

CHAPTER 4



The Representation of Medea in the Roman House

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Introduction

Episodes from Medea's story have been illustrated in a variety of visual forms in classical art, including Greek vase paintings, engraved Roman gemstones, Italian terracottas, Pompeian wall paintings, Roman sarcophagi and mosaics. In the context of domestic art, however, only one version of Medea's story is represented, namely, her contemplating the murder of her children. The scene appears on the wall paintings of two Pompeian houses and on the floor mosaics of a townhouse in Antioch¹ and a countryside villa at Torre de Palma.² The preserved material is only a fraction of what existed: Ovid (*Tr.* 2.525–26) reports that paintings showing Medea as a mother with sin on her face abounded in Roman houses.³ Though other scenes from Medea's story may have decorated the ancient house, the choice of this specific mythological episode gives rise to a number of questions. Why is this specific subject represented in a domestic context? What message does the scene convey to the ancient viewer? How can the image of a woman contemplating the murder of her sons be integrated into the normal lives of the inhabitants of a house? Using iconographic and literary evidence, this chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

The Image of Medea in Roman Domestic Art

Medea contemplating infanticide appears in two very similar Pompeian paintings. In the Casa di Giasone at Pompeii Medea is portrayed sitting and holding a sword in her lap. Her pose — right elbow resting on her knee and head propped on her right hand — connotes thought. To the left two children play with *astragaloi* (knucklebones): one kneels on his right knee and looks up from his game; the other hastens toward Medea with a sprig in his left hand. From behind the scene the tutor looks on. The painting, an example of the Third Pompeian Style,⁴ dates to Augustan times.⁵ A similar scene occurs in a wall painting from the Casa dei Dioscuri at Pompeii (Figure 4.1). Medea holds a sword in her left hand and moves her right hand towards the hilt; she stands facing the viewer, but casts her eyes right towards her children. The latter are playing with *astragaloi* on a rectangular support. Behind them, within the frame of a door, the tutor looks at the two boys, head on



Fig. 4.1. *Medea*, attributed to Perseus Painter, wall painting from the peristyle of the House of the Dioscuri, Pompeii (third quarter of first century AD), 120 × 97 cm, inv.-no. 8977, Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico

hand as a sign of meditation. Belonging to the Fourth Style,⁶ the wall painting dates to the Neronian or Flavian era (c. 50–70 AD and last quarter of the first century AD respectively).⁷ The portrait of Medea displays close similarities to a fourth-style painting from Herculaneum⁸ representing Medea facing the viewer and holding a sword while looking to her right. The fragmentary panel from Herculaneum is commonly assumed to be the reproduction of a Hellenistic painting by Timomachus of Byzantium⁹ and to be based on a series of ecphrastic epigrams describing this Greek painting.¹⁰ Purchased by Julius Caesar and displayed in the Temple of Venus Genitrix at Rome,¹¹ Timomachus's painting was widely replicated in painting and other media.

Ecphrastic epigrams are representations in text of paintings and statues. Many of those were intended as gifts of poetry for patron and friends on replicas placed in their private houses. For example, Martial's *Apophoreta*, which are epigrams on gifts given to dinner guests, include several descriptions of statues and paintings, some of which were replicas of well-known Greek works (14.170–75, 177–82). Ecphrastic

epigrams, therefore, may be instrumental in giving information on works of art that are now lost. However, they also document the viewer's experience of art, namely how the artistic subjects were interpreted and judged.¹² In Timomachus's time, the Euripidean monologue of Medea served as a paradigm for philosophical debate about the interaction of reason and emotion. Nevertheless, it is better to be cautious in arguing that all representations of Medea provoked the same response in viewers. In the different reality of Roman society there may have been other readings of the image of Medea. Westall, for example, explains Caesar's dedication of Medea and Ajax paintings to his patron goddess Venus in political terms: the mad Ajax would represent Pompey while Caesar, hesitant about war but influenced by desire, would play Medea to Pompey's Jason.¹³ However, within the more private context of the Roman house the image of Medea as a mother/killer may have provoked other responses, as will be discussed later.

