter during her preparation for the filicide: “I cannot. If he were my own hands I would / cut him off, or my eyes, I would gouge him out - / But not you: that was madness.”<sup>136</sup> However, it does not last long, “so Jason will be able to say, ‘I have lost much, / But not all: I have children: [...] No! I want him crushed, boneless, crawling- / I have no choice.’”<sup>137</sup> She proves she did not lose her senses, she is able to feel more than hatred. Nevertheless, she takes the boys home and the door closes.

The climax comes and to enhance the fear, Jeffers lets the children speak. Though it is not the first time the audience hears their voices, it is the last and that bears a powerful intensity: “Child’s voice. (*In the house, shrill, broken off*) Mother Ai- !”<sup>138</sup> The two boys’ deaths are separated by The Women, who definitely abandoned their prototypical chorus’ characteristic and rose to action, though in vain: “(*The Women press toward the door, crying more or less simultaneously*).”<sup>139</sup> The pause is necessary to imitate real life – the boys were probably struggling and Medea had to move and perhaps even catch the older boy so she could kill him. It also imitates real life in terms of simultaneity, individual actions do not orderly follow one after another, instead, they overlap. Now, finally: “Elder Boys Voice. (*Clear, but as if hypnotized*) Mother- Mother- ai!”<sup>140</sup>

Afterwards, the scene does not stop, but it feels numb. Jason is too late when he appears on stage and for a while, he cannot shake denial: “First Woman. (*Pointing toward Creon’s house*) Death is there; death is here. / But you are both blind and deaf: how can I tell you? / Jason. (*Is silent, then says slowly*) But- the- children are well?”<sup>141</sup> The emotional roller-coaster does not stop yet. Medea’s final strike comes: “(*The doors open revealing the Two Boys soaked in blood.*)”<sup>142</sup> One can imagine that the faint of heart can feel even nauseous from simple reading. The toll on a parent must be overwhelming and completely devastating.

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<sup>135</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 69.

<sup>136</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 71.

<sup>137</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 72.

<sup>138</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 74

<sup>139</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 75

<sup>140</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 75

<sup>141</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 77.

<sup>142</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 79.



Stepping back from the perspective of fear and pity, there remains one major change in the plot that needs to be addressed. Jeffers omits the *deus ex machina* which is present in Euripides and which Aristotle straightforwardly forbids: “the unravelling of the plot, no less than the complication, must arise out of the plot itself, it must not be brought about by the *deus ex machina*.”<sup>143</sup> Medea escapes, but not owing to a divine intervention. The only time her divine relative is mentioned in direct continuity is when she is preparing the magic “gifts” for Creusa.

The audience witnessed Medea’s fall, the bits and pieces of her dramatic good fortune changed to bad fortune in an instant, she brings the downfall onto herself when she transforms from a victim of Jason’s actions to a, technically, serial murderess. Despite her successful revenge and the fact that she also managed to survive, she still does not emerge victorious. Her life as she knew it was in ruins, she lost her children and was driven to exile. David Rothman summarizes that “Jeffers took his Aristotle seriously” as he “knows how to begin a story, complicate it, develop it, and finally, how to end it.”<sup>144</sup>

Moving to Medea as a character, she fulfils the vindictive wife archetype in this play. Every single action of hers stems from the revenge on her (former) husband Jason. As already demonstrated together with the emotional aspect of the play, she simply had to kill her children despite her motherly love because Jason must have been deprived of heirs and every soul that could bring him happiness.

A second dominant archetype in this character is the savage foreigner. As she was always reminded, she does not fully belong to Corinth despite being married to their hero and bearing him children. Society was looking down on her and calling her barbarian or savage (“No, a barbarian woman from/ savage Colchis, at the bitter end / Of the Black Sea.”<sup>145</sup> ) or suggesting that she is not only savage, but also abnormal in a sense as she is connected to magic, though this aspect is limited in Jeffers (“All the people of her country are witches. They know /about drugs and magic. They are savages, but they / have a wild wisdom.”<sup>146</sup>). Instead of trying to prove herself to the Corinthians, Medea decides to embrace this stereotype: “How the barbarian woman endures betrayal: watch / and you’ll know.”<sup>147</sup>

Her image as a savage woman is supported by the symbolic language Jeffers uses in connection with her character. Although Jeffers used straightforward and understandable language, it still bears a poetic quality, especially when it comes to metaphors connected to

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<sup>143</sup> Rothman, “Robinson Jeffers, Translation,” 258–259.

<sup>144</sup> Rothman, “Robinson Jeffers, Translation,” 258.

<sup>145</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 15–16.

<sup>146</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 17.

<sup>147</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 63.

nature which are bountifully represented in the text. At the beginning, the Nurse uses two contrasting images: “She is like a stone on / the shore. / Or a wave of the sea,”<sup>148</sup> as if showing two possible directions the development can take – Medea will either stay calm like a stone and endure the storm of elements, or she will be like a wave that hides the dormant power of the sea. Once awoken, the sea has the potential to destroy anything in its path and cost humans their lives, just like Medea eventually does. Over the course of the play, she or something about her is likened to a variety of animals, for instance, “the lion-eyed glare”<sup>149</sup>, “caged animal”<sup>150</sup>, or “crawling viper”<sup>151</sup>. Simultaneously, similar metaphors are used to stress the fact that not even the wild animals would kill their own offspring: “no blood-lapping / Beast of the field, she-bear nor lioness, / Nor the lean wolf bitch, / Hurts her own tender whelps.”<sup>152</sup> Jason also reacts in these terms when he learns about the filicide: “I knew it before I saw it. No wild beast could have done it,”<sup>153</sup> therefore suggesting she is worse than the feared predators.

On the other hand, Medea’s ostensible savagery is contrasted with a completely different image. Her children feel that something is wrong, but they are not scared of their mother for the most part. Moreover, a number of the characters reminisce at some point about how good Medea was. One of them is the Nurse, who fights for her lady and Medea even owes the refuge to the Nurse entirely. Were it not for her, Aegeus would have never learned about her situation and would not seek Medea. The Nurse also initiated the offer herself: “Oh – She is all bewildered, sir, / In the deep storm and ocean of grief, or she would ask / of you / Refuge in Athens.”<sup>154</sup> From the position of a mere nurse, she dared to approach a king. It can be argued, that the Nurse saw Medea grow up and is therefore attached to her, however, she knew her well and was able to sense the danger, which is already present in her starting monologue. Were it not enough, even one of the slaves, the messenger who urges Medea to flee after Creusa’s murder, suggested that Medea had been pleasant and perhaps amicable before Jason’s betrayal: “I am Jason’s man, but you were good to me.”<sup>155</sup> The point is even stronger for he is Jason’s servant who should be entirely on his side in this dispute. This possibility also adds to the fear and pity – the spectators might worry that since Medea was ordinary beforehand, the same destiny may lie ahead of them.

