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Medea and New Media: Analyzing Euripides' Tragedy through the Medium
of Video Games

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ABSTRACT

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by

Ashton Lacy Murphy

Women play an astonishingly prominent role as characters in ancient Athenian tragedy; we have only one extant tragedy—*Philoctetes*—which does not feature at least one female character. The number, and perhaps more importantly the depiction, of these characters has given rise to a search for proto-feminism in tragedy, with Euripides as an especially prominent target. As our understanding of the history of the Medea myth stands, it appears that Euripides was the first to write a Medea who murders her own children. Therein lies the ambiguity behind the of the play: for Euripides portrays a strong, intelligent woman challenged by unjust forces beyond her control; and he has this same woman commit one of the worst offenses in the Hellenic world—the murder of one's own blood. Can the classic be enjoyed by modern women, or does the misogyny of Euripides' Athens imbed its patriarchal values too deeply into the text? In my research I analyze Euripides' Medea through a new lens: comparing and contrasting Medea's depiction to those of female characters in modern entertainment, specifically, video games.

1. Introduction: How Do You Solve a Problem Like Medea?¹

1.1

Women play an astonishingly prominent role as characters in ancient Athenian tragedy. We have only one extant tragedy—Philoctetes—which does not feature at least one female character. Of the 32 surviving tragedies (plus one satyr play)² traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, 10 bear women’s names as titles.^{3 4} These are a significant number, only slightly fewer than the 11 which bear men’s names.⁵ The women in these plays are neither crudely sketched nor uniform: for every Clytemnestra there is a Hypermnestra, for every Antigone an Ismene, for every Medea an Alcestis. These women (the good, the bad, and the troubled together) not only occupy the stage, but dominate it, often deciding the fate not only of their *oikos*, but of the *polis* in which they live.⁶

Despite these seemingly positive portrayals of female characters, scholarship has been divided as to what to make of them. This prominence of women on stage, even if they are only female *characters* portrayed by male actors, flies in the face of almost everything we know about the “ideal” behavior of Athenian women in the fifth century.

¹ Title taken from: “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Medea?.” *The Independent*, 2001. APGRD General Collection.

² 7 Aeschylus; 7 Sophocles; 18 Euripides +1 Satyr Play

³ Antigone; Electra (Sophocles); Alcestis; Medea; Andromache; Hecuba; Iphigenia in Tauris; Electra (Euripides); Helen; and Iphigenia in Aulis.

⁴ In fact, of the nine “alphabetical” plays of Euripides [Helen, Electra, Heraclidae, Hercules, Suppliant Women, Iphigenia at Aulis, Iphigenia Among the Taurians, Ion, and Cyclops] five refer to a woman (as in Helen and Iphigenia at Aulis) or group of women (as in Suppliant Women).

⁵ Agamemnon, Prometheus Bound, Ajax, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Philoctetes, Hippolytus, Ion, Heracles, Orestes, and Rhesus.

⁶ As Judith Mossman puts it: “It is perennially startling that a culture that prescribed the invisibility and silence of women produces, and indeed promoted to the highest cultural status, a genre in which women are portrayed as supremely articulate.” (Mossman, Judith. “Chapter Twenty-Two. Women’s Voices.” *A companion to Greek tragedy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008. 352)

These women speak when they should be silent, disobey when they should be submissive, and show strength and brutality when they should be crushed by the unfairness of the world. It seems too incredible that these complicated, nuanced portrayals would indicate any pro-female tendencies in the ancient playwrights.

On one pole, Gilbert Murray stated in 1917, “To us [Euripides] seems an aggressive champion of women; more aggressive, and certainly far more appreciative than Plato. Songs and speeches from the *Medea* are recited today at suffragist meetings.”⁷ On the other, feminist scholar Sue-Ellen Case writes: “Classical plays and theatrical conventions can now be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing real women and replacing them with masks of patriarchal production...overall, feminist practitioners and scholars may decide that such plays do not belong in the canon—and that they are not central to the study and practice of theater.”⁸

Euripides’ *Medea* especially invites this ambiguity. One can only imagine the reaction of the original audience of Euripides’ tragedy. Poised on the brink of the Peloponnesian war, at the height of their confidence and empire, the denizens of Athens flock to the theater of Dionysus, young and old, male and female,⁹ slave and free.¹⁰ They already know the bare bones of the story, and, remembering the ceremony honoring *Medea*’s children carried out in real-life Corinth[□], suspect that the Corinthians will kill

⁷ Van Zyl Smit, Betine. "Medea the feminist." *Acta Classica* 45 (2002): 102.

⁸ Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminism and theatre*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. (No Page Numbers in ebook.)

⁹ Csapo, Eric, and William J. Slater. *The context of ancient drama*. University of Michigan Press, 1995: 286-287.

¹⁰ This description of Athens owes much to that in chapter 1 of Blackwell’s companion to Greek tragedy. (Gregory, Justina. *A companion to Greek tragedy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008. 3.)

them in revenge.¹¹ The audience watches as Medea's case is argued: they feel their sympathies move to her, this woman who has been conspicuously Hellenized, who has been a proper¹² wife in every way, "loved by the citizens to whose land she had come, and lending to Jason himself all her support,"¹³ Medea's nurse says. They, especially the male spectators, might shift uncomfortably in their seats during the "women of Corinth" speech, recognizing the gendered injustice that is being perpetrated against these women and which they themselves have enforced upon their wives and daughters.

Then, as is so often the case, the audience experiences a jarring reversal. They hear Medea's exultant crowing over the gruesome deaths of the rightful ruler of a city and his innocent daughter—and, worst of all, their hearts sink when Medea announces her plan: she will kill her children to destroy their father.¹⁴

As our understanding of the history of the Medea myth stands, it appears that

¹¹ "Medea will first establish the children's tomb in the temenos of Hera Acraea; then, in return for this impious murder, Corinth is to observe for the rest of time a solemn festival and ritual in the children's honor... The ritual referred to in these lines, involving the internment of fourteen noble Corinthian boys and girls in Hera's temple precinct to mourn for the children of Medea, was carried out from very early times until the Romans sacked the city, after which "the children no longer cut their hair for [the Medeids] or wear black clothes." Mills, S. P. "The sorrows of Medea." *Classical Philology* 75, no. 4 (1980): 295.

¹² Proper, if not Athenian. She has, according to the nurse's first speech, been an excellent wife, and she's certainly fulfilled her part of the bargain, both by her services in Colchis and by her production of at least two sons. Interestingly, in the Athens of Euripides these children would not have been granted citizenship: however, Jason doesn't seem to refer to his sons by Medea as any more foreign or less legitimate than those he would have had with Glauce.

¹³ Euripides. "Euripides, Medea David Kovacs, Ed." Perseus. Accessed May 03, 2016. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0006,003:8>. Lines 12-13.

¹⁴ "Sympathy shifts from Medea to Jason as she moves from victim to victimizer, prey to predator," remarks Nancy Rabinowitz. (Rabinowitz, Nancy Sorkin. "Didaskalia - The Journal for Ancient Performance." *Didaskalia - The Journal for Ancient Performance*. Accessed April 07, 2016.)

Euripides was the first to write a Medea who murders her children.¹⁵ Therein lies the ambiguity behind the play. Euripides portrays a strong, intelligent woman challenged by unjust forces beyond her control; and he has this same woman commit one of the worst offenses in the Hellenic world—the murder of one’s own kin. Does this shift, as Rabinowitz claims, support an argument for the play’s misogyny, “by making the audience turn against the wronged woman when she turns out to be strong?”¹⁶

The question, with the state of the evidence as it is now, will likely never be definitively answered. As Terry Collits articulates, “Short of the unlikely event of the discovery of a hitherto lost library of new evidence, the empirical data for answering the question is likely to remain as limited and unyielding as it is now. The alternative method is re-reading the existing texts, subjecting them to new methods of analyses and different perspectives for interpretation.”¹⁷

We don’t know how the original audience responded—we can only conjecture, based off of the trilogy’s last-place finish at that year’s City Dionysia¹⁸ and scant evidence about the character of Euripides.¹⁹ However, although the Medea is thousands of years old, its original audience crumbled into dust: we are now the audience of Greek

¹⁵ “And it seems to be suggested by the evidence that the murder of the children by Medea herself is Euripidean invention.” Knox, Bernard MW. “Word and action.” *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 296

¹⁶ Rabinowitz, Nancy Sorkin. “Didaskalia - The Journal for Ancient Performance.” *Didaskalia - The Journal for Ancient Performance*. Accessed April 07, 2016.

¹⁷ Collits, Terry. “Intimations of Feminism in Ancient Athens: Euripides’ Medea.” *Sydney Studies in English* 26 (2008): 1.

¹⁸ It has been suggested that the play “troubled” the judges. (Zerba, Michelle. “Medea hypokrites.” *Arethusa* 35, no. 2 (2002): 319.)