The portrait of Medea standing and holding a sword appears again in a mosaic panel from the fourth-century villa at Torre de Palma in Lusitania: the woman stands with a sword in her left hand, itself interlaced with the other hand in front of her.¹⁴ However, the Torre de Palma mosaic differs to some degree from the Pompeian paintings in the elements of its composition. To the left stands a child, a stick in his right hand. He looks at a young man who moves left holding a torch in his raised left hand and a whip in his lowered right one. Lancha argues that the figure represents Apsyrtus, who was killed and cut into pieces by his sister Medea as she escaped with Jason from Colchis. Her interpretation is based on lines 963–70 of Seneca's play, when the ghost of Apsyrtus, who seeks vengeance for his own murder, appears to Medea at the very moment she is about to kill her sons. However, Lancha's argument assumes a close relationship between text and image which is far from certain. Moreover, in the Senecan play Medea's description of her brother as an indistinct, dismembered shade (line 963)¹⁵ would not correspond to an image with a distinctively human appearance as it is depicted on the mosaic panel at Torre de Palma. Rather, the appearance of a man holding a torch next to Medea as killer on an Apulian vase from Canosa¹⁶ suggests the figure is the personification of Oistros, the fury who leads the mother to her crime.

A further scene with similarities to the Torre de Palma mosaic appears on a mid-second-century AD mosaic panel in the House of the Red Pavement at Antioch.¹⁷ The seriously damaged panel represents, on the right, a woman standing with her front to the viewer but her head turned right towards a male figure; her curly hair and gloomy eyes seem to denote anguish. In the centre a man moves towards the woman, dragging a child in his right hand; the child holds a torch which rests on his right shoulder. To the left and behind this scene a female figure holds an unidentified object in her right hand and looks at the central scene; remnants of grey hair suggest her old age. Levi argues that the scene represents an episode from the tragedy of Troy, namely, the slaughter of Astyanax.¹⁸ In his view the mosaic illustrates the moment preceding the child's death when Ulysses drags Astyanax away from his mother Andromache; the old woman on the left represents a priestess from the sanctuary where the slaughter takes place. However, the composition of the scene, which separates a physically static but emotionally active woman from a cluster of other figures, recalls the layout of Medea scenes discussed above. Moreover, the

Greek mosaic contains some iconographic details which occur again in the mosaic panel from Torre de Palma. This similarity suggests that the Antiochene panel, too, represents the most dramatic moment in Medea's story.¹⁹ As in the Torre de Palma mosaic, on the Antiochene panel Medea is accompanied by only one child. Though artistic and literary tradition always describes two children, the representation of one child may result from the personal choice of the mosaicist to concentrate on a few pivotal figures in order to represent the climax of Medea's story.²⁰ The child is the element crucial to the interpretation of the scene as taking place within the realm of the family. A further detail that closely relates the Greek mosaic to the Torre de Palma panel is the torch: this element may suggest the presence of Oistros, the fury symbolized by a running figure in the latter. However, the image of the boy holding a torch also reminds the viewer of the Roman procession which escorted the bride to her new home: the torchbearer who led the procession had to be a boy whose parents were still living, as the Oistros was symbol of the fertile and generative power of nature believed to be embodied in the element of fire. However, the torch was also closely associated with the funerary ceremony in Roman custom, especially the one for children.²¹ In the Torre de Palma mosaic, the torch held by the boy may signify the violent death awaiting Medea's son and the destruction of the concept of fertility within the family. The male figure in the centre is too damaged (head and right shoulder are missing) to determine whether it represents a young hero, as Levi suggests. Rather, the male figure may be the tutor bringing the child to his mother: in Euripides' tragedy the tutor enters the scene with Medea's children, who have just given their mother's gift to Creusa (ll. 1175–99). The old woman may be the Nurse, who looks at the scene aware of Medea's criminal intentions but unable to take any action against her.

The iconographic analysis of the image of Medea in Roman house shows that either famous works of art or plays exercised an influence on the patron's and artist's choice to represent Medea as a son-killer. However, as will be discussed later, a Roman patron's motivation for his choice of this specific subject from Medea's story was also influenced by fundamental changes in the nature of gender roles in Roman society of the Imperial period. The Pompeian paintings are well integrated into the political circumstances and cultural constructions of the Imperial system that contemporary Augustan legislation created, with a considerable impact on the private experience of the upper class for the rest of the pagan period.²² The representation of Medea as a mother/killer in other provinces of the Roman Empire up to the fourth century is evidence for that. In fact, though the scenes of Medea on which the present paper focuses appear over a great range of time (from the first century to the fourth century AD) as well as geography (from Italy to Lusitania to Asia Minor), the reasons behind the choice of this subject for domestic decoration seem to be generated by the same ideas as a consequence of the wide diffusion of the culture of the ruling class. The result was a great uniformity of Imperial culture in terms of art, architecture and, indeed, social habits in the elites of the provinces of the Roman Empire as expression of *Romanitas*.