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<sup>148</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 11.

<sup>150</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 15.

<sup>151</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 78.

<sup>152</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 62.

<sup>153</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 79.

<sup>154</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 44.

<sup>155</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 67.

Also, Vardamis explains that Jeffers admired “Euripides’s ability to present ‘real and understandable human beings, people you could identify with yourself, rather than the ideal heroes and demigods’.”<sup>156</sup> Medea as a Jeffers’ character is believable and induces fear since the emotional impact is caused by the probable events. Divorce is a common occurrence in modern society and anybody may fear that were it happen to them, they may react similarly.

Not to make any excuses for Medea, though blinded by rage and crushed by her husband’s treachery, she still acted consciously and willingly, in Aristotle’s words – knowingly. She is not a victim of bad luck or a bigger force.

One more layer of Jeffers’ is to be briefly discussed. Batton argues, that even though Jeffers reportedly tried “to resist social commentary in the *Medea* – a play perhaps overburdened with opportunities for the satire of social issues” as if following “his own advice [...] a great poet would break sharply away from the directions that are fashionable in contemporary literature,” it is possible to read his *Medea* in connection to the horrors of the Second World War. He explains, that “Jeffers strove for timelessness, that he wanted his *Medea* to be pure passion.”<sup>157</sup> Passion is definitely the dominant aspect, yet more can be found in the imagery.

Batton highlights especially the description of Creusa and Creon’s deaths. “The nurse who acts as messenger left the victims, horribly burnt, before they expired: ‘They lie there. Eyeless, disfaced, untouchable, middens of smoldering flesh laced with molten gold.... The harsh tides of breath still whistled in the black mouths.’” The description produced by Jeffers is juxtaposed to the “account of Hiroshima bombing victims, ‘whose faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks.’”<sup>158</sup>

Similarly, Vardamis brought attention to the echoes of war in Jeffers’ *Medea*, he even refers to the same scene, but reads it in connection to phosphorus bombing, thus enriching Batton’s description: “One of the characteristics of white phosphorus fire-bombing, such as was used against Hamburg, was that victims were untouchable. Those who went to their aid became, themselves, victims in exactly the same manner as Jeffers describes the death of Creon.”<sup>159</sup>

This short demonstration proves that, consciously or not, Jeffers did create a multilayer play which was relevant to society not only in the United States, but to the whole world affected by the Second World War. It was in fact symbolic that Jeffers brought the attention down from

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<sup>156</sup> Vardamis, “*Medea and the Imagery*,” 10.

<sup>157</sup> Batton, “*Jeffers and the Politics*.”

<sup>158</sup> Batton, “*Jeffers and the Politics*.”

<sup>159</sup> Vardamis, “*Medea and the Imagery*,” 16.

the divine realm and the only essential godly connection remained the magical gifts since he cancelled the *deus ex machina* that would conveniently save Medea. The atrocities and mentality behind the actions of the Second World War were beyond human comprehension, surpassing it, but the aftermath was painfully and harshly real.

Even though generally “Jeffers, like Nietzsche, was writing not for today, not for tomorrow, but for the day after tomorrow, [...] because each epoch is confused, that its poet should share its confusion,”<sup>160</sup> it can be argued, in connection to Steiner, that the audience that lived through the war saw the mirror image in the play. The background they shared was not mythical, it was historic and the play offered them a catharsis to cope with the terrors they saw and the trauma they carried.

In conclusion, the analysis proved that Robinson Jeffers managed to compose a modern tragedy in accordance with Aristotle’s *Poetics*. At first glance, his *Medea* seems to be a mere translation of Euripides’ tragedy, however, after a thorough examination it becomes clear, that Jeffers’ was skilled enough to transform it and make it relevant to the modern audience. The play was enriched with emotional and social depth and therefore it can be read on multiple levels. This play proved to be a successful demonstration of the claim, that tragedy is still viable in modernity.

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<sup>160</sup> Batton, “Jeffers and the Politics.”

#### **4. BY THE BOG OF CATS BY MARINA CARR**

The second play chosen for analysis and subsequent comparison is *By the Bog of Cats* written by Marina Carr. It premiered in 1998 in Ireland and therefore represents a younger adaptation of the myth in the form of tragedy with different cultural and social connotations. The structure of this chapter will follow the outline of the preceding one. Firstly, the author will be briefly introduced in the context of Irish drama and also its use of Greek mythology. Secondly, the play will be compared to Aristotle's theory of tragedy in order to establish whether it complies with the framework of Greek tragedy. Thirdly, the play will be examined from the psychological and social view in relation to catharsis. Additionally, Carr's play will be progressively compared to Jeffers' *Medea*. Across the analysis, any innovations, similarities and deviations regarding both Aristotle's *Poetics* and Jeffers' *Medea* will be addressed.

Marina Carr is one of the few prominent female Irish playwrights. Clare Wallace claims that *By the Bog of Cats* represents a second wave of Carr's drama and that the most recent work (in 2006) represents a new focus on "well-worn familiar modes" and that she almost entirely left "the overtly satirical feminism and gender destabilisation" of her older plays behind.<sup>161</sup> Meaning, that even though feminism and similar agendas were reportedly once present in her plays, Carr changed her style to pursue more classical themes. Also, Janelle Reinelt highlights the fact that Carr, when asked "whether or not she feels a responsibility to counter patriarchy and put forth female themes in her plays," answered resolutely: "Absolutely not! [...] The writer can't do that, can't carry that."<sup>162</sup> This statement likens her to Robinson Jeffers who, for the most part, aimed to remain apolitical in his work. The remark about patriarchy was aimed at the fact that Carr in the context of the Irish authors represents a minority as a woman. Although, *By the Bog of Cats* was mainly chosen for its unique approach to the genre of tragedy and international success, the indisputable truth is that "Carr's play was the first written by a female dramatist to be produced on the main stage of [the Abbey Theatre] for decades, a testimony to a new moment in Irish theatre, [...] as well as a testament to this extraordinary playwright's great talent."<sup>163</sup> Simply put, regardless of her gender Carr represents the new and unique direction the Irish, hence global, drama is heading. Therefore, her work is essential for

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<sup>161</sup> Clare Wallace, "Marina Carr: Nostalgia for Destiny," in *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity & Citation in 1990s New Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), 237.

<sup>162</sup> Janelle Reinelt, preface to *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xiv.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Russell, "Talking with Ghosts of Irish Playwrights Past: Marina Carr's 'By the Bog of Cats'," *Comparative Drama* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 149.

understanding the modern way of exploring the depths of Greek myths and tragedy.