¹⁹ Most famously, the portrayal of the women’s rage towards his “misogynistic” plays in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*.

tragedy,”²⁰ as Oliver Taplin writes. We are also creating our own new art forms. Our Penguin copies of the *Medea* may be almost as far removed from their original contexts as they can be—but if we compare the reception of one of *our* emerging art forms to that of tragedy, we may be able to make some informed conjectures about not only the status of *Medea*’s character, but about the purpose of its ambiguity.²¹ The emergent art form that I have chosen to analyze Greek Tragedy is videogames—and this concept is not so far-fetched as one might think.²²

1.2: Videogames and Tragedy

It is easy to forget with the passage of time that tragedy, as it was presented by our extant playwrights, was still a highly volatile and changing form of performance, not the crystallized ideal that we, or even perhaps Aristotle, knew. Aeschylus himself was credited with the introduction of the second actor in a play, and Sophocles with the third. What we would call “special effects” were also being rapidly developed and tested: the introduction of the *skene* building instead of a tent, the invention (and subsequently lampooned use) of the *ekkyklema* and the creation of the *machina* all occurred in a

²⁰ Taplin, Oliver. *Greek tragedy in action*. Routledge, 2003: 4.

²¹ It should be noted that this paper doesn’t attempt to deal with what might be called “Feminism with a capital F.” Rather, it attempts to analyze the ambiguity behind *Medea*’s character: how sympathetic is the narrative to her initial plight? How much does it condemn her eventual decision? How might Euripides have wanted the audience to feel about *Medea*, the real women who could be in her position, and the society that victimized them as they walked out of the theater? For explicitly “Feminist” analysis of the *Medea*, see “*Medea the Feminist*,” “Intimations of Feminism in Ancient Athens: Euripides’ *Medea*,” “*Medea and British Legislation before the First World War*,” and “*Medea: Hero or Heroine?*”

²² It might be difficult to take video games seriously as a medium, especially for older readers. This may be partly generational: video games were even newer twenty years ago, and in some ways bear little resemblance to the games we’ll be looking at in this paper. Those who grew up with *Galaga* will hardly recognize the cinematic, story-driven games of recent years, which can, in a lot of ways, more resemble interactive movies than traditional arcade fare. I would urge any readers to keep their minds open, and remember that there was a time when even novel-reading was thought to be degenerative to women.

relatively short period. These innovations allowed for more technologically advanced storytelling: the *skene* and *ekkyklema* allowing the representation of indoor space, the *machina* allowing gods and goddesses to intervene in human affairs while hovering high above the action.

Videogames are enjoying a similar popularity and explosive growth—in fact, their identity as a medium is intrinsically linked with finding new and creative ways to tell stories. Videogames are a new medium to even a modern audience. It has grown from Pong to the games of the virtual reality headset Oculus Rift, and with it so has the complexity of the stories being told. Both tragedy and video games are very immersive; that is to say, each presents its story in a more visually and psychologically intense way than media had before. Of course, our standards of immersion have changed considerably from those of ancient Athens. The evidence we have, however, shows that tragedy had an unusually strong impact on the emotions of its viewers; according to the *Varia Historia*, the spectators of Phrynichus were so moved by his verse that they elected him General.²³ The audience of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* were said to be so terrified by the sudden appearance of the furies that women miscarried and children died;²⁴ while it seems unlikely that the account is historically literal, it speaks to a memory of the shock and fear that was actually felt by the original audience.²⁵ This shock and fear enjoys a modern analog in horror games. The most subscribed channel on YouTube as of March 2016 is PewDiePie, a gaming channel which often features YouTuber Felix Kjellberg reacting to

²³ "Aelian, *Varia Historia*." ToposText. Accessed May 03, 2016. <http://topostext.org/index.php/our-texts/mythology-literature/221->.

²⁴ Paley, Frederick Apthorp. *The tragedies of Aeschylus*. Whittaker, 1870: lvii.

²⁵ William Calder actually found an anecdote about a European production of Hamlet where the audience was said to have a similar reaction. (Calder, William M. "Vita Aeschyli 9: Miscarriages in the Theatre of Dionysos." *The Classical Quarterly (New Series)* 38, no. 02 (1988): 554-555.)

horror games with over-the-top fear, even leading to a YouTube Red live-action show titled “scare PewDiePie,” in which the YouTube personality undergoes staged horror situations based on games.

Aristotle famously hypothesized about the catharsis of tragedy, the emotions it allows the audience to live vicariously through its players. This catharsis, often translated “purging” is perhaps more appropriately represented by the English word “refining”—like dross being melted out of gold. Aristotle, rather than hypothesizing that tragedy draws out and *removes* horror and fear from its audiences, rather argues that the plays teach their viewers instead to experience the correct amount of horror and fear in response to the right things.²⁶

Vicarious experience is likewise the crux of videogame play. A video game player picks up a controller and takes on the persona of the character controlled in the game, role-playing as the protagonist or protagonists. This dynamic is present even in games where the player doesn’t take up the mantle of an obvious protagonist, such as in the *Sims* franchise: the player, instead of acting through the body of a character on-screen, takes on the persona of God, manipulating and controlling the lives of the Sim characters he or she creates. Of course, there is enormous debate about the effects of this vicarious experience on the player, and whether video game play can influence attitudes and behaviors. However, current research seems to suggest that video games may have, like tragedy, an edifying effect on their players: prosocial video game play has been positively correlated in several studies with prosocial actions in real life.²⁷

²⁶ Aristotle, and Anthony Kenny. *Poetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Xxiv.

²⁷ Gentile, Douglas A., Craig A. Anderson, Shintaro Yukawa, Nobuko Ichori, Muniba Saleem, Lim Kam Ming, Akiko Shibuya et al. "The effects of prosocial video games on prosocial

1.3: Political Play

The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides had a profoundly political dimension, almost by their very nature commenting on issues essential to the *polis* of Athens in their day. Aeschylus places the first trial ever for murder on the Areopagus, only four years after the reforms of Ephialtes. These rules severely restricted the scope of the ancient council's power, and the positioning of the trilogy's final play seems to be making explicit comment on the reforms, though it's unsure whether the play is endorsing them or criticizing them.²⁸ Regarding another tragedy, Bernard Knox notes how Oedipus "represents, by the basis of his power, his character, and his title, the city [Athens] which aimed to become (and was already on the road to becoming) the *tyrannos* of Greece, the splendid autocrat of the whole Hellenic world."²⁹

While video games seem an odd place to look for politics, they increasingly have a more political dimension as the medium matures. The U.S. Supreme Court decided in 2011 that video games are protected under the first amendment³⁰, and many video games feature explicit or implicit political commentary. BioShock is a response to the political theory of Objectivism. It takes place entirely in a city called Rapture, a Galt's Gulch under the sea, a city where enterprise and creativity can, in theory, remain unhindered. Rather than the idyllic capitalist utopia Rand might imagine, Rapture has by the beginning of the game devolved into a hellish underwater prison, torn apart by the greed

behaviors: International evidence from correlational, longitudinal, and experimental studies." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2009).

²⁸ Vandiver, Elizabeth. "The Oresteia—Libation Bearers and Eumenides." Lecture.

²⁹ Knox, Bernard. *Oedipus at Thebes: Sophocles' tragic hero and his time*. Yale University Press, 1998. 99.

³⁰ Downes, Larry. "Video Games given Full First Amendment Protection." CNET. Accessed May 04, 2016. <http://www.cnet.com/news/video-games-given-full-first-amendment-protection/>.

and corruption the game seems to argue is inevitable when humans are unregulated.



[Pictured above: A statue above the entrance to Rapture³¹]

BioShock's political message is very explicit, but even games without obvious political leanings may endorse certain actions and beliefs. For instance, SimCity, a city-building simulation by game publisher Maxis, based its economic system on the Laffer Curve. Players can decide whom to tax and how much to tax them; the optimum tax rate for the game has been calculated to be 10 percent for the rich, 11 percent for the middle-

³¹ "No Gods or Kings. Only Man". Digital image. Bioshock.wikia. Accessed May 5, 2016. Bioshock.wikia.com.

class, and 12 percent for the poor. Without explicitly stating a political position, simply by rewarding one player behavior over another, SimCity seems to advocate a conservative economic model.³²

I mentioned above that video games could have an edifying effect on their players, teaching prosocial behaviors through gameplay. However, much more famously, games are also blamed for a number of societal ills, including violent crime and sexism. The now-disbarred lawyer Jack Thompson famously called violent video games “murder simulators,”³³ and in the aftermath of the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting CBS correspondent Bob Orr reported that the killer was “motivated by violent video games.”³⁴ Hillary Clinton, in the aftermath of the 2005 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas “Hot Coffee” scandal, asserted, “There is no doubting the fact that the widespread availability of sexually explicit and graphically violent video games makes the challenge of parenting much harder.”³⁵

Of course, this aspect of video games seems to caution against a comparison with tragedy: after all, tragedies are widely regarded to be masterpieces, taught in college classes, elevated against other forms of media. Video games are, in some cases literally, children’s play. However, those familiar with Plato’s *Republic* might remember that even

³² Peck, Michael. "The Hidden Politics of Video Games." POLITICO Magazine. Accessed May 04, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/04/xbox-video-games-politics-economic-theory-117289>.

³³ "Transcripts." Jack Thompson.org. Accessed May 05, 2016. <http://www.jackthompson.org/archives/transcripts.htm>.

³⁴ Jaslow, Ryan. "Violent Video Games and Mass Violence: A Complex Link." CBSNews. Accessed May 04, 2016. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/violent-video-games-and-mass-violence-a-complex-link/>.