The Representation of Medea in Art and Literature

The artistic representation of mythological episodes is often seen as the visual reproduction of stories told in literature.²³ The influence of literature on the scenes of Medea contemplating the murder of her sons is especially significant. In fact, there exist a number of literary versions of the death of Medea's sons that all insist the children died accidentally or at another's hand and that Medea was not responsible for killing them in revenge for Jason's infidelity.²⁴ The theme of Medea's infanticide was first introduced by Euripides, who may have borrowed it from a play by Neophron (fifth century BC).²⁵ Following the performance of Euripides' *Medea*, the image of a mother killing her own sons appeared in art and this version of the myth was accepted by writers of later generations.²⁶ In the first century AD Seneca wrote a tragedy which resembles the version of the story told by the Greek playwright four centuries earlier.

The association with a play is immediately evident in a painted scene (c. 69–79 AD) which decorated the *tridinium* (i.e. dining room) of the Casa del Centenario at Pompeii: the panel, which was accompanied by other tragic scenes, shows Medea pointing the sword at her children, who are being brought to her by the tutor; all the figures wear stage costumes and tragic masks.²⁷ It is likely that the source for this dramatic scene is Seneca's play, in which Medea kills her children in front of the audience, whilst in Euripides' play this dramatic moment was performed off-stage. The decoration of domestic space with a scene drawn from the theatrical repertory suggests the house-owner's interest in the theatre. Visitors may have associated the scene with some then famous play and acknowledged the house-owner's cultured nature.²⁸ However, it is not possible to ascertain whether the artist is simply illustrating the text of a play or recalling a specific performance. It is often assumed that the scene with Medea and her children depends on the plays by Euripides or Seneca, as both playwrights accept the version of the myth according to which Medea kills her sons. However, it is highly unlikely that Euripides' *Medea*, a play performed in Athens in the fifth century BC, was still being illustrated in the Roman provinces of Imperial times, i.e. first to fifth century AD. Seneca's tragedy may have influenced the choice of Medea as subject on the part of the patron, but in the Roman playwright there is no mention of the tutor, who is, by contrast, represented in the Pompeian paintings. It is arguable that the Pompeian painting illustrates or recalls another, no longer extant, tragedy on Medea in which the tutor appears on stage. Ovid, for example, who lived at the height of the Pompeian wall paintings, wrote a tragedy *Medea*, but only two lines survive.²⁹

The representation of an extant tragedy in the other scenes under discussion is debatable as there is no element that might suggest a link between pictorial scenes and dramatic performances: no stage is portrayed; the figures do not wear either theatrical dress or masks. Indeed, one might argue that artistic representations of mythological scenes follow their own conventions and need not necessarily show any elements of a stage performance to the ancient viewer, who might in any case easily have related the pictorial representation to an extant tragedy.³⁰ Consequently, all the pictorial scenes portraying Medea as her sons' killer might depict theatrical

scenes as a means of displaying the patron's highly developed cultural awareness. However, this reasoning is very slippery. Artistic representations of Medea as a killer are not necessarily dependent upon theatrical repertory: the version of the myth that Euripides first introduced in the fifth century BC became part of a tradition upon which both artists and playwrights drew.

A thorough analysis of the domestic scenes of Medea in terms of iconographic detail and their relation to other scenes in the architectural context they decorate suggests various reasons for a patron's choice of such an emotionally disturbing subject to decorate his house. The Medea panels on which the present contribution focuses are not isolated images within a certain domestic space, but are accompanied by representations of other mythological episodes. It is the interaction of these scenes with one another and with the semantic framework that enabled viewers to make sense of the images.

The painted scene of Medea in the Casa di Giasone at Pompeii decorates one wall of a *cubiculum*, a private room set aside not only for sleeping but also for relaxing during the day, receiving friends and conducting business. On either side of the Medea scene are two more mythological illustrations. Upon entering the room, one sees on the left the representation of the myth of Phaedra, Theseus's wife, who fell in love with her stepson Hippolytus; he, as a follower of the chaste goddess Artemis, spurned her love. On the opposite wall a further painted panel represents the story of Helen, the beautiful wife of the Greek Menelaos who was kidnapped by the Trojan Paris as Aphrodite's gift. As Bergmann points out, all three panels are thematically linked by the representation of a tragic wife who is about to destroy what is sacred in the family through infanticide (Medea), incest (Phaedra) and adultery (Helen).³¹ The same scenes appear again in the mosaic panel from the House of the Red Pavement at Antioch.³² The two panels representing Phaedra and Hippolytus on either side of the Nurse and Paris and Helen before Aphrodite frame the central image of Medea. The scenes are accompanied by two further representations of mythological love: Meleager and Atalanta as the symbol of inverted male-female roles;³³ and Adonis and Aphrodite between an eros as the expression of the tragic consequences of immoderate love.³⁴