Regarding the tradition of Greek mythology in Irish drama, González Chacón suggests that Marina Carr “follows the tradition of Irish writers and approaches aspects of Ireland through her conversation with the classics.”<sup>164</sup> To support her claim, she elaborates: “Greek mythology has been in the hands of Irish writers for a long time [from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century] with different intentions.” She argues that after the English conquest of Ireland, the “loyalty towards the Greeks was not stopped,” on the contrary, the Irish used the “classical references to add a meaning of authority to Irish texts: the act of revisiting and appropriating Greek literature was considered as an act of rebellion against outside rule.” Interestingly, the authors realized that the potential of the “universal underground consciousness revealed in myths” is not limited to a means of “[finding] common meaning, but, also, as a strategy to individualize Irish contexts and tales and build Irish tragic landscapes reflecting the history of social upheaval and troubles.”<sup>165</sup> Basically, the Irish were using Greek mythology to enrich the Irish traditional folktales in order to broaden their artistic possibilities and thus sociopolitical commentary on historic development. It can be further argued that the authors might have been using this approach to immortalize their national heroes or even heal from the history-induced traumas through catharsis. A similar point was made about Jeffers’ *Medea* and the following analysis will try to prove the connection in Marina Carr.

Contrarily to Robinson Jeffers, Carr removed the veil of Ancient Greece and placed *By the Bog of Cats* in the rural landscape of Ireland, specifically in the Midlands. The original Greek myth is enriched by new themes stemming from the Irish setting. She also changed the names of the characters and at the same time added new supporting roles to allow greater possibilities in her adaptation of the myth.

One of the striking aspects of the play is also the Midland dialect which “forces the reader of a typical Carr playscript to recite the lines aloud as they are phonetically reproduced on the page.”<sup>166</sup> Aristotle’s stance on clarity and dignity should be addressed in connection to the accent. Perception of dialects and accents is individual and even though Carr tried to moderate the thickness, it might be too heavy for some readers/spectators. Despite the potential struggles, it can be argued that Carr used it in compliance with Aristotle to enrich the language and keep the exotic aspect. Both her and Jeffers’ plays can be received without serious

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<sup>164</sup> María del Mar González Chacón, “Myths in Crisis? Marina Carr’s Revision of Feminine Myths in Contemporary Irish Theatre,” *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies* 22 (December 2015): 64.

<sup>165</sup> González Chacón, “Myths in Crisis,” 60.

<sup>166</sup> Russell, “Talking with Ghosts,” 154.

difficulties. Although, Carr's text is not as rich in metaphors, the best form of exotic words, she compensates it for example by implementing the accent.

Medea is transformed into Hester Swane who was abandoned by her husband Carthage Kilbride, together, they have an only child Josie. Josie was named after Hester's absent mother Josie Swane. Carthage divorced Hester and on the day that is covered in the play, he is getting married to Caroline Cassidy, whose father is a wealthy farmer and Carthage was promised a significant portion of land to add to his own farm. Hester is being forced out of the house he built for her and basically being sent to exile to the city where she does not want to go. Throughout the play, almost everybody is telling Hester to leave and showing her ostentatiously that she does not belong to their society. Hester's revenge proceeds from disrupting the wedding reception to burning down Carthage's house and eventually killing their daughter and committing suicide. Along the main storyline run supporting subplots revealing that Hester murdered her brother and that there is another killer by the bog, Caroline's father most likely killed his son.

Regarding Aristotle's theory of tragedy, Carr does not fully adhere to the advice presented in the *Poetics*, when she deems it appropriate, she challenges it and creates dialogue with the prescribed order.

In terms of structure, one of the crucial aspects of tragedy according to Aristotle, Carr follows his rules. The play is clearly divided into the beginning, middle and end like Jeffers', moreover, there are three acts in this play, not only two, and each of them corresponds with one of the main sections of the plot. Again, following the rules and corresponding to Jeffers, the beginning of the play is a prologue in which the main themes, conflicts and the characters of the play are introduced through Hester's dialogue with a Ghost Fancier, Hester's neighbour Monica and partially with other characters. The explanatory part of the plot is significantly longer as nobody assumes the role of a narrator the way the Nurse does in Jeffers' *Medea*. Through complications and the individual and logically connected episodes of the middle part the play heads towards the climax and subsequent resolution.

The sense of doom and death is present in the opening image. Hester is dragging a dead swan representing the end of her own life which was tied to the swan's. What makes the scene arguably even more powerful than Jeffers' is that Medea rages about death, while Hester is silent, walking and casually carrying death in her arms which proves to be prophetic. Even though death is pervasive in the scene, Hester is not drawing any conclusion. There are no dreary expectations until the Ghost Fancier, the embodiment of the supernatural (arguably the

Grim Reaper himself), appears too early and accidentally discloses the fact that Hester will be dead by dawn. When she introduces herself, he reacts: “You couldn’t be, you’re alive. [...] Then I’m too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk.” Following this remark, Hester shows distress for the first time: “Come back! – I can’t die – I have a daughter.”<sup>167</sup> Unlike in Jeffers, at this point in Carr, there is no reason to believe that Hester is going to harm her only child as she is genuinely concerned. Aristotle’s fear and pity come into play at this moment as well. The fear-inducing source of the real-life imitation is the position of a mother who knows she is going to die and she worries about her child as it’s a human being solely dependent on her.

One of the main deviations from Aristotle and even Jeffers is one missing component of the original Greek tragedy – the chorus. Already Jeffers reduced its role in his play and Carr takes it one step further omitting it completely. In the close-knit community, no characters are standing aside merely commenting on the happenings, everybody is more or less involved in the individual episodes. The role of the chorus is divided and distributed among the characters, for example, little Josie sings a song about the bog that would otherwise belong to the chorus as it adds to the mysterious and prophetic atmosphere: “By the Bog of Cats I dreamed a dream of wooing / I heard your clear voice to me a-calling / That I must go though I be my undoing / By the Bog of Cats I’ll stay no more a-rueing – [...]”<sup>168</sup> The song holds a deeper meaning and even more so when presented by the child. It was composed by Hester’s mother who disappeared from her life and whose return Hester stubbornly awaits. This is the reason Hester cannot leave the bog even if the price is her and, and subsequently her child’s, life. Apart from the song, Josie’s role is more prominent than Jeffers’ two boys. She acts like a real child, plays, talks and articulates her opinions and desires. Unfortunately, her desire to stay with her mother is also the last.