³⁵ "USATODAY.com - Clinton Seeks 'Grand Theft Auto' Probe." USATODAY.com - Clinton Seeks 'Grand Theft Auto' Probe. July 14, 2005. Accessed May 05, 2016. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-07-14-clinton-game_x.htm.

tragedy was not without its critics. One passage is particularly striking: it starts with “we must begin by controlling the fable-makers.” Plato’s caricature of Socrates calmly and rationally states that the same tragedies now taught in colleges around the country should be banned from his hypothetical city. “Young people cannot distinguish the allegorical from the non-allegorical, and what enters the mind at that age tends to become indelible and irremovable,”³⁶ he said—one supposes Mrs. Clinton might approve. It is easy to think that tragedy was born old, had sprung into the world fully-formed like Athena from Zeus’ forehead. But the plays we have were new, once. They were violent and shocking and innovative. Dangerous.

It is this last point of comparison which is important when thinking about the *Medea* and video games. Video games can endorse or challenge certain worldviews, either explicitly, as in the case of BioShock, or implicitly, as in SimCity. This essay will compare the narrative of the *Medea*, as well as its depiction of its main character, with those of selected video games.³⁷ First, we will lay the basis from which we will make analysis of Medea’s character and actions by comparing and contrasting Medea to the most iconic character in Bioware’s *Dragon Age* series: Morrigan the witch.

2. Witchy Woman: Exploring the Character of Medea Through *Dragon Age*’s

³⁶ Aristotle, and Anthony Kenny. *Poetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 3.

³⁷ The characters and games for comparison were chosen exclusively from what might be called “triple A” games. “Triple-A” used to be the highest score of a rating system of game quality—over time it evolved to mean a game published by a major publisher whose monetary resources are assumed to ensure quality and advertisement exposure. As opposed to Indie games, Triple-A games reach a large audience and, rather than being a personal project of a developer, tend to be designed for consumption by a wide range of gamers. These traits (high production value and large audience) closely mimic those of the plays of Euripides, which would have enjoyed both the patronage of a *choregos* and a large audience in that of the theater of Dionysus.

Morrigan

2.1

Bioware's *Dragon Age* Series chronicles the adventures of several protagonists through the medieval fantasy world of Thedas, a complex world filled with various city-states, kingdoms, and empires fighting for survival and power.

Three games, *Dragon Age Origins*, *Dragon Age II*, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, represent the core titles in the series, though other *Dragon Age* material exists in the form of downloadable content (DLCs), comic books, novels, and a free-to-play text-based browser game.

The complex world of the game—its politics, religions, mythologies, and people groups—is too sprawling to summarize here properly; however, at the heart of the games is conflict between opposing factions³⁸ neither of which is completely in the right.

Dragon Age Origins, the first title in the series, has the player take on the persona of the Warden, one of the last surviving members of the Fereldan Grey Wardens. The Grey Wardens are a Night's Watch-like organization who are sworn to protect the world from the Blight, a time when Orc-like Darkspawn emerge from the ground and attempt to overrun the world. To combat the Darkspawn, the Grey Warden assembles a rag-tag band of adventurers and raises an army, navigating politics, demons, and ancient ruins to do so. The Warden's personality and attributes are chosen by the player: he or she may be male or female, and has the choice of a number of fantasy races and classes with which to play.

One of the first companions the Warden gains is Morrigan, a young witch sent to aid

³⁸ These factions tend to fall on two sides: those who support the Chantry, the dominant religion in Thedas, and those who oppose it (or at least its methods). There are exceptions, such as the conflict between two dwarven king-hopefuls, but the conflict at the heart of *Dragon Age II* and to a lesser extent *Dragon Age Inquisition* is between the Chantry's Templars and the Mages.

the Warden and his companions in their quest. Morrigan travels in the Warden's party almost the entire game, aiding in combat and offering advice and commentary as they travel through the world. She is also, in the words of *Dragon Age* lead writer David Gaider, "the most iconic character in *Dragon Age*."³⁹

Morrigan is biting intelligent and openly disdainful; most of her dialogue with the Warden's other companions is competitive and at least a little hostile.⁴⁰ She tends to disapprove of player actions that are too altruistic or self-sacrificing, espousing a worldly "tit-for-tat" philosophy that everything has a price. This dynamic especially comes to the forefront in romance: Morrigan is a romantic option for a male Warden, though at first she is interested in nothing more than a physical connection. At the same time, Morrigan is young and in some ways inexperienced, having grown up in the wilds outside of civilization rather like Medea herself.

Morrigan is a sort of anti-Medea, the flip side of the same coin. Both women are powerful sorceresses who come from a barbarian place outside civilization as the other characters know it. After the story both disappear into parts unknown, and both are involved in the death of a family member.

Morrigan's journey parallels the journey of Medea on the *Argo*, the adventure which provides a history and backdrop to the events of the *Medea*.⁴¹ At the start of *Dragon Age*:

³⁹ "Lead Writer Interview David Gaider: *Dragon Age Origins Inquisition - General Discussion (Spoilers)*." The BioWare Forum. Accessed April 07, 2016.

⁴⁰ "Morrigan/Dialogue." *Dragon Age Wiki*. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁴¹ As Marianne Hopman has pointed out, Medea uses the play to "enact a symbolic revision of the *Argo* story that nullifies the old saga, annihilates her marriage, and deprives Jason of his heroic glory." Hopman, Marianne. "Revenge and Mythopoiesis in Euripides' *Medea*." In *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 138, no. 1, pp. 155-183. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008: 158.

She argues that Nautical images dominate the play, and as the *Medea* continues its titular

Origins Morrigan is recruited from the Kokari Wilds, having experienced only limited interaction with the outside world. While very articulate, she has interacted more with the wildlife around her in her capacity as a shapeshifter than with people, and views other humans with suspicion and mistrust, while at the same time reacting with wonder and surprise when confronted with a crowded marketplace: "I... have never seen such a collection of merchants and people before. 'Tis always so?"⁴²

When asked what Morrigan's role in the story of *Origins* was, David Gaider, the lead writer, answered:

"She's the other. Everybody else in the party represents a facet of life in Thedas. You have people who are believers in the Chantry. You have people who are typical Fereldans or typical Templar. And we needed those characters. They are sort of cyphers through which the player learns about the world and how they interact with the plots. But Morrigan is the outsider. She comes in with an outsider's view on the Chantry. She's an apostate. She is an outsider to everything all the other party members represent."⁴³

character in essence takes Jason's heroic glory for herself, while killing the children reverses their marriage, erasing the tangible evidence that their relationship ever took place.

⁴² "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁴³ "Lead Writer Interview David Gaider: Dragon Age Origins Inquisition - General Discussion (Spoilers)." The BioWare Forum. Accessed April 07, 2016.



[Pictured above: Morrigan Concept Art from *Dragon Age: Origins*⁴⁴]

Morrigan returns in the latest game in the Dragon Age franchise, this time as an advisor to the Empress. After her departure in the first game, Morrigan has made her way from the wilds to politics. Still cynical and mysterious, she assists the new player character, the Inquisitor, in his or her maneuverings of complicated court politics. The player can decide the outcome of quest, but, whoever remains in charge, Morrigan is sent as an ambassador to the Inquisitor's side, providing magical guidance and becoming an intrinsic part of the story moving on.

⁴⁴ Morrigan Concept Icon. Digital image. Dragonage.wikia. Accessed May 5, 2016. Dragonage.wikia.com.



[Pictured above: Morrigan Concept Art from *Dragon Age: Inquisition*⁴⁵]

The Warden in this way functions as a sort of Jason figure: through his or her intervention Morrigan, like Medea, is removed from her barbarian homeland, journeying into civilization and eventually becoming acculturated.

2.2: *Medea the Clever Corinthian*

For Euripides' *Medea is* acculturated, at least in the way she presents herself. As Stewart Laurence pointed out, "if the audience entered the theatre expecting to see Medea the exotic criminal, they received essentially (though not entirely) the opposite

⁴⁵ Dossier: Morrigan. Digital image. [gamestorylife](http://gamestorylife.com). Accessed May 5, 2016. Gamestorylife.com.

impression.”⁴⁶ As Medea steps out onto the stage for the first time her speech “becomes controlled, abstract, intellectualizing and indistinguishable from that of any of the male characters she confronts in the early scenes of the play—including Jason.”⁴⁷

Medea has lived in Corinth for ten years and is apparently well-liked by her new community, as the nurse says, “she gave pleasure to the people of her land of exile,”⁴⁸ and she earns the silence of the chorus of Corinthian women by identifying herself with them throughout the speech: “we women are the most unfortunate creatures!”⁴⁹ and “what they say of us is that we have a peaceful time living at home, while they do the fighting in war!”⁵⁰

Granted, some scholars claim that Medea’s otherness—her status as a barbarian and a witch—is the true reason behind her actions—as Page says, “because she was a foreigner, she could kill her children: because she was a witch she could escape in a magic chariot.” However, as Knox argues, this interpretation deprives the play of any relevance to Athenian society⁵¹. Medea is an exceptional woman: but her uniqueness does not derive from her barbarian origins.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, Stuart. "Audience Uncertainty and Euripides' Medea." *Hermes* 125, no. H. 1 (1997): 49.