In the Casa dei Dioscuri at Pompeii, the painted panel of Medea was placed on the end pier of the colonnade in the peristyle; on the opposite pier was the scene of Perseus rescuing Andromeda.³⁵ Visible through the large doorway of the *triclinium* which opened at the eastern end of the space, the two panels would have been seen as pendants. The link between the two scenes seems to be the contrasting image of woman in her role as wife and mother. Andromeda fits the paradigm of the good woman: delivered by Perseus from the sea-monster to which she had been offered in order to save her people, Andromeda leaves her father's house and follows her hero-husband Perseus, whom she has borne many children. Perseus's gesture — he holds Andromeda's arm firmly — is an image of the bond between a man and a woman as the support of the family. Medea's encounter with Jason is, too, the story of delivery from a monster and Medea, too, leaves her father's house for the sake of marriage and bears Jason two sons. However, Medea is the opposite of the good woman: she breaks with her natal family by killing her brother and destroys the

conjugal family by killing her sons. The composition of the painting, which isolates and separates Medea from the other figures, communicates the inevitable isolation of a woman who fails as both wife and mother.

On the floor mosaic of the Villa at Torre de Palma, the Medea panel was set in a more complex composition.³⁶ Upon coming into the reception room, the visitor was welcomed by a picture of the Nine Muses, who stand in a row facing the entrance. On the opposite side is the Triumph of Dionysos and beneath the Dionysian procession a square panel depicts Theseus killing the Minotaur. The central part of the pavement is divided into eight panels showing different scenes: a satyr and a maenad; an old Silenus held by a satyr; two maenads dancing; two Dionysian figures; Hercules drunk, held by Hermes; Daphne being transformed into a laurel tree before Apollo; Medea; and Hercules killing his son in the presence of his wife, Megara. The arrangement of the panels raises the question as to whether the images in the floor mosaic are intended to be diverse and isolated or whether they are thematically linked. Among its eight central panels those illustrating Medea and Hercules appear to form a complementary pair: they are each framed by a rectangular panel whilst the other representations are contained within a medallion within a smaller rectangular panel. The decorative layout of the two panels emphasizes the thematic link between the two scenes as illustrations of a parent about to kill her/his son. However, the two scenes may have prompted further associations in the ancient viewer: Diodorus Siculus³⁷ (4.55) tells a version of the Hercules story in which it was Medea who cured Hercules of his madness. All eight scenes are thematically linked by the idea of the passions; these are mainly Dionysian in inspiration (satyrs, maenads, Hercules drunk) but can also be the driving force behind human actions in a more domestic context (Medea and Hercules as killers). However, the arrangement of the Muses and Theseus panels on either end of the composition suggests that education (the Muses) and *virtus* (Theseus) can safely control destructive passions.

The Roman Family

The analysis of the Medea scenes found in a domestic context shows they are thematically linked by their visual representation of ideas about the dynamics of marriage and the role of the woman as wife and mother. The image from a myth gains immediacy and conveys a morally significant message when it shows the viewers familiar scenes in which heroes, though their exceptional state of being demi-gods, display the same sort of feelings and hold essentially the same values as humans. As the main components of any mythological story are the divine or the supernatural or the heroic living in a time which cannot be placed in our time (i.e. human time), myth is not a documentary containing historical data. In spite of its predominantly fictional character, however, myth proves itself more useful than documentary evidence as it illustrates common attitudes more clearly and simply than history and expresses the complexity of cultural norms, values and preoccupations. All mythological stories explore and raise questions about the relationship of men with the divine, nature, family and society throughout the

ages. The number of variants of the same story shows that myth was continuously reshaped, adapted and reused as a reflection of the concerns and beliefs of a society in a specifically historical time. In this sense, fictional myth is embedded within history.³⁸ Within the domestic context, myths become a mirror of the household's interests, dreams and concerns about life. In fact, a wide range of images filled the houses of Roman society: the walls, ceilings and floors of rooms were mostly adorned with representations of Greek and Roman myths, such as the story of Medea, which ought to be placed within a larger social framework.