Another portion of the chorus responsibilities, as developed by Jeffers, was assigned to a Catwoman who identifies herself as “the Keeper of the Bog of Cats” and someone who “know[s] everythin’ that happens on this bog.” She can be described as a sibyl or medium. She is the one to warn Hester that her attitude is dangerous (“I had a dream about ya last night. [...] Hester Swane, you’ll bring this place down by evenin’.”), moreover, she provides further insight into Hester’s past as she narrates the story of Hester’s mother cursing Hester and tying her life to the swan’s: ““That child,’ says Josie Swane, ‘will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less.’ [...] I snuck ya out of the lair and took ya home with me.” She also

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<sup>167</sup> Marina Carr, *Plays 1*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), Act One, Scene One, EPUB.

<sup>168</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act One, Scene Two.



emphasises that “curses only have the power ya allow them,” meaning that Hester has the power to influence the outcome of her situation.<sup>169</sup> The purpose of the reminiscing is to steer Hester in the right direction, to try and prevent the tragic end. However, Hester does not listen to the voice of reason and follows the emotional road of passion and feelings of betrayal.

Considering the plot in terms of action, Carr gives Hester more space for movement. Jeffers’ *Medea* is positioned in one setting only pacing around like an animal in a cage. Hester moves freely and therefore disrupts the unity of place, however, the breach is necessary for the plot. It allows Hester to speak to a larger variety of characters, but it also allows her to take an active part in her revenge. Unlike *Medea*, Hester meets the young bride and, in correspondence with a modern approach to tragedy, she opts for psychological revenge on her for she is trying to steal Hester’s husband, the house and “even want me daughter.”<sup>170</sup> Though not killing Carthage’s new bride, Hester ruins her life by constant reminders that Carthage is intertwined with her and not Caroline, part of Hester’s plan is completed when she personally interrupts the wedding reception wearing her own wedding dress and, next, proceeds to the house that Carthage built for Hester and wanted to re-use with Caroline. She sets it ablaze. Instead of his new bride, she burns his cattle. Arguably, this act can be perceived as equally appalling or even worse than *Medea*’s murder of the Princess and *Kind of Corinth* especially considering the fact that the innocent animals in no way contributed to her unfortunate fate. They simply became the means of hurting Carthage.

It can be also concluded that this part of the revenge is more logical than killing the bride in this setting. Jeffers’ Jason is only mentioned in connection to his new bride, his ambitions and his children, while Carthage has something he is more passionate about. As Caroline remarks, when Hester disturbs the reception “Carthage gone away in himself, just watchin’ it all like it had nothin’ to do with him,” however, when he hears and sees his cattle burning, he shows clear distress: “The cattle! The calves! Ya burnt them all they’re roaring’ in the flames! The house in ashes! A’ ya gone mad altogether? The calves!”<sup>171</sup> This approach develops the fact only hinted in Jeffers – the treacherous husband does not love either of the women, he uses them for his own social growth. *Medea* helps Jason obtain the Golden Fleece making him a hero, Hester kills her brother and steals his money which Carthage uses to buy land for farming. Both *Creusa* and *Caroline* are only means of acquiring more prominent social positions.

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<sup>169</sup> Carr, *Plays I*, Act One, Scene Three.

<sup>170</sup> Carr, *Plays I*, Act One, Scene Five.

<sup>171</sup> Carr, *Plays I*, Act Three

The individual episodes of the main plot are logically connected and follow a linear development as requested by Aristotle. However, three main subplots enrich Hester's history and incorporate aspects of Irish folklore. Anne Markey suggests that traditional Irish tales used to be "oral, anonymous, [and] collective fictions," with "popular belief in the supernatural."<sup>172</sup> These core characteristics prove beyond doubt the idea that Irish folklore and Greek myth were based on the same foundations and therefore can be merged almost effortlessly. Carr chose to replace the Greek divine presence with those found in the Irish heritage. Ghost Fancier appears to represent the supernatural force that determines the path of the tragic heroine. Hester seemingly had a choice to make, whether to leave and save herself, or stay and die, but the Ghost Fancier underlines what is clear from Hester's eventual behaviour – she simply cannot leave. The Catwoman, who partially fulfils the role of a one-person chorus, is also connected to the supernatural forces. When another embodiment, the ghost of Joseph Swane, Hester's brother, appears, Catwoman is able to sense his presence and even talk to him. This seems to be her natural ability, since she is not surprised by the fact that she hears a ghost, rather, she is annoyed: "Ah Christ, not another ghost. [...] I tould ya I'm not talkin' to ghosts today."<sup>173</sup> Also, Hester's curse is out of the ordinary, yet it is not questioned in the play by anybody.

Even though these subplots add enriching details important for the understanding of the main story, partly because there is no chorus that would summarize and supplement crucial information, Aristotle would have highly likely used the argument of *unity*: "A plot is not (as some think) unified because it is concerned with a single person. An indeterminately large number of things happen to any one person, not all of which constitute a unity." He believed, that "not everything which happened" should be included in a single narrative.<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, the abundance and over-complication that might lead to confusing plot structure is subject to personal perception and it depends on the audience whether or not it is easy to follow. However, in comparison with Jeffers' *Medea*, Carr's structure is undeniably more complex and diverse.

The main difference between the two plays can be found in the final scenes. Immediately preceding the climax, the focus of *By the Bog of Cats* returns to the core dispute between Hester and Carthage. Not only did Carthage betray her, but after the fire frenzy he also threatens to take Josie away from her: "That's it! I'm takin' Josie off of ya!" which surprises Hester: "Take her then, take her, ya've taken everything' else. In me stupidity I thought ya'd

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<sup>172</sup> Anne Markey, "The Discovery of Irish Folklore," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 33.

<sup>173</sup> Carr, *Plays I*, Act Two.

<sup>174</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 15.

lave me Josie. I should've known ya always meant to take her too."<sup>175</sup> In terms of fear and pity, Carr's and Jeffers' plays can be pronounced equal, however, the essence of their respective impacts differs profusely. While Medea gradually loses the remnants of sympathy and in the end induces pure fear, Hester seems to gain more of an understanding sympathy, in the Hegelian sense, as her actions and speech uncover the depths of her past and inner struggle. Also, the climax differs even though the same act, filicide, is carried out. Medea takes her boys inside but despite the lack of visuals, the progress of the murder itself is crucial and puts the audience in distress. It corresponds with Medea's passionate and frantic portrayal. Josie's perishing happens on stage but until the last minute, Hester does not intend to harm her child:

HESTER     Never mind. I only wanted to tell ya goodbye, that's all.  
 JOSIE       Well, can I go with ya?  
 HESTER     No, ya can't.  
 JOSIE       Ah, Mam, I want to be where you'll be.  
 HESTER     Well, ya can't, because wance ya go there ya can never come back.  
               [...]  
 JOSIE       (*Struggling to stay in contact with HESTER*) No, Mam, stop! I'm goin' with ya!  
               [...]  
 HESTER     Alright, alright! Shhh! (*Picks her up*) It's alright, I'll take ya with me, I won't have ya as I was, waitin' lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't, Josie, they don't. It's alright. Close your eyes.<sup>176</sup>

One would expect the moment to be terrifying or even nauseating just like Jeffers' version is, however, the moment between Hester and Josie seems to be even loving. Another prominent feature is the fact that Josie dies on stage before the eyes of the audience: "HESTER *cuts JOSIE's throat in one savage movement,*" she utters her last words "Mam – Mam –" and finally "*dies in her arms.*"<sup>177</sup>

Hester is heartbroken and starts crying, not even the Catwoman anticipated this outcome, when she finds Hester crying, she believes she only hurt herself. In the resolution, Carr's Hester dies calling for her mother using the same words Josie uttered a few moments earlier, while Jeffers' Medea lives and continues on her mythical journey.