⁴⁷ Williamson, Margaret. "A woman's place in Euripides' Medea." *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality* (1990): 16.

⁴⁸ Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 11-12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 231.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 249.

⁵¹ “This aspect of the play is usually ignored or dismissed—on the grounds that Medea is atypical: she cannot be considered a figure relevant to the problems of Athenian society because she is an oriental barbarian and also a witch. “Because she was a foreigner,” says Page, “she could kill her children: because she was a witch she could escape in a magic chariot.” The second half of this magisterial pronouncement kills two birds with one stone; in addition to denying the play any relevance, it also disposes of the awkward questions raised by Medea’s appearance as the *theos* on the machine—she is just a witch on a glorified Hellenic broomstick.” (Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 306.)

It could be argued that Medea's use of *pharmaka* places her in the realm of the supernatural *other*. Certainly the horrific passage in the messenger's speech describing Glauce and Creon's deaths illustrates Medea's power: "from the top of her head there oozed out blood and fire mixed together. Like the drops on pine-bark, so the flesh from her bones dropped away, torn by the hidden fang of the poison."⁵² However, this use of potions is not completely out of the realm of a non-magical Greek wife: Deianira's use of poison in her unwitting murder of her husband isn't indicative of any occult affiliations.⁵³ Any Greek wife could, if inclined, attempt to poison her enemies: her deed and Medea's would differ in scale, not in nature.⁵⁴

Morrigan's magic is in the realm of the occult—no Greek housewife would be able to summon a firestorm or turn herself into a giant venomous spider. In the world of Dragon Age, magic is not only a powerful weapon⁵⁵, but also a terrible liability, as demons are attracted to magic-users. These demons attempt to bargain with or overpower the mages they find, and if they succeed they turn into horrible, murderous monsters. This dynamic has caused the use of magic to be heavily regulated in Thedas.

Morrigan's attitude towards her own magic is, however, more mundane than might be expected from a power so fraught with danger. Morrigan believes in her magic in the same way that a scientist may believe in her craft; when one of the other party members asks Morrigan about her lack of belief in the monotheistic god of Thedas, "the Maker,"

⁵² Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 1198-1201.

⁵³ Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 214.

⁵⁴ "There is abundant testimony to the Greek woman's use of potions, which I will pass over (e.g., Antiphon 1)." Shaw, Michael. "The female intruder: women in Fifth-Century drama." *Classical Philology* 70, no. 4 (1975): 259.

⁵⁵ As one of the companions in Dragon Age Inquisition notes: "Magic is dangerous, just as fire is dangerous. Anyone who forgets this truth gets burned."

Morrigan answers her:

Leliana: How can someone who practices magic have so little capacity to believe in that which she cannot see?

Morrigan: Magic is real. I can touch it and command it and I need no faith for it to fill me up inside. If you are looking for your higher power, there it is.⁵⁶

The witch also has a great belief in her own cunning and intelligence⁵⁷, a trait which is acknowledged by those surrounding her. It is her cunning, not her occult magic, which is Morrigan's true power. If a male Warden⁵⁸ romances Morrigan, Wynne, the group's mother-figure and a powerful sorceress in her own right, admonishes: "you are dangerous, Morrigan. Dangerous, cunning and thoroughly deceitful. But you are beautiful, and he is young. It's a pity he doesn't know any better."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁵⁷ More party banter: **Alistair:** That's right. You think you're so smart? I've got an academic question that I bet you won't be able to answer. **Morrigan:** Oh, I doubt that.

("Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.)

⁵⁸ As mentioned above, the player may choose the gender of the Warden, as well as the name.

⁵⁹ Ibid



[Pictured Above: Morrigan in Dragon Age Inquisition]⁶⁰

David Gaider, the lead Writer for Dragon Age, commented in an interview:

“I had Morrigan talk a lot about herself in Dragon Age: Origins, and considering how [Origins] ended, players walked away thinking, ‘how much of that is true?’ You’d be foolish to recognize [her enigmatic qualities] and then not have her take advantage of it, right? She knows the power that she has...”⁶¹

In the same way, the real danger of Medea’s “magic” is her cleverness⁶²: Creon fears Medea, in his words, because of her *sophia*, her intelligence: “σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν

⁶⁰ Tweaked Morrigan. Digital image. nexusmods. Accessed May 5, 2016. nexusmods.com.

⁶¹ Wallace, Kimberly. "Dragon Age: Inquisition's Morrigan – Past and Present." www.GameInformer.com. August 12, 2013. Accessed April 07, 2016.

⁶² As Caronlyn Durham notes: “Originally the source of her superiority, magic becomes in Euripides' "humanized" view of Medea a metaphor for intelligence in a world in which female intelligence is little valued. Medea's response to Creon's admission that he fears her because she is "a clever woman" (281-85) confirms that she is simply too bright and has failed to conceal her sharpness of mind with proper female decorum.” Durham, Carolyn A. "Medea: hero or heroine?." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (1984): 56.

πολλῶν ἰδρις” – “You are a clever woman and skilled in many evil arts”⁶³

Medea’s rebuttal of Creon’s charges, is, interestingly, not that he must not fear her great and terrible magical prowess, but that she is, in reality, not as clever as she is reputed to be, and that a person only suffers from a reputation for *sophia*:

“This is not the first time, Creon. Often previously though being considered clever I have suffered much. A person of sense ought never to have his children brought up to be more clever than the average...For, being clever, I find that some will envy me, others object to me. Yet all my cleverness is not so much.”⁶⁴

Medea’s primary weapon is her intelligence: an ordinary attribute which, when bestowed on a mortal in an immoderate way, can cause harm.^{65 66} As George Gellie remarks, “before the next entry, that of Creon, Medea has begun to assess her chances of revenge and from that point on the cleverness of her planning will make fools of everyone else in the play. In fact her powers of mind so far outrange those of the other characters that we have little sense of a genuine conflict.”⁶⁷

As opposed to the shape-shifting wilderness enchantress Morrigan, this Medea Euripides presents appears quite civilized: she is a mother of two sons, a woman who has endeavored to be a good wife to her husband, whose downfall lay in her spouse’s

⁶³ Greek and translation from Perseus. "Euripides, Medea David Kovacs, Ed." Euripides, Medea, Line 252. Accessed April 07, 2016.

⁶⁴ Euripides. "Medea." Google Books. Accessed May 04, 2016.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=oZejAQAAQBAJ>. 10.

⁶⁵ Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 292-305.

⁶⁶ “In the fourth century B.C., Euripides uses Medea to illustrate by contrast the Greek ideal of moderation.” (Durham, Carolyn A. "Medea: hero or heroine?." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (1984). 55.)

⁶⁷ Gellie, George. "The Character of Medea." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 35, no. 1 (1988): 16.

unfaithfulness and her reputation for exceeding intelligence.

2.3: *Medea the Hero*

Medea's motivation for revenge is also less-than-exotic: her claim on Jason stems from the oaths that they swore one another, rather than any "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" sentiment. Morrigan too espouses a "tit for tat" view of the world, an attribute that is especially prominent in her romance plot, though it does come out even if the Warden is female or uninterested.

When the Warden presents Morrigan a gift—a beautiful golden mirror exactly like the one Morrigan's mother smashed when she was young—Morrigan responds, after a period of flustered wonder, "you must want something in return, certainly." Morrigan's worldview precludes favors or gifts, and her attitude of jaded reciprocity extends to romantic entanglements:

"I never understood the purpose of [brothels]. In my experience, everyone pays for sex."

And, after her first night with the Warden,

Warden: "Then I assume we're done?"

Morrigan: "Finished with me now are you? Well you do not get away so easily as that! I will have my way with you until I am satisfied, out of a sense of fairness, if nothing else."⁶⁸

Morrigan's romantic subplot is centered on her unwillingness to admit that she is in love—and her distaste for the feeling once she has admitted to it. She once even calls the Warden a "selfish bastard" if he refuses to end the relationship and their feelings for one

⁶⁸ "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

another.⁶⁹

Medea's marriage to Jason is a little more complicated. Like Morrigan, Medea views the marriage as almost a treaty, an agreement entered into on both sides and secured by oaths⁷⁰. "Her concern with broken oaths is surely not as Page says 'childish surprise at falsehoods and broken promises' but in the great masculine heroic tradition of anger against insult and impeachment of honor,"⁷¹ remarks Barlow. From the very beginning of the play this is hinted at by the Nurse, who "tells us that Medea's marriage to Jason was guaranteed by *orkoi*—oaths—and *dexiai*—pledges; it is these and the gods who witnessed them, which the betrayed Medea invokes."⁷²

Medea is not simply masking her sexual jealousy in heroic terms when it suits her, however. Her exchange with Aegeus is proof of her reliance on oaths, as she demands Aegeus formally swear to honor their agreement, an expedient even Aegeus finds wise.⁷³ This legitimizes Medea's anger to some extent: in a world where women are expected to bear infidelity from their husbands while guarding their behavior so strictly that they ideally should not cross the threshold of their own houses,⁷⁴ Medea has an extra claim on

⁶⁹ Laidlaw, Mike and Ohlen, James. "Dragon Age: Origins." *Dragon Age*. Developed by Bioware and Edge of Reality, 2009.