The scenes with Medea allow the viewer a glimpse of the normal life of an ordinary family: a mother, her children and their tutor. In the Pompeian paintings the two children are represented playing with knucklebones, one of the commonest pastimes of boys in antiquity; the image signifies the happy innocence of childhood. These scenes as an illustration of a moment from domestic life are the visual expression of a prevalent attitude about family in Imperial times. In the years following Augustus's victory in the civil wars (27 BC) and his foundation of the imperial system, the state of Rome underwent political, military, legal and social changes that had a deep impact on the cultural shape of the Roman family and of gender roles. By way of marking the return of law and order after the chaos of the civil wars, Augustus introduced a series of laws enforcing the type of Roman behaviour which would have been appropriate to the restored *res publica*. The laws on marriage, procreation and large families that Augustus promoted served, first, as a means of reinforcing the emperor's power and his image as *pater patriae*; but they also created far-reaching changes for the aristocracy in its attitude towards the family and in gender roles during the following centuries of the Imperial experience.³⁹ These cultural changes marked innovations in imagery, too, with the increased representation of family groups, children and mothers which characterized both state and private art. An illustrative example are the sculpted images decorating the Ara Pacis, the altar that Augustus commissioned in the ninth century BC to celebrate the peace established in the Empire. The sculptures depict scenes of sacrifices to the gods as an image of traditional Roman piety: here Augustus is surrounded by members of his family, including women and children, something very rare on public monuments.⁴⁰ As Kleiner points out, the unusual appearance of women and children as public historical subjects is meant to signal family responsibility.⁴¹ Further examples of the representation of women and children as members of the audience at public events come from the Column of Trajan (110 AD) and one of the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius in Rome (176 AD). Following the example of state imperial imagery, scenes of family groups abound in Roman literature, in inscriptions, in commemorative reliefs as well as in domestic decoration: they all reflect a sentimental ideal of family life based on conjugal happiness and harmony (*concordia*) and on a love for children. In the Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii, for example, a small room was decorated with a wall painting from the Augustan period illustrating the story of Pero and Mycon. Mycon was unjustly imprisoned⁴² and condemned to starve to death but his daughter Pero saved her father's life by suckling him in prison.⁴³ The three elegiac couplets that accompany the scene make the significance of the painting eminently clear. The reference to *pietas* as family sentiment explains the

painted scene as an example of filial piety and devotion. The scenes with Medea, too, are inserted into this social frame of the sentimental ideals of conjugal and familial happiness⁴⁴ which developed in Imperial times, though with different implications. In fact, the absence of Jason as husband and father in these scenes significantly suggests that this ideal of happy, united, affectionate family may be threatened by the more dramatic realities of divorce, remarriage and the death of children. The representation of Medea as a figure who appears isolated in the foreground focuses the viewer's attention on another theme of dramatic actuality: the role of the woman within the context of the family.

In Roman society, the role of any woman was mainly that of wife and mother — both functions linked to the benefit of one man, since the main purpose of marriage was to assure a male line of descent from the *domus* of a *paterfamilias*. Pliny's letters about his wife's miscarriage make this unmistakably clear. In letter 6.4 to Calpurnius Fabatus, his wife's grandfather, immediate reference to the loss of a potential heir reveals Pliny's concern about his own well-being, as well as that of the family group. In the letter to Calpurnia's aunt (8.11), by contrast, Pliny focuses on the well-being of her niece. The difference in the tone and content of Pliny's letters about the same topic may indicate a difference in the concerns and interests of men and women from a male point of view: men's concern is to produce the next generation of the family line as a civic duty, whilst women, who care more about the physical pain and suffering involved in childbirth, seem to live in a more private world. Nevertheless, women, too, were affected by this social pressure, albeit differently: for a woman, in fact, producing offspring was the only way to construct her own identity as wife and mother. In this sense, the divorce from her husband involved for the woman who had been abandoned the loss of both her marital and her maternal identity: in Roman society the separation from her husband also involved the separation from her sons, who would remain in their father's house.⁴⁵ However, the significant cultural transformations of the early Empire promoted major changes in the position of women within the domestic sphere of family as well as in the outside world. There is, in fact, a considerable body of literary evidence which indicates that the Roman *matrona* enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy and participated in a wide range of activities which took her out of the house: women emerge into public discourse as benefactors, patrons and property-owners.⁴⁶ As women might have been seen to have access to power and authority, their position was perceived as highly problematic and a source of tension by the traditionally dominant group of men. But despite their new position, wealth and status, the elite Roman women of Imperial society continued to be defined by the socially constructed image of the woman as a wife and mother belonging mainly to the domestic sphere. The description of women in speeches to emperors, letters to mothers and epitaphs is evidence for that: in these passages women are praised for their traditional domestic values according to a set of formulae that changed little over the Imperial period. However, as literary accounts of womanhood were the product of a restricted group, i.e. the male members of the upper class, it is evident that the ideal image of the woman was constructed and defined according to the values and interests of this elite group whose position was most affected by women.