Turning briefly to the character of the Irish Medea, Carr's Hester radiates an intensive inner struggle showing greater psychological depth. While Jeffers built his protagonist out of passion and fury, Hester is immersed in her childhood trauma in addition to the feelings of

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<sup>175</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>176</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>177</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

betrayal and abandonment. Contributing to Hester's more composed and less raging demeanour might be the fact that by the opening scene, she has already known about the betrayal, divorce and "exile" for over six months. Though quieter, she does not feel less wronged or hurt, the raging inside of her manifests itself through the climax. Carthage makes the same mistake as Jason and underestimates Hester and the acts she is capable of: "Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? [...] Let's see how ya like this – Ya hear that sound? Them's your cattle howlin'." <sup>178</sup> He is also surprised by her savagery when she kills Josie.

Even though the vindictive wife archetype is indisputably present, the savage foreigner proved to be more prominent although it is even paradoxical in this play. After all, Hester is not a foreigner at all, she was born, raised and for the most part was also living by the bog with no intention of leaving: "I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days." <sup>179</sup> Carthage's mother, Mrs. Kilbride, articulates the reason why the community avoids her, even shuns her: "A waste of time givin' chances to a tinker. All tinkers understands is the open road and where the next bottle of whiskey is comin' from," she expands it also onto Josie when she remarks: "the lazy shiftless blood in ya, that savage tinker eye." <sup>180</sup> They despise Hester's nature and origin, no matter what she does, she never truly fits in. Her loneliness and solitude are emphasised also by the fact that the "crazy" Catwoman is accepted, despite her abnormal behaviours, for instance, she eats mice, but when she talks to the local priest, he only tells her to try snails instead. Moreover, Hester's neighbour Monica, who is the closest representation of a mother figure in her life, in the end, abandons her and does not fully take her side as she fears she would damage her relations in the neighbourhood: "I stood up for ya as best I could, I've to live round here, Hester. I had to pay me respects to the Cassidys. Sure Xavier and meself used walk to school together." <sup>181</sup> This shows Hester she is completely alone.

The impact of pity and fear is enhanced by adding small yet significant details that bring the mythical woman closer to the real person. Hester is not of royal descent and does not have a powerful family or acquaintances, she is significantly older than Carthage (10 years difference), she has a drinking problem and she never overcame her wretched childhood which is affecting and shaping her adult life. The demythologisation of the character serves its purpose – Hester is easier for modern audience to identify with. Arguably, Carr's adaptation imitates real life better than Jeffers'.

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<sup>178</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>179</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act One, Scene Six.

<sup>180</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Two.

<sup>181</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

The most prominent aspect of Carr's play is the accurate portrayal of filicide, the prerequisites in Hester's life and the signs that her actions may lead up to this horrendous act. Monica S. Cyrino explains that residents and professors of psychiatry often use knowledge of antique myths to help them in their clinical work. She also attended several seminars focused on the myths and their possibilities in psychiatry, she remarks: "the most exciting and best attended session, [...], was the seminar on Medea as the murdering mother archetype." She was surprised to learn that so many patients' "lives had been affected by actual or symbolic filicide," and she adds that filicide is so shocking to general society because "we view the mother-child relationship as the model of what should be purest love."<sup>182</sup> As demonstrated above, the final scene between Hester and Josie had almost a loving atmosphere, fulfilling the expectations of motherly love and yet Hester did not see any other choice than to act. The popularity of the seminars also suggests that the universality of Greek myths is not restricted to the universal themes of love, family, power or fate, there is also a deeper layer that helps modern medicine address mental health.

Although there are other terms and reasons for parents killing their children. It can be argued that filicide is the one present in the myth of Medea and therefore in the plays analysed in this thesis. Both Jeffers' and Carr's heroines are "emotionally immersed in [...] a 'matrix of deprivation': specifically, an intricate web of conjugal (read: sexual) abandonment, loss of natal family, jealousy of children felt as sibling rivalry, and thwarted protective maternal instinct." According to the specialists, "these women really see no other options to their desperate decisions to kill, due to the lack of nurturing experience in their own, often brutal, personal histories."<sup>183</sup>

Medea constructed by Robinson Jeffers reflects several of these aspects: she was abandoned by her lover ("To sleep with the dog's daughter. [...] But for me, Jason, me / driven by the hairy snouts from the quadruped / marriage-bed."<sup>184</sup>), lost her natal family by choice ("remembering her / father's house and her native land, which she / abandoned / For the love of this man"<sup>185</sup>) and her passionate hate of Jason also overpowered her protective maternal instincts, though only after a deep internal struggle as discussed in the previous chapter.

As for Carr's Hester, all of the above-mentioned factors can be found within the plot, generally, they are more developed since *By the Bog of Cats* is significantly longer and features

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<sup>182</sup> Monica Silveira Cyrino, "When Grief Is Gain: The Psychodynamics of Abandonment and Filicide in Euripides' 'Medea'," *Pacific Coast Philology* 31, no. 1 (1996): 1.

<sup>183</sup> Cyrino, "When Grief is Gain," 2.

<sup>184</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 34.

<sup>185</sup> Jeffers, *Medea*, 10.

more characters that help paint the picture of Hester's outer and inner life. Unlike Medea, Hester is obsessed not only with Carthage and their connection, but she also cannot shake the mental picture of her mother who abandoned her long before her disloyal husband.

The fact that she was abandoned by her lover is beyond doubt, she shares this hardship with Medea, allusions run throughout the whole text: "There was a time you loved this caravan,"<sup>186</sup> or "Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine. I'm the one who chooses and discards, not him, and certainly not any of yees."<sup>187</sup> Occasionally, it is referred to by others as well: "I'm not jealous as to whether ya love her or don't love her, I think maybe I'd prefer if ya still did."<sup>188</sup> Her hurt pride and hate for Carthage are definitely related to this layer of narrative.