⁷⁰ See Burnett and Flory for a more thorough discussion of the treaty-like status of the marriage.

⁷¹ Barlow, Shirley A. "Stereotype and reversal in Euripides' Medea." *Greece and Rome (Second Series)* 36, no. 02 (1989): 161.

⁷² Williamson, Margaret. "A woman's place in Euripides' Medea." *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality* (1990): 16.

⁷³ Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 741-745.

"That Medea is sincere in her attitude toward the practice of oathtaking is confirmed by the oath she demands from Aegeus." Rickert, GailAnn. "Akrasia and Euripides' Medea." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987): 109.

⁷⁴ Of course, as David Cohen acknowledges, the actual reality of Athenian women's role outside of the house may have been very different from this ideal. Cohen, David. "Seclusion, separation, and the status of women in classical Athens." *Greece and Rome (Second Series)* 36, no. 01 (1989): 5.

Jason—the fact that he has not acted as she has the right to expect from a suppliant.

For Medea speaks not only of their agreement as a treaty, but also in terms of the suppliant and supplicated,⁷⁵ as she addresses the body parts which Jason clasped:

“O my right hand, and the knees which you often clasped in supplication, how senselessly I am treated by this bad man, and how my hopes have missed their mark!”⁷⁶

“Notice, too, that when she speaks of physical contact with Jason, it is not of the contacts of lovers at all but those of a suppliant; he took her by her right hand, he clung to her knees, but he was a base man, not a noble man, as she thought, and so she was disappointed in her expectations,” Elizabeth Bongie remarks.⁷⁷ Jason has not only dishonored his wife, and used her thoughtlessly—he has broken the sacred bonds of Supplication, the very relationship which Zeus himself guards.

In many ways Bioware’s Morrigan represents the other, as David Gaider’s comment above indicates. She is a cynic, espousing views often contrary to commonly held wisdom. She challenges the Andrastian Chantry, the dominant organized religion in Thedas:

Leliana: I'm wondering Morrigan... do you believe in the Maker?

Morrigan: Certainly not. I've no primitive fear of the moon such that I must place my faith in tales so that I may sleep at night.

⁷⁵ “Between these two poles are other kinds of relationship, most notably that between suppliant and supplicated, and that of Xenia, which are based on differentiation and inequality in status but involve a change in status, effected by ritual and witnessed by the gods.” Williamson, Margaret. “A woman’s place in Euripides’ Medea.” *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality* (1990): 17.

⁷⁶ Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955. Line 496-497.

⁷⁷ Bongie, Elizabeth Bryson. “Heroic elements in the Medea of Euripides.” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 107 (1977): 42.

Leliana: But this can't all be an accident. Spirits, magic, all these wondrous things around us both dark and light. You know these things exist.

Morrigan: The fact of their existence does not presuppose an intelligent design by some absentee father-figure.

Leliana: So it is all random, then? A happy coincidence that we are all here?

Morrigan: Attempting to impose order over chaos is futile. Nature is, by its very nature, chaotic.⁷⁸

Unless Morrigan's worldview is shared by the protagonist (and it need not be, even to form a friendship with her) Morrigan's opinions mesh poorly with those of other characters, a dynamic which is evident in her interactions with the other party members. Morrigan's banter with almost every other character in the party (including the *dog*)⁷⁹ is tense and argumentative,⁸⁰ to the point where Wynne, the party's healer, surrogate mother, and voice of moderate wisdom says to Morrigan:

“Think what you will, Morrigan. When the end comes, I will go gladly to my rest, proud of my achievements. While, you... you will see how empty your life was. You will realize that because you never had love for others, you never received love in return. And you will die alone and unmourned.”⁸¹

Morrigan's heterodox sentiments and harsh manner alienate her from almost all other Dragon Age characters: by contrast, Medea in some ways is even more firmly entrenched in the value system of the Greeks than Jason is.

⁷⁸ "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁷⁹ **Morrigan:** Stop looking at me, mongrel. I have nothing you want! **Dog:** (Whine!) **Morrigan:** Why do you keep staring at me so, you flea-ridden beast? Can you not tell when you are not wanted? **Dog:** (Whine!) "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ *ibid*

Medea's plight earns the sympathy of every character in Euripides' play other than Jason and Creon: the nurse could hardly be more loyal to her mistress, the tutor expresses his sympathy, and the Corinthian women are thoroughly won over and pledged to silence. Aegeus' endorsement is especially significant, as Bongie points out:

“Here, too, we are again reminded that Medea is not being capricious in her opinion that Jason's actions constitute a breach of obligation. Aegeus, a king and a man renowned for his uprightness, immediately supports Medea's case. Quite aside from the personal considerations involved, such as Medea's jealousy, Jason's desire for wealth and status, his lust for a new bride—quite apart from these, there is an objective argument that would have been clear to an audience of the fifth century.”⁸²

2.4: *Medea and the Gods*

Medea's rage is not only validated by her own adherence to oaths; she, at least for the first part of her revenge, enjoys the approval of her peers. However, she loses the support of the Corinthian women and nurse (and by extension the audience) after she announces her plans to kill her children (though it is worth noting that even then the chorus does not side with Jason⁸³): “Since you have shared the knowledge of your plan with us, I both wish to help you and support the normal ways of mankind, and tell you not to do this thing.”⁸⁴

At this point it would seem that Medea's heroic justification has reached its limit. Medea fixes upon the course that will bring her the most glory after she announced that

⁸² Bongie, Elizabeth Bryson. "Heroic elements in the Medea of Euripides." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 107 (1977): 47.

⁸³ “Heaven, it seems, on this day has fastened many evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them.” Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 1231-1232.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 809-810.

she will kill her children: “Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited, a stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite, one who can hurt my enemies and help my friends; for the lives of such persons are most remembered.”⁸⁵ However, in the course of punishing her enemies Medea has decided to hurt those closest to her, those who by their very nature qualify as *philoï*: her sons.⁸⁶

But even when Medea seems alone, in this last part of the play she gains the support of the very force that Morrigan would disdain: that of god. Morrigan, though not an atheist,⁸⁷ “cares nothing”⁸⁸ for the religion of most of Fereldan, and certainly does not fall back upon the gods for support: “I advocate nothing. Nature dictates that the strong survive, if they have the will,”⁸⁹ she bites. Morrigan’s power is essentially secular: she produces it, she hones it, and she believes in it because she can control it. Morrigan will face the vast world alone if she has to.

In the list of those who merit the scorn of the gods, a woman who kills her own sons would surely be among the top entries. However, in the words of Knox:

“All the Sophoclean heroes feel themselves, sooner or later, abandoned by the gods as well as men: their loneliness is absolute, they can appeal only to the silent presence of mountains, sea, and air. But Medea from her first appearance has no doubts that the gods support her cause. She appears to Themis (ancestral law) and Artemis (woman’s help in childbirth!) to witness Jason’s unjust action (160); she calls on Zeus, who, she says, knows who is responsible for her sorrows (332), swears to avenge herself in the name of Hecate.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Ibid. 811-813.

⁸⁶ Bongie, Elizabeth Bryson. "Heroic elements in the Medea of Euripides." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 107 (1977): 53.

⁸⁷ Gaider, David. Twitter Post. July 09, 2012, 5:09 PM.

<https://twitter.com/davidgaidier/status/222482726664667136>.

⁸⁸ "Morrigan/Dialogue." Dragon Age Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 301.

At a recent production of the *Medea* in Austin's Long Center⁹¹, a participant in a question-and-answer session afterward ask about *Medea*: "So, is she crazy?"

Is *Medea* crazy? The producers smiled and shook their heads, saying that *Medea* was not insane as long as her actions were understood as symbolic: these are the sort of emotions someone in this situation would feel. As for actually enacting the revenge...well, no one in their right minds would actually murder their children.

Of course, within the context of the play, *Medea* does not *symbolically* murder her children. She holds their limp bodies in her arms after she has slaughtered them with her sword. But, if *Medea* is crazy, she is crazy in good company.

"In their last choral ode before the murderess appears in the machine the chorus invoke the Sun (they mention Earth, but all that follows is directed to the Sun) to stay *Medea's* hand and drive her, Fury that she is, out of the house: *exel oikon*, they demand; and that is precisely what the god does, in *Medea's* good time, not obstructing her hand at all."⁹² N.E. Collinge points out in the essay "Medea ex Machina." Jason may cry to the heavens "O God, do you hear it, this persecution, these my sufferings from this hateful woman, this monster, murderess of children?" The gods may hear...but their answer has been to provide *Medea* with a chariot drawn by flying serpents.⁹³ *Medea's* revenge, even the murder of her children from which most sane humans would shrink, is thus backed by the inscrutable force of the gods.

⁹¹ Austin Shakespeare. *Medea*. The Long Center, Austin, Texas, March 04, 2016.

⁹² Collinge, N. E. "Medea ex machina." *Classical Philology* 57, no. 3 (1962): 172.

⁹³ "Medea is for this reason quite certain that the gods will support her punishment of Jason. And the final surprising appearance of the chariot of the sun seems to prove her right." (Foley, Helene. "Medea's divided self." *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1989): 65.)