In this view Medea's tragedy dramatizes the social reality of women in the Roman Empire and highlights tensions within the Roman family. In fact, albeit within the framework of a mythological story, Medea represents a real woman whose identity is shaped by the male ideal of a wife and mother.⁴⁷ In all the representations discussed above Medea is, significantly, represented not as a witch with evil supernatural powers but as a normal woman encapsulated in a family drama and represented in a moment of agonizing decision about her role as mother and wife. It is her sword that distinguishes the mythological representation from a scene from ordinary life and functions as the visual signifier of the impending murder. In this analysis, the sacrifice of the children as the visual manifestation of the bond between husband and wife makes the separation a loss not just for the woman who has been abandoned but also for the man who has benefited from the union. The compensation of loss becomes the terrible instrument by which the woman reacquires her identity. In the real world, probably no ordinary woman would have used a violent weapon to hurt men in the sacred *domus* in this way. Nonetheless, behind Medea's story lurks the possibility that other women might follow her example and adopt equally destructive behaviour towards men.

It is, then, evident that the scenes with Medea function as the visual expression of the subjective male point of view. That the imagined viewers of the Medea scenes are men is confirmed by their display in a certain type of room. The reception room in the villa at Torre de Palma; the peristyle piers conveniently located in front of and visible from the *triclinium* in the Casa dei Dioscuri; the *cubiculum* in the Casa di Giasone at Pompeii, presumably reserved for the house-owner or male guests because of its location next to the *triclinium* in the public section of the house, were all rooms designed for male-defined activities. In the arrangement of domestic space, the entrance hall, audience chamber, dining rooms and other types of reception room were in the first instance associated with the *dominus* alone. Their architectural and decorative layout was constructed principally as a means of display intended to enhance the reputation of the *dominus* and allow more striking self-presentation.⁴⁸ Significantly, the only male figure to appear in most Medea scenes is the tutor. In both Pompeian paintings he is placed behind the scene as the silent spectator who meditates upon the impending drama but does nothing to avert it, as if he were paralysed in his actions. One may wonder why the tutor does not intervene. As a servant, the tutor is distanced from the normative self of the Roman male and zoomed to the world of women, whose identity and role in society are shaped by male power (and the male ideal of family). Through his gaze the tutor may resemble the visual equivalent of the viewer, who is invited to read the scene through masculine eyes; in his immobility, the tutor signifies male impotence.

Hence the representation of Medea as a normal woman acting in a domestic setting becomes more disturbing to the male viewer because it suggests that the ordinary woman embodied by the mythological figure of an infanticide may also commit an 'unwomanly' act. Medea does not kill her children by means of the poison or magic arts traditionally associated with female behaviour; rather, she uses a sword, the typically male weapon. The image of Medea as a woman in distress and an extreme situation unmasks the Roman male's suspicion about their