Unlike Jeffers' Medea, Hester did not abandon her family by choice, on the contrary, her mother left her and even her brother, presumably committing suicide: "if it's any consolation to ya, she left me too and our father. Josie Swane hung around for no wan."<sup>189</sup> Even though it has been many years since her disappearance, Hester has not come to terms with her loss and is still waiting for her: "I can't lave – Ya see me mother said she'd come back here."<sup>190</sup> This is the reason for her stubborn refusal to leave and move to the city, she simply needs to stay by the bog, waiting for her dead mother. Hester's life seems to have been doomed long before Carthage and his betrayal.

The sibling rivalry in this case applies to Hester's jealousy of her brother Joseph. She feels like their mother favours him and it escalates to the point where she kills him. Even after all those years, when confronted with his ghost, she is enraged by the fact that he sings Josie's song when she declares "That song is mine! She made it for me and only me," though Joseph "didn't know it was [her]. She used to sing it to [him] all the time."<sup>191</sup> Hester seems to long for a sense of belonging so much she created a mental picture of the perfect mother who loved her, nurtured her and who will certainly come back to her; even though everybody else remembers Josie Swane as a horrible neglectful mother who even cursed her daughter. Yet, Hester lovingly tells her daughter: "Ya have her eyes."<sup>192</sup>

It may seem that the last entry on Cyrino's list, "thwarted protective maternal instinct",

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<sup>186</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>187</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act One, Scene One.

<sup>188</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Two.

<sup>189</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>190</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Two.

<sup>191</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>192</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act One, Scene Six.

is not present in Carr's work, she always checks on Josie:

HESTER     [...] Did ya wash your teeth?  
JOSIE        Why do I always have to wash me teeth? Every day. It's so  
              borin'. What do I need teethe for anyway?  
HESTER     Ya need them for snarlin' at people when smilin' doesn't work  
              any more. G'wan in and wash them now.<sup>193</sup>

This particular citation shows a completely ordinary interaction between a parent and their child, it contains a teachable moment delivered light-heartedly with a sense of humour. There is not a shadow of mental distress. This may again enhance fear in the audience, the situation looks ordinary and yet the mother will later kill her child.

Moreover, Hester always makes sure that her little girl is well even when she is not with her: “[To Monica] And check to see Josie's alright, will ya?”<sup>194</sup> Even during the murderous scene, Hester is resisting and her maternal instinct is prevailing: “Go away, get away from me, g'wan now, run away from me quickly now.”<sup>195</sup> However, there is one argument that makes Hester's troubled mind decide to kill – she realises that her suicide would condemn Josie to the same destiny she endured and would not wish on her child. This shows that filicide does not necessarily come from negative emotions towards the child or even anybody else. Sometimes one's psyche plays tricks on loving mothers who believe that they are acting in their children's best interests. This psychological string of culminating signs takes place deep inside Hester's mind, while on the surface the audience witnesses a betrayed and overwhelmed woman's life turn to bad fortune. Despite Carr's dialogue with Aristotle, she follows the most important rules and creates a powerful modern tragedy.

In relation to the emphasis on psychology, Russell points out that “the 14 September 2001 production at the San Jose Repertory Theatre, [...] just three days after the terrorist attacks of September 11 – catapulted Carr to fame in the United States.”<sup>196</sup> Similar to the reception of Jeffers' *Medea* after the Second World War, “the play's violence was apparently appropriate to the somber national mood: [...] ‘in retrospect *By the Bog of Cats* ... offered a sense of comfort and catharsis.’”<sup>197</sup> Perhaps the American society needed the Greek myth supplemented with the Irish supernatural elements, suggesting a universality of this approach. Like the destinies of the airborne attacks' victims, Hester's fate was partially sealed from above. The role of catharsis once more proves to be crucial in the reception of modern tragedy, arguably even more so in

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<sup>193</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act One, Scene Six.

<sup>194</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>195</sup> Carr, *Plays 1*, Act Three.

<sup>196</sup> Russell, “Talking with Ghosts,” 149.

<sup>197</sup> Russell, “Talking with Ghosts,” 149–150.

modern society.

Perhaps also Nietzsche, lamenting over the loss of the Dionysian component of tragedy, would see a glimmer of hope in Robinson Jeffers' and Marina Carr's modern approach to tragedy. Jeffers' *Medea* is full of passion and her return to the primal instincts is enhanced by the poetic language full of metaphors related to nature and especially animals. Carr's enrichment with the Irish supernatural and other folktale-inspired components disrupts the expected simplicity and logic, blurring the lines between the real and the abstract.

To conclude, Marina Carr approaches the genre of tragedy and Greek mythology with an open mind and successfully brings it to life on the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The analysis proved that the fusion of Greek myth and Irish folklore can be successful. The portrayal of Medea's transformation into an Irish rural tinker is believable. Even though Marina Carr engages in a daring dialogue with Aristotle's *Poetics*, it was proved that *By the Bog of Cats* still abides by the crucial rules and therefore can be perceived as a variation of the Greek tragedy. The drama corresponds to the modern emphasis on psychology and the rich inner world of the characters, displaying primarily the characteristics of filicide in the context of psychiatry. Analogous to Jeffers, Carr proves that an adaptation in the hands of a skilled author can provide modern society with a catharsis-inducing tragedy.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis dealt with two modern adaptations of Euripides' play *Medea*, namely *Medea* by Robinson Jeffers and *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr. The dramas were analysed and elaborately examined through the lens of Aristotle's theory of tragedy and also the modern fascination with psychology, the inner struggle and human motivation for their actions.

First, the thesis focused on the theoretical framework of tragedy and myth providing insight into the unique combination. The primary focus was on Aristotle's theory of tragedy in order to provide a solid background for the final analysis. The major concepts regarding the ideal tragic form, such as structure, plot, pity and fear, complication, episodization or characters, were introduced and subsequently used for the analysis of the selected plays. Also, philosophers closer to the production of the two selected plays and their views on the genre of tragedy were discussed, specifically Hegel, Nietzsche and Steiner. The modern philosophers articulated their reasons for the claim that tragedy constitutes a dead genre in modern society. This issue in particular was addressed and the thesis struggled to prove that the verdict was premature and that tragedy especially in combination with mythology is still viable.

The following section of the first chapter developed the theme of the Greek myth in relation to the ancient society that created and formed the mythology that proved universal enough to survive centuries and find its place in virtually any society around the globe. The remaining section focused on the evolution of tragedy as a dramatic genre partly on its own and partly in combination with myth. Undoubtedly, the journey towards the modern interpretation was long and enriching. Each nation that discovered the beauty of this genre contributed and expanded the fundamentals set in Ancient Greece.