"The gods and I—she gives herself as their instrument and associate. "And the play gives us no reason to think that she is wrong. On the contrary, it confirms her claim in spectacular fashion." (Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 302)

3. 99 Problems: Grand Theft Auto V, Saints Row, and Women as Less Than Human

3.1 Dorothy Sayers

Medea's character is complex—the audience must be very active watchers, analyzing her every word and action through a number of filters: her status as a barbarian, as a witch, as a woman; the opinions and predispositions of the other characters in the play; her heroic aspirations and identity as not only a heroic woman, but as a mother and a wife. Each of these strands interweave to make a complicated braid of a character, and one might not blame those viewers who leave thinking that Medea is insane.

In an effort to untangle these strands (and analyze how the narrative treats its titular character) we will compare Medea to female characters in *Grand Theft Auto V*, the fastest selling entertainment property ever (as of 2015). We will use a framework novelist Dorothy Sayers invented to discuss the way *we* talk about women—she argues that we often talk about women as if they were less than human, a strange species all of our own.

In her book “*Are Women Human?*” Dorothy Sayers, perhaps best known as the author of the Lord Peter Wimsey series, explores what she calls the “Woman Question,” or “what does it mean to be a woman?” She framed the relationship between the sexes thus:

“The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are “the opposite sex”—(though why “opposite” I do not know; what is the “neighboring sex”?) But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world. They are human beings. *Vir* is male and *Femina* is female: but *Homo* is male and female.

This is the equality claimed and the fact that is persistently evaded and denied. No matter what arguments are used, the discussion is vitiated from the start, because Man is always dealt with as both *Homo* and *Vir*, but Woman only as *Femina*.”

Sayers goes on to describe how men are generally expected to act in a way which will

result in their being *comfortable*, whereas women are expected to act in accordance with being *feminine*; she argues that this is the case in the discourse around gendered wearing of skirts and pants. “Man” wears trousers, as they are “warm, convenient and decent,” but disapproves of women wearing the garment. He scolds: “why do [women] want to go about in trousers? They are extremely unbecoming to most of you. You only do it to copy the men.”⁹⁴ *Vir* and *Femina* wish to be attractive; *Homo* wishes to be comfortable. However, in this situation, men are allowed to act as *Homo* while demanding that women act as *Femina*.

I bring this up to ask how the *Medea* treats its titular character. Is she, like a fully-realized human being, allowed to have the motivations of both a *Femina* and a *Homo*? Is Medea’s wrath that of “a woman scorned,” or is it the wrath of the hero, that particular kind of human being who can be male, as in *Ajax*, or female, as in *Antigone*?⁹⁵

3.2 *Grand Theft Auto V*

Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV) is a 2013 sandbox-style open-world action video game following the thieving, murdering, and drug-dealing exploits of three men in fictional Los Santos, California. The video game website IGN (to gaming websites what ESPN is to sports networks) called it a “masterpiece.”⁹⁶ PC Gamer gave it a 92/100.⁹⁷ Metacritic

⁹⁴ Sayers, Dorothy Leigh. *Are Women Human?*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005: Location 130 of 355.

⁹⁵ It was Bernard Knox who first noted Medea’s similarity to a Sophoclean hero. (Knox, Bernard MW. “Word and action.” *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979).)

⁹⁶ McDonald, Keza. “Grand Theft Auto V Review - IGN.” IGN. September 16, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

Stapleton, Dan. “GTA 5 PC Review - IGN.” IGN. April 14, 2015. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁹⁷ Thruster, Chris. “GTA 5 Review.” PCGamer. April 20, 2015. Accessed April 06, 2016.

gives it a 97/100.⁹⁸ Game Spot gave it a 9/10 twice.⁹⁹ The game smashed an astonishing six world sales records, including becoming the fastest entertainment property to gross a billion dollars.¹⁰⁰



[Pictured Above: Michael DeSanta, one of the protagonists of GTA V]¹⁰¹

But, as should surprise almost nobody who has been even mildly interested in the GTA franchise, the title quickly drew criticism and controversy. In 2005 Grand Theft

⁹⁸ "Grand Theft Auto V." Metacritic. Accessed April 06, 2016.

⁹⁹ Walton, Mark, and Peter Brown. "Grand Theft Auto 5 PS4/Xbox One/PC Review." GameSpot. September 17, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

Petit, Carolyn. "Grand Theft Auto V Review." GameSpot. September 17, 2017. Accessed April 06, 2016.

Infamously, as some fans called for one female reviewer to be fired for giving the game a 9/10 rather than a 10/10.

¹⁰⁰ Lynch, Kevin. "Confirmed: Grand Theft Auto 5 Breaks 6 Sales World Records." Guinness World Records. October 08, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Grand Theft Auto v PS4 Review. Digital image. Software News. Accessed May 5, 2016. Softwarenews.co.

Auto: San Andreas was discovered to contain hidden “graphic pornographic content”¹⁰² that could be modded¹⁰³ back into the game. In what was later termed the “hot coffee mod” players would control a character in 3rd person in a sex mini-game, an activity which was considered very explicit, the 2005-era graphics notwithstanding. The discovery of this hidden code (which would not be available to players without specially modifying the game) moved Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas from a “Mature” rating to an “X” rating,¹⁰⁴ and even drew attention from politicians as high-ranking as Hillary Clinton.¹⁰⁵

No hidden sex scene scandal erupted over GTA V, partly because its sex scenes are available out of the box, allowing the three player characters to have (not very graphic) sex with a number of prostitutes on the streets of Los Santos. Considerable controversy, however, was generated when players found out that they could have sex with the prostitutes and then kill them. Huffington post ran an article titled “Grand Theft Auto V and the Culture of Violence Against Women,” arguing that players were in fact incentivized to kill the women to get their money back.¹⁰⁶ It called for consumers to “speak out” against GTA V, claiming that the game was “legitimizing and significantly profiting off of America’s rape and gender-based violence culture.” Target Australia

¹⁰² Feldman, Curt, and Brendan Sinclair. "Hillary Clinton to Take on Rockstar over Hot Coffee." GameSpot. July 13, 2005. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰³ “Modding” refers to adding mods to games. “Mods” is short for “modification,” changes in the code of the game which players can create or download.

¹⁰⁴ Rybka, Jason. "What Does the Grand Theft Auto Hot Coffee Mod Do?" About.com Tech. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Feldman, Curt. "Hillary Clinton to Take on Rockstar over Hot Coffee." GameSpot. July 13, 2005. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Saar, Malika Saada. "Grand Theft Auto V and the Culture of Violence Against Women." The Huffington Post. December 09, 2014. Accessed April 06, 2016.

acquiesced to a Change.org petition to take GTA V off its shelves.¹⁰⁷

However, the violence against sex workers in the game may have been overstated. Yes, the prostitutes drop stacks of money when they are killed, but so does basically every other NPC in the game. The game encourages the killing of these prostitute NPCs no more than it incentivizes the killing of any other.

The characters which the game actually does incentivize killing (mostly by making their murder a mandatory step in completing a mission) tend to be overwhelmingly male. This fact in and of itself is not surprising, as the game centers on the criminal underworld of gang shootouts, bank robberies, and assassinations, fields which have not historically been known for their high female-to-male ratios. However, the dearth of female-targeted violence is surprising, considering the number of voices decrying the game's violence against women.

Reviewers have also commented on how *unlikable* female characters in the game are.¹⁰⁸ The women of the game tend to be overwhelmingly one-dimensional, bratty, and flawed. However, with the possible exception of the 3 main characters, the men fare no better.¹⁰⁹ The game is largely concerned with lampooning popular culture,¹¹⁰ and this

¹⁰⁷ Makuch, Eddie. "GTA 5 "Violence Against Women" Criticisms Spurs Ban by Australian Retailer." GameSpot. December 03, 2014. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Petit, Carolyn. "Grand Theft Auto V Review." GameSpot. September 17, 2017. Accessed April 06, 2016., Plante, Chris. "Grand Theft Auto 5 Review: Golden Years." Polygon. September 16, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Tassi, Paul. "On Gender And 'GTA 5'" Forbes. September 26, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Plante, Chris. "Grand Theft Auto 5 Review: Golden Years." Polygon. September 16, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

includes the people living in it, be they male or female, black or white, young or old, urban or rural. There is not a single character in the game who could survive a tour of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory,¹¹¹ save perhaps a notorious gangster's wife whom one of the main characters kidnaps.

The male characters of GTA V are intensely and variously flawed, but, at least in the case of the three playable characters, they are multifaceted and coherently motivated. Michael, the first playable character and a retired robber, struggles with purposelessness, debt, guilt, and an inability to connect meaningfully with his family. After a heist gone wrong he moves to Los Santos in a "witness protection program," leaving behind his life of crime and his best friend Trevor. As the game progresses it becomes apparent that Michael's exit from a life of crime was not as simple as it seemed; the plot line culminates with Michael and Trevor holding each other at gunpoint over the grave of Brad, their former comrade, who was buried in Michael's place.

Franklin, the third protagonist, struggles trying to make his way up in the world while his former community brands him a sellout: his best friend is an impulsive gangster wannabe, and his new profession hinges on a washed-up ex con and a psychopathic killer. Of the three protagonists he seems to have the steadiest head on his shoulders, often acting as a voice of reason, but his youth and relative inexperience make him dependent on Michael and Trevor to get started.