deficiency of *virtus*, as idealized masculinity, in the private realm of their home. It also reveals male fears concerning women, fears born of the realization that all men are subject to a similar fate and that, like the tutor, they are unable to control women's dangerous potential.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Antioch was the capital of ancient Syria, corresponding to modern Turkey.
2. Torre de Palma is in the Roman province of Lusitania (modern Portugal).
3. Ovid, *Tristia*, 2.521–26: 'Thus, while in our houses there are glorious pictures of the figures of ancient worthies limned by the painter's hand, yet in some corner is a small canvas that portrays the various postures and modes of love; and the son of Telamon sits manifesting his wrath by his aspect, and the foreign mother shows murder written in her eyes' (P. Ovidi Nasonis *Tristium Liber Secundus*, ed. with trans. by S. G. Owen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 117). Ovid is the only source for the representation of this episode from the Medea myth in a domestic context; we cannot know how many such representations may have existed.
4. The defining characteristic of the Third Style (c. 20 BC–20 AD), which coincided with Augustus's reign (27 BC–14 AD), is surface ornamentation. Bands of delicate polychrome motifs frame simple architectural structures; small figural and landscape scenes appear in the centre of a panel usually with a monochrome background such as red, black or white.
5. Erika Simon, 'Die Typen der Medeadarstellung in der antiken Kunst', *Gymnasium*, 61 (1954), 203–27 (pp. 216–17); Jean-Michel Croisille, *Poésie et art figuré de Néron aux Flaviens. Recherches sur l'iconographie et la correspondance des arts à l'époque impériale*, 2 vols (Brussels: Latomus, 1982), 1, 49, 73; Margot Schmidt, 's.v. Medea', in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, 18 vols (Zurich: Artemis, 1981–99), vi (1992), 1, 386–98 (p. 388, n. 9); Bettina Bergmann, 'The Pregnant Moment: Tragic Wives in the Roman Interior', in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy*, ed. by Natalie Boymel Kampen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 199–218 (p. 203).
6. The Fourth Style (c. 20–79 AD) uses large-scale narrative painting and panoramic vistas; the whole wall is opened up illusionistically by means of perspectival architecture in which figures are freely set. The colours warm up and are used to advantage in the depiction of scenes drawn from mythology.
7. Simon, p. 217; Croisille, pp. 50, 73; Schmidt, p. 388, n. 10.
8. Herculaneum is located on the Bay of Naples, near Pompeii.
9. Timomachus of Byzantium was a very distinguished painter of Byzantium (modern Istanbul) who lived at the time of Julius Caesar in the mid-first century BC.
10. Kathryn Gutzwiller, 'Seeing Thought: Timomachus' Medea and Ecphrastic Epigram', *American Journal of Philology*, 125 (2004), 339–86 (p. 340; pp. 360–80).
11. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History. With an English Translation by H. Rackham*, II, Books 3–7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7.126, 35, 136.
12. The 'rhetoric of viewing' is analysed by Simon Goldhill, 'The Naïve and Knowing Eye: Ecphrasis and the Culture of Viewing in the Hellenistic World', in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, ed. by Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 197–223.
13. Richard Westall, 'The Forum Iulium as Representation of Imperator Caesar', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 103 (1996), 83–118.
14. José María Blázquez, 'Los mosaicos romanos de Torre de Palma', *Archivo español de arqueología*, 53 (1980), 125–50 (p. 137); Schmidt, p. 391, n. 33a; Janine Lancha, *Mosaïque et culture dans l'Occident romain (Ier–IVe s.)* (Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 1997), pp. 237–38, pp. 244–46.
15. Seneca, *Medea*, 963–66: 'Whose shade is approaching, indistinct, dismembered? It is my brother, he seeks revenge: we shall provide it — all of us shall. Plunge your torches into my eyes, hock, burn; see my breast is exposed to the Furies' (*Medea*, with an introduction, text, translation and commentary by Harry M. Hine (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2000)).
16. Simon, pp. 212–14; Schmidt, p. 391, n. 29.

17. Kurt Weitzmann, 'Illustrations of Euripides and Homer in the Mosaics of Antioch', in *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, ed. by Richard Stilwell, III (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 233ff (pp. 239–42); Doro Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 82–85, plate XIIIa; Schmidt, p. 395, n. 73.
18. Levi, I, p. 82; II, p. XIII.
19. Weitzmann too suggested that the mosaic panel from Antioch represents Medea.
20. The practice was very common in classical art. For a thorough analysis and other examples, see Susan Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 3–12, pp. 28–42.
21. Susan Wood, 'Alcestis on Roman Sarcophagi', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 4, 82 (1978), 499–510 (pp. 505–08).
22. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: 'Iusti Coniuges' from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
23. For the relationship of artistic representations with literary texts, see Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially 'What does it mean to illustrate a text?', pp. 1–7 (Chapter 1); 'The evidence from Hellenistic and Roman art', pp. 79–117 (Chapter 4).
24. One story said that the Corinthians killed Jason's children in revenge after Medea had killed Creon (Scholia to Euripides, *Medea*, 264). Another said that Medea tried to protect her children, or to make them immortal, but inadvertently caused their death (Scholia to Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 13.749; Eumelus, *Corinthiaca*, Fr. 3a Davies; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.3.10.1).
25. Bernd Manuwald, 'Der Mord an den Kindern: Bemerkungen zu den Medea-Tragödien des Euripides und des Neophron', *Wiener Studien*, N. F. 17 (1983), 27–61 (pp. 41–56); Ann Michelini, 'Neophron and Euripides' Medea 1056–80', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 119 (1989), 115–35 (p. 116; pp. 124–34).
26. Ennius (239–169 BC) wrote a Latin version of Euripides' play; Ovid (43 BC–14 AD), *Heroides*, 12; id. *Metamorphoses*, 12, 394–97.
27. Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 230; Croisille, pp. 50–51, 61, 73; Schmidt, p. 389, n. 13.
28. Depictions of theatrical scenes in classical art were very common, especially in a domestic context as a means of displaying the house-owner's cultural refinement and literary allegiances. The most detailed illustration of the theatre from the Imperial period is given by the late-third-century AD mosaics from the House of Menander at Mytilene in Greece (Serafim Charitonidis, Lilly Kahil and René Ginouvès, *Les Mosaïques de la Maison du Ménandre à Mytilène* (Bern: Francke 1970). The floor mosaics show actors, wearing masks and comic costume, and inscriptions bearing play's title along with an indication of the act from which the episode comes. These scenes are mostly from the plays of Menander, a famous Greek playwright who wrote comedies in the second half of the fourth century BC. One may guess that the reading and performances of the plays were intended to take place in the room where the theatrical subjects were on display.
29. Anastasios G. Nikolaidis, 'Some Observations on Ovid's Lost Medea', *Latomus*, 44 (1985), 383–87.
30. As Penny Small points out, both artist and author depended on the same set of legends. In the artist's choice of illustrating plays three factors were involved: 'visual and oral memory of actual performances, visual sources from long-standing artistic traditions, and the classical view of the malleability of myth' (p. 78).
31. Bergmann, 'The Pregnant Moment', p. 208.
32. Levi, pp. 68–89.
33. Meleager was in love with Atalanta, the only woman in the hunting party of heroes called together by the king of Calydon to rid his country of a terrible boar. Meleager rejoiced when Atalanta was the first to wound the boar; he then completed the kill himself, and awarded the boar's hide to her on the grounds that she had drawn first blood. However, Meleager's uncles were enraged that the prize of the hunt should be awarded to a woman and tried to take it for themselves. Meleager fought with them and killed them.