The second chapter concentrated on the myth of Medea itself. It offered a summary of the narrative as generally accepted by both the ancient and modern societies and as typically used in modern adaptations. However, it was stressed that myths were in essence subject to constant change and reiteration. The outline of the story as proposed by this chapter cannot be considered codified nor untouchable. Five authors from the vast span of Medea's tradition in literary form were chosen to illustrate the changes and innovations in terms of plot, form and overall approach to the narrative in combination with the dramatic genre.

The last two chapters contain the analysis of the plays by Robinson Jeffers and Marina Carr respectively. The thorough examination of *Medea* proved that Robinson Jeffers achieved a composition of modern tragedy in accordance with Aristotle's *Poetics*. It needs to be

emphasised that even though his play seems to be a mere translation of Euripides' tragedy at first glance, the truth is he managed to transform the myth into a modern rendition while keeping the original setting and impression of Ancient Greece. Jeffers created a play rich with emotional and social depth. Despite its prominent focus on passion and emotion, it can be read on multiple levels.

Marina Carr approached the genre of tragedy and Greek mythology with an open mind and, as the analysis proved, successfully updated the myth for the society on the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her unique fusion of Greek myth, the essence of Aristotelian tragedy and Irish folklore can be deemed both well-crafted and relevant. Even though Marina Carr challenged a number of notions as established by Aristotle's *Poetics*, evidence found in the play shows that Carr still abides by the crucial rules and therefore the play can be perceived as a modern variation of the Greek tragedy. Medea's transformation into an Irish rural tinker demonstrates the immense possibilities not only of the myth but also of tragedy as a modern genre. The mental struggle and rich inner world of Hester as a modern embodiment of Medea imbues the play and offers a modern stance on filicide in the context of psychiatry.

Even though both authors found inspiration in Euripides, their works are diametrically opposed in their approach to the tragedy. Jeffers' Medea is purposefully passionate and arguably primal in her initial reaction to her husband's betrayal and it only intensifies with the progress of her vengeance. She is located in Ancient Greece, particularly in Corinth which is far from her homeland. She lived and breathed for her family they established with Jason and after his betrayal, she gradually progresses from a victim to the embodiment of the savage murderess. Regarding Aristotle's theory of tragedy, the play almost perfectly follows all suggestions and proves Aristotle's relevance in modern art.

On the other hand, Carr's Hester arouses and then encourages feelings of sympathy and compassion regarding the tragic heroine's fate. Moreover, she enriched the original story with the supernatural element stemming from Irish folklore, thus developing and complicating the plot even further. She challenges Aristotle's principles and adjusts several aspects to serve her rendition of modern tragedy.

As much as the two plays prove to be different, they are simultaneously the same in their core aspects. Neither of their works is a direct translation, as already established, the nature of myth and myth in tragedy invites authors to retell and innovate, which is exactly what Jeffers and Carr did, only the intensity and range of the variation differs. Both of their plays encourage emotional viewing of the filicide. Both works also became popular in connection with a major

traumatic event in history, the Second World War and the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, which proves the authors understood the aspect of catharsis as an important component of a successful tragedy. Although the playwrights did not aim to make the plays relevant to a certain event or social group, the audience found their way to the plays when they needed them, once again proving the universality of myth and tragedy.

To summarize, despite the pessimistic views of certain philosophers and literary theorists, both Jeffers and Carr prove that there are still ways how to update and innovate drama and tragedy in particular in order to provide modern society with a catharsis-inducing story. The modern focus on psychology thrives in the mythological stories in relation to the universal themes of betrayal, love, family, fate, power and many others. Especially Medea proved to be a tragic heroine who deserves the attention of modern society. Through her connection with modern psychiatry, she can help understand the psyche of desperate and troubled mothers. Moreover, her story offers comfort and catharsis to anybody who needs it in relation to any traumatizing personal or historical event.

## RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce v češtině nazvaná “Variace na řeckou strunu: Médeia podle Robinsona Jefferse a Mariny Carrové” se ve své hlavní části zabývá dvěma moderními zpracováními mýtu o Médeii. Jedná se o divadelní hry, konkrétně tragédie, které spatřily světlo světa v různých dekádách 20. století. První z nich je „Medea“ amerického básníka Robinsona Jefferse, která vyšla v roce 1946. I když se na první pohled zdá, že se jedná o hru velmi podobnou té Euripidově, jejímž je přebásněním, při bližším pohledu je patrné, že se ve skutečnosti jedná o moderní dílo relevantní ve světle aktuálních a globálních událostí. Druhé zvolené dílo je z pera Mariny Carrové, jedné z předních irských dramatické. Její zpracování tohoto mýtu nese v angličtině název „By the Bog of Cats“, který v tuto chvíli nemá ustálenou českou podobu, ale Klicperovo divadlo v Hradci Králové, které připravuje premiéru této hry na říjen 2023, pracuje s názvem „U Kočičí bažiny“.

Práce je rozdělena do čtyř hlavních kapitol: 1. Tragédie a mýtus, 2. Medea, 3. „Medea“ od Robinsona Jefferse a 4. „By the Bog of Cats“ od Mariny Carrové. První kapitola je ryze teoretická a obsahuje 3 další podkapitoly. V první části se věnuje teoriím významných filozofů, kteří se žánrem tragédie zabývali podrobněji. Jedná se o Aristotela, Hegela, Nietzscheho a Steinera. Dá se říci, že každý z nich navazuje, ať už vědomě či pouze podvědomě, na díla filozofů a autorů, kteří publikovali před nimi. Často se tedy ve svých pojednáních navzájem vymezují, případně dle svých schopností zdokonalují již existující modely. Nejvíce prostoru je věnováno Aristotelově „Poetice“, která je natolik stěžejní, že ji ve světě tragédie není možné ignorovat. Tato teoretická kapitola zároveň definuje základní pojmy, například děj, postava, tragické emoce (strach a soucit) nebo také katarze, které jsou zásadní pro rozbor v poslední části práce. Aristotelova teorie tragédie je hlavním nástrojem závěrečné analýzy obou vybraných her. Nietzsche, ale především Steiner vyjádřily ve svých pojednáních názory, že tragédie jako žánr umírá, protože se přestala vyvíjet. Tato kapitola a potažmo i celá práce se proti tomuto tvrzení snaží vymezit a dokázat, že v rukou schopných dramatiků má tragédie nejenom možnost a prostor se dále rozvíjet, ale že se tomu tak i v moderním pojetí přímo děje.