Trevor is, as one Gamespot reviewer articulated, "probably the most reprehensible

¹¹¹ Joke shamelessly stolen from twitter, where it was used to refer to 2016's Republican presidential candidates: Waldman, David. Twitter Post. January 14, 2016, 6:12 PM. <https://twitter.com/kagrox/status/687819703646044160>.

dirtbag protagonist in the history of gaming, if not everything.”¹¹² Trevor’s primary character trait is bloodlust, in his first cutscene literally killing a man by stomping on his head and in his first mission massacring an entire biker gang in a trailer park. His instability makes the random mayhem that players often visit upon the world seem in-character; in a game about stealing and murdering, he’s a perfect protagonist. Even Trevor has some complexity however: in his first mission Trevor snaps, “you think it’s clever to disrespect women?” and seems to have a better relationship with Michael’s daughter than Michael does. He also struggles to trust and forgive his best friend Michael after the other man’s disappearance and return, and tries to expand his small business in uncertain economic times that resemble 2008 America.^{113 114}

All three men have complex and varied motivations, plot lines, and interests. The concept of masculinity is intrinsic to the game:¹¹⁵ but Trevor, Michael, and Franklin are treated as both *Vir* and *Homo*. The protagonists are ultimately trying to create a better life for themselves and the people they care about, and the only way they know how to do this is to steal, rob, and cheat their way to the top. Michael cheats on his wife and pulls down what he thinks is the house of his wife’s lover because he’s performing masculinity as a *Vir*, but he attempts to reconcile with her and knit his family back together because he craves human connection: a *Homo* need.

¹¹² Todd, Brett. "Grand Theft Auto V Review - Southland Sprawl." GameSpot. September 17, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹¹³ Todd, Brett. "Grand Theft Auto V Review - Southland Sprawl." GameSpot. September 17, 2013. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Granted, his “small business” is a meth cooking and distribution service, and “expanding” tends to entail at least 10 counts of first degree murder and a couple explosions.

¹¹⁵ Hill, Matt. "Grand Theft Auto V: Meet Dan Houser, Architect of a Gaming Phenomenon." The Guardian. September 07, 2013. Accessed May 06, 2016.



[Pictured Left to Right: Protagonists Trevor Phillips, Franklin Clinton, and Michael De Santa/Townley]¹¹⁶

There exist no playable female characters in the single-player campaign of Grand Theft Auto V: not surprisingly the characterization of GTA V's women tends to be less nuanced and complex, as even at their most important they are secondary characters. These secondary characters tend to have a gimmick: there is the overly emotional and sexual male yoga teacher Fabian, the corrupt founder of a Facebook-like tech company Jay Norris, and Michael's pot-smoking, video game obsessed son Jimmy, poking fun at new age yoga practitioners, unscrupulous businessmen, and stereotypical gamers respectively. The game also features female bit-players: there is Michael's fame-

¹¹⁶ Record-breaker: GTA has now broken its franchise record in Japan. Digital image. Mirror.co.uk. Accessed May 5, 2016. Mirror.co.uk.

obsessed, sexually promiscuous daughter Tracey, his constantly nagging and confrontational wife Amanda, and Trevor's 58 year old kidnap-victim-cum-girlfriend-cum-mother figure Patricia. These characterizations are often ridiculous and satirical, taking real-life stereotypes and blowing them up to the extreme. However, there appears to be a significant difference in how male and female NPCs are characterized: while the characterization of male NPCs often focuses on traits that are exhibited by both *Vir* and *Homo*, most female NPCs are given primarily *Femina* traits.

Take for instance Dom Beasley, an adrenaline junky that Franklin rescues from being tangled up with his parachute in a tree. Dom convinces the protagonist to skydive to the summit of the tallest mountain in the game with him, and then to bike race down the steep slopes to the bottom. At various points in the game Dom and Franklin drive ATVs out of the cargo bay of a flying plane, skydive off of the tallest building in Los Santos and land on a moving flatbed truck, and parachute from the top of Land Act Dam.

Dom is obnoxious, ridiculous, and ostentatious, posting statuses on his in-game LifeInvader page like, "I don't live my life at 100%, I live it at 50% to give the rest of you a chance," "I'd go to work today but the sun's out and I made 10 million yesterday," and "Who spends 6 figures to drive a quad bike out of a cargo plane? Guilty as charged, your honor!"¹¹⁷ Dom is a caricature of the rich adrenaline-seeker, a hedge-fund manager whose preoccupation with life-threatening stunts eventually gets him killed. His preoccupation with risk and adrenaline could be seen as a *Vir*-driven, as in the status he posts to Franklin's Lifeinvader after a mission: "Maze Bank Building...tick it off the list!

¹¹⁷ "Dom Beasley." - Grand Theft Wiki, the GTA Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

Done. DOMINATED!! I want you [Franklin] to stand in front of a mirror tonight, put down your pants, and tell me your dick isn't that little bit longer. Hanging with me is better than Mollis, dude!¹¹⁸” However, adventure-seeking personalities are not limited to men¹¹⁹—desire for excitement is ultimately *Homo* impulse, and Dom’s character easily could have been male or female.¹²⁰

As a contrast, let’s look at another quest-giver whom Franklin assists in the course of the game: Tonya Wiggins. She stands in short-shorts and high heels outside of a liquor store in Franklin’s neighborhood gesticulating wildly and calling out, “Hey Franklin! Why don’t you come over here and let me take care of that lonely ass!” Over the course of several missions Franklin helps her and her boyfriend JB out by towing cars while JB is too high to do his job. During the missions Tonya consistently flirts with and propositions an obviously disinterested Franklin, bringing up a time when they were thirteen that they apparently engaged in some sexual behavior: “I ain’t so cracked out I don’t remember that night behind the Burger Shot,”¹²¹ and offering sexual payment for his driving services: “move that seat back and you know I’ll make it right for you.” During the first mission there is given no reason why Tonya couldn’t simply drive the

¹¹⁸ "Dom Beasley." - Grand Theft Wiki, the GTA Wiki. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹¹⁹ In fact, all of the self-professed “adrenaline junkies” I personally know are women—my mother included among them.

¹²⁰ Of course, there is a reason why he is male: simply, that the game designers decided he should be. This decision may simply be the combination of many different forces—a mostly-male writing team, a cultural mindset that takes “white maleness” as default, a belief that games with women sell fewer copies. However, when contrasted with Medea, these reasons combine to make her character even more remarkable. After all, she was written and performed in a culture that literally thought of women as less than human—but given characteristics that, were she a character in GTA V, would almost guarantee her maleness.

¹²¹ Not a typo: “Burger Shot” is the name of a fast-food chain in the GTA V universe.

truck herself: after all, she knows enough about the job to give Franklin instructions on how to operate the vehicle. The game addressed the question in the second mission:

Franklin Clinton: Man you sure you need me? 'Cause you look like you know what you doin'.

Tonya Wiggins: One, I can't drive. And two, this ain't no work for a lady.

Franklin Clinton: Oh, you really fightin' the feminist cause there, ain't you Tonya?

Tonya Wiggins: Like your aunt, you mean? I saw her fake-jogging the other day, chanting some whacked-out nonsense. That bitch is crazy.

Franklin Clinton: Yeah. That we can agree on.

Tonya's character is rooted in her status as a *Femina*: she requires a man to drive her around, refuses to engage in legal work that is gender-coded to the opposite sex, and offers sexual services as payment for a job, a trait that is distinctly feminine in the world of Grand Theft Auto V, where all encountered strippers and prostitutes are uniformly women. Her crack addiction could be considered a *Homo* trait, as her boyfriend is also addicted and people of all genders can become addicted to drugs, but her main purpose as a character is as a woman, a *Femina*: she needs Franklin's help because the other man in her life cannot take care of her. Where Dom enables missions by providing the means for their stunts, chartering planes, buying ATVs and bikes, Tonya enables missions by needing to be provided for.



[Pictured Above: Michael's wife Amanda arguing with his daughter Tracy]¹²²

The “problem” with GTA V’s portrayal of women is not necessarily the sexualization or the stereotypes—the problem is the way the female characters are tethered to their gender.

The male characters in GTA V are gangsters, washed up criminals, corrupt cops, psychopathic meth dealers, thrill-seekers, imbeciles, arrogant millennials and hipster celebrities. The female characters are women. For the most part, they do not have another gimmick; they are different iterations of the “woman”: sluts and strippers, nagging wife, promiscuous daughters, social-climbing ex-girlfriends. While men in the GTA V universe

¹²² *Grant Theft Auto*. Rockstar. 2013. Screenshot.

exist as both *Homo* and *Vir*, women only exist as *Femina*.