34. When Adonis was born, Aphrodite was so moved by his beauty that she sheltered him and entrusted him to Persephone (the goddess queen of the underworld). The latter was also smitten by his beauty and refused to give him back. The dispute between the two goddesses was settled by Zeus, who decided that Adonis was to spend one-third of every year with each goddess and the last third wherever he chose. He always chose to spend two-thirds of the year with Aphrodite. This went on until he died, fatally wounded by a wild boar — a fate said to be caused by Ares, who was jealous of Adonis.
35. Konrad Schauenburg, s.v. 'Andromeda', *Lexikon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, I (1981), 774–90 (p. 781, n. 67).
36. Lancha, pp. 231–55, n. 109.
37. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian of Sicily (c. 80–20 BC) wrote forty books of world history called *Bibliotheca Historica* (Library of History).
38. For a general introduction to classical mythology, see William F. Hansen, *Classical Mythology: A Guide to the Mythical World of the Greeks and Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Robert Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a more detailed analysis on methods for the study of ancient Greek myth, but useful for classical mythology, too, see: *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. by Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).
39. Kristine Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
40. Natalie Boymel Kampen, 'Between Public and Private: Women as Historical Subjects in Roman Art', in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. by Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991), pp. 218–48.
41. Diana E. E. Kleiner, 'The Great Friezes of the Ara Pacis Augustae', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, 90 (1978), 753–76.
42. The cause of his imprisonment is not specified in the sources.
43. Waldemar Deonna, 'La Légende de Pero et de Micon et l'allaitement symbolique', *Latomus*, 13 (1954), 140–66; Milnor, pp. 99–102.
44. *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, ed. by Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Helpful sections include W. Eck, 'Rome and the Outside World: Senatorial Families and the World They Lived In', pp. 73–99 (Chapter 4); S. Dixon, 'Conflict in the Roman Family', pp. 149–67 (Chapter 7); H. Sigismund Nielsen, 'Interpreting Epithets in Roman Epitaphs', pp. 169–204 (Chapter 8).
45. On Roman divorce, see Treggiari, Chapter 10 (pp. 323–64), Chapter 13 (pp. 435–82).
46. *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, ed. by Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (London: Duckworth, 2005).
47. Margaret Visser, 'Medea: Daughter, Sister, Wife and Mother: Natal Family versus Conjugal Family in Greek and Roman Myths about Women', in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays Presented to D. J. Conacher*, ed. by Martin Cropp, Elaine Fantham and S. E. Scully (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1986), pp. 149–65; Gianni Guastella, 'Virgo, Coniunx, Mater: The Wrath of Seneca's Medea', *Classical Antiquity*, 20 (2001), 197–219.
48. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Social Structure of the Roman house', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 56 (1988), 43–97 (pp. 43–49).

Unbinding Medea

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Antiquity to the 21st Century*



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