Druhá teoretická podkapitola představuje antický mýtus ve vztahu s antickou společností, která řeckou mytologii vytvořila a zformovala do podoby, jež se ukázala být natolik univerzální, že přečkala staletí a našla si své místo snad ve všechny civilizacích po celém světě, se kterými přišla, byť i jen krátce, do styku. Poslední podkapitola v této části se zaměřila na vývoj tragédie jako dramatického žánru, částečně samostatně a částečně ve spojení s mýtem. Cesta k moderní interpretaci tohoto žánru byla nepochybně dlouhá a místy spletitá, ale zároveň

nesmírně obohacující. Každý národ, který objevil krásu tohoto žánru, přispěl svým jedinečným pohledem a přístupem k rozšíření základních principů ustanovených v antickém Řecku.

Druhá kapitola se už soustředí na samotný mýtus o Médeii. Nejprve nabízí shrnutí jejího příběhu v základní podobě, která odpovídá verzi přijímané v antické i moderní společnosti, a tedy také tak, jak je obvykle představován v moderních zpracováních. Je však nutné zdůraznit, že mýty ze své podstaty podléhají neustálým změnám a vývoji pramenícím z individuálního přístupu k převyprávění každého jednotlivého autora. Tento nástin příběhu nelze v žádném případě považovat za kodifikovaný ani nedotknutelný. K dokreslení vývoje, změn a inovací, kterými tento mýtus za staletí svého propojení s tragédií prošel, bylo vybráno dalších 5 autorů, kteří Médein příběh zpracovali, jmenovitě: Euripides, Seneca, Corneille, Anouilh a Wolfová.

Poslední dvě kapitoly se věnují literárnímu rozboru děl Robinsona Jefferse a Mariny Carrové. Jak již bylo řečeno, vybrané hry byly analyzovány z pohledu Aristotelovy teorie tragédie, ale obsah práce se neomezuje pouze na ni, tato antická tradice je využita ve spojení s optikou psychologie a moderního přístupu k tragédii. Důkladným rozbohem hry „Medea“ bylo prokázáno, že Jeffers dokázal i ve 20. století dosáhnout kompozice moderní tragédie v souladu s Aristotelovou „Poetikou“. Je třeba zdůraznit, že ačkoli se jeho hra na první pohled může jevit jako pouhý překlad Euripidovy tragédie, je toto zdání mylné a zavádějící. Pravdou je, že se mu podařilo mýtus přetvořit do moderní podoby, zatímco zachoval původní prostředí a dojem antického Řecku. I přes důraz na emocionalitu a vášeň lze tuto hru číst v dalších psychologických a sociálních rovinách.

Marina Carrová přistoupila k žánru tragédie a řecké mytologie s otevřenou myslí a, jak ukázala analýza, úspěšně aktualizovala řecký mýtus pro společnost na prahu 21. století. Jedinečné spojení řeckého mýtu, esence Aristotelovi teorie tragédie a irského folklorního dědictví je možné prohlásit za aktuální, inovátorské a řemeslně zdárně zpracované. Přestože si některé pojmy z Aristotelovy „Poetiky“ upravuje pro svou potřebu a s některé přímo nahrazuje prvky z irského prostředí, důkazy nalezené ve hře samotné ukazují, že Carrová dodržuje stěžejní zákonitosti, a i proto lze její hru vnímat jako moderní variaci původní řecké tragédie. Zdařilá proměna Médeie v irskou tulačku s cikánskými kořeny, která ovšem nikam neodchází, dokazuje nezměrné možnosti moderního pojetí tragédie. Duševní a bohatý vnitřní svět Hester, irského ztělesnění Médeie, prostupuje celou hrou a nabízí vhled do problematiky filicidy, neboli vraždy odrostlejšího dítěte, v kontextu moderní psychiatrie.

Přestože oba autoři našli inspiraci v Euripidově hře, jejich díla se diametrálně liší ve svém přístupu a zpracování tohoto mýtu. Jeffers kladl důraz na vášeň a dalo by se říci, že tak

opět vnáší do moderní tragédie dionýský princip, na jehož bezdůvodné potlačování upozorňoval Nietzsche. Děj je zasazen do Korintu, který leží daleko od Médeiny domoviny. Médeia žila pro svou rodinu, kterou s Íásonem založili, ale po jeho zradě postupně přechází z role milující manželky a matky přes oběť zrady až po krutou vražedkyni. „Medea“ téměř dokonale dodržuje všechny rady a doporučení z Aristotelova pojednání a dokazuje tak, že Aristoteles je stále aktuální a významný pro moderní umění.

Ve srovnání s Médeiou, Hester vzbuzuje a následně přiživuje v divácích především pocity soucitu a lítosti kvůli nešťastnému osudu této tragické hrdinky. Carrová obohatila původní příběh o prvky z irského folkloru a děj tak ještě více rozvinula, dodala mu hloubku, ale také ho do jisté míry a v rozporu s Aristotelovou zásadou přímočarého děje zkomplikovala.

Přestože se tyto hry zdají být naprosto odlišné, jsou si vlastně zároveň i velmi podobné. Jeffers i Carrová následovali inherentní povahu mýtu a místo pouhého překladu zvolili převyprávění se snahou o určitou invenci a pojetí, které se v kontextu jejich současníků do jisté míry vymyká. Obě hry také podněcují diváky k sledování děje s emočním zaujetím. Navíc, popularita obou her dosáhla svého vrcholu ve spojení s významnou a traumatizující historickou událostí, jednalo se o druhou světovou válku a teroristické útoky z 11. září 2001, což dokazuje, že oba autoři pochopili a úspěšně implementovali katarzi jako důležitou složku svých tragédií. Ačkoliv ani jeden z nich neusiloval o odkazy na konkrétní sociopolitické události, diváci si k nim skrze ně sami našli cestu – což opět dokazuje univerzálnost mýtu v tragédii.

Závěrem lze říci, že navzdory pesimistickým názorům některých filozofů a literárních teoretiků, Jeffers i Carrová dokazují, že stále existují možnosti, jak aktualizovat a inovovat drama, zejména tragédii, aby moderní společnosti poskytla příběh vyvolávající katarzi. Moderní důraz na psychiku člověka je v mytologických příbězích jako ryba ve vodě díky univerzálním tématům zrady, lásky, rodiny, osudovosti, moci a mnoha dalším. Zejména Médeia prokázala, že si jako tragická hrdinka zaslouží pozornost moderní společnosti. Svým propojením s moderní psychiatrií může pomoci pochopit duševní stavy zoufalých a nešťastných matek. Její příběhy navíc nabízí útěchu, a tedy i katarzi, každému, kdo ji potřebuje v souvislosti s jakkoliv traumatizující osobní nebo historickou událostí.

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