3.3 *Saints Row: the Third*

As a contrast, we will look at another game series, similar in tone to GTA V, though it treats its female characters differently. The Saints Row series started off its life inauspiciously, in the words of one reviewer, “as a rather generic (albeit tongue-in-cheek) GTA clone.”¹²³ The games share essentially the same mechanics: make some friends, steal some cars, commit some manslaughter, and blow some stuff up. GTA has been by far the more successful of the two series, outselling Saints Row by a landslide.¹²⁴ However, as Saints Row has grown it has diverged substantially from GTA, in the words of its publisher:

"I went online like everyone to see the GTA trailer. It's a high quality trailer and I think it's going to be another fantastic game in the GTA series," he said. "That said, it also shows the completely different positioning of the two games. GTA is still serious and character driven - a very different experience. Saints Row - if you saw our video today - it shows you all the crazy stuff in the game¹²⁵."

Saints Row: the Third is not the latest title in the Saints Row series, and was released before Grand Theft Auto V: however, the majority of Saints Row the IV occurs in a computer simulation¹²⁶ and therefore does not have an atmosphere as conducive to comparison to GTA V as its predecessor.¹²⁷ The game follows the leader of the Third

¹²³ Tilley, Steve. "'Saints Row' a Great 'GTA' Parody." Toronto Sun. December 03, 2011. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹²⁴ Herndon, Neil. "GTA Vs. Saint's Row: A Battle Of Satire." Forbes. May 19, 2015. Accessed April 06, 2016.

¹²⁵ Carter, Grey. "THQ Is Unruffled by the GTA V Trailer." The Escapist. November 02, 2011. Accessed April 6, 2016.

¹²⁶ Perhaps a nod to the fact that video games are in and of themselves simulations.

¹²⁷ Also, by virtue of its production timeframe, it can't be claimed that the portrayal of female characters in Saints Row: the Third is a reaction to that of GTA V.

Street Saints as he or she takes control of the city of Steelport, wresting districts from rival gangs and later fending off attacks from a government task force.

As its publisher acknowledged, *Saints Row: the Third* is far less character driven than *GTA*; however, the series' female characters enjoy far more prominence than their *GTA V* counterparts, and, perhaps even more surprisingly, are given *Homo* motivations and character traits.

For example, the protagonist of the game can be a man or a woman—the change is mostly aesthetic, and the choices and missions presented in the game don't vary from those of the male, but there is something addictive about clacking around Steelport in high-heeled boots and pigtails, wielding dual pistols and smashing through the windshields of police cruisers as a woman. This is partially because the main character serves not only as a type of wish fulfilment (by the end of the game, depending on how high-level the player is, the Boss is more or less invincible), but almost as a sort of exercise in dress-up. The Boss has at her disposal a truly dazzling collection of clothing, hairstyles, body types, skin colors, and weapons. *Saints Row* allows its players the ability to step into a female body or a male one—because in the raunchy power fantasy that is Steelport, women are not second class.



[Pictured Above: A Female Saints Row: the Third Protagonist Avatar]¹²⁸

The protagonist, whether male or female, has three female characters as allies, two of whom she gains during the course of the game. One of the primary antagonists is also a woman, the Senator Monica Hughes, who is understandably upset when her husband's memorial bridge is destroyed by gang violence on the day of its opening.

All three of the protagonist's female allies in Saint's Row: the Third have *Homo* traits. Kinzie, former FBI agent and the Saints' resident tech genius, is paranoid, cryptic, and very intelligent. Kinzie enables missions by hacking into the Decker's tech resources, allowing the Protagonist to disrupt the enemy gang's operation in tech-themed mini-

¹²⁸ Saints Row The Third: Great Game, But Good Example of How Developers Still Fail Female Gamers. Digital image. New World Notes. Accessed May 5, 2016. Nwn.blogs.com.

games. She often speaks in rapid tech lingo, frustrated when she has to repeat in plainer words what she's talking about for the less tech-savvy Protagonist. As opposed to Tonya, whose missions revolve around her helplessness and dependence on Franklin, Kinzie's missions revolve around her skill; her unique abilities allow her to match wits with the rival gang's leader and help the Saints take over the city. Whereas Tonya was only allowed to exist as *Femina*, Kinzie exists as *Homo*: a genius tech expert who could be any gender.

The plots of both other female gang members center on revenge: Viola, originally an antagonist, joins the Saints when her sister is killed by her employer. Shaundi, the Protagonist's team member from the second game, wants revenge against the rival gangs' leaders who were responsible for the death of a fellow Saint. Interestingly, both of these revenge plots focus on platonic relationships, neither of which are particularly female-coded: Viola seeks revenge for a sibling's death, Shaundi for a friend's.

Saints Row: the Third isn't a feminist work: one mission involves the rescue of a group of female sex workers—referred to as “Hos” by the game—who, after they've been taken from their former captors, are loaded into a shipping crate. The Protagonist then has the choice of selling them back to their former captors (even after she has witnessed the torture devices kept on the ship) or has the option to keep the prostitutes and pimp them out for money over time. The prostitutes are treated like a commodity—not people, but product that can be sold now or over time.

However, despite the game's mistreatment of its sex workers, its treatment of its female characters is more nuanced and humanizing than that of GTA V. With the examples of these games in mind, let's turn to the *Medea*'s treatment of its leading

character.

We have discussed Medea's dangerous cleverness as well as commitment to oaths, and her insistence that Jason broke his commitment to her; one that she had every right to expect would be honored under the terms of *Xenia*. Medea's commitment to her oath—and Jason's callous disregard of it—legitimize Medea's feelings of anger. She is not simply a woman scorned—she is a party to a binding contract that had been filled in every way on her end, only to be abandoned when Jason found the contract no longer useful.¹²⁹

Medea is a wife and mother, a *Femina*. Jason's breach of the oath threatens the world which is typically the domain of the Greek wife—the *oikos*—and she reacts: not to defend it, as might be expected, but to destroy it more than even he has. Medea seems to say, "Fine? You want to destroy this household of yours? Then see it destroyed utterly."¹³⁰ She, in the words of Michael Shaw, "is killing Jason's wife as well as his children."¹³¹ Medea's revenge is motivated by Jason's broken oath, but, as she herself admits, also by love: "is love so small a pain," she says, "do you think, for a woman?"¹³²

¹²⁹ It has been noted (c.f. Burnett, Anne. "Medea and the Tragedy of Revenge." *Classical Philology* 68, no. 1 (1973): 13.) that this marriage of Medea to Jason is unique—no ordinary Athenian woman would have been able to bind her husband with oaths in this way. Her ownership would simply have been transferred from her father to her husband when she was married. Instead of a normal marriage, Jason and Medea's relationship has been noted to resemble a treaty between states. (Boedeker, 110; Flory, 71; Burnett, 13)

¹³⁰ "But Jason completely despises Medea's values, and she has no sympathy for his. Worst of all, she has no home to which she might go and weep. Jason has destroyed it. Although her earlier actions were potentially male, and they have indeed won her fame, in actuality Medea has acted as a woman, since she acted for Jason's sake. However, vengeance on Jason is for her own sake." Shaw, Michael. "The female intruder: women in Fifth-Century drama." *Classical Philology* 70, no. 4 (1975): 262.

¹³¹ Shaw, Michael. "The female intruder: women in Fifth-Century drama." *Classical Philology* 70, no. 4 (1975): 262.

¹³² Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Line 1368.

(1368) Medea gains the sympathy of the Chorus by appealing to them as women, and, as Knox argues, “there can be no doubt, to anyone who reads it without prejudice, that the *Medea* is very much concerned with the problem of woman’s place in human society.”¹³³ However, Medea is more than “a woman,” and her most prominent traits, her heroic anger and sense of justice, are what drive her actions in the play.

Many writers have noted the heroic elements in Medea’s character, perhaps most prominently Knox and Bongie. Knox argues,

“This is no ordinary woman wronged: in face, the stage situation may have reminded the audience of a play they had (probably) seen some years before—the *Ajax* of Sophocles. There too we hear the hero’s desperate and terrifying cries from inside the stage building, where, like Medea, he lies, refusing food; there too a woman fears for the protagonist’s child (and has had it taken away to safety). And there are many other resemblances. Both Ajax and Medea fear more than anything else in this world the mockery of their enemies; for both of them a time limit of one day is set; both in a set speech explore the possible courses of action open to them and, rejecting alternatives, decide—the one for suicide, the other for revenge. And these similarities are enforced by some striking verbal parallels between the two plays.”¹³⁴

Jason has been unbelievably foolish in Euripides’ *Medea*. If there was any doubt in the audience’s minds, his first two appearances would make the fact very clear. From the beginning of the play Medea’s daring has been stressed: “nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill their father,”¹³⁵ the Nurse reminds us in her opening speech: Medea is cunning and ruthless, none of which is a secret to Jason. But Jason’s tone in his speech is condescending and rationalizing, as if he is not talking to the woman he once saw murder and dismember her own brother. Jason has not, exactly, taken

¹³³ Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 306.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 297

¹³⁵ Euripides. *Euripides I: Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. University of Chicago Press, 1955: Lines 9-10.

advantage of a helpless woman, powerless to fight back against the patriarchal system: he has foolishly double-crossed a powerful hero in her own right. In many ways, Jason's grievous error is not that he has victimized Medea, but that he has refused to respect her.¹³⁶ Jason recognizes that Medea is a *Femina*; but he ignores that she is also a *Homo*, and it is for this reason that he is utterly destroyed.¹³⁷

This is one way the *Medea* might be interpreted as a feminist drama. As Terry Collits argues:

“The point about these two contrasting tableau-portrayals of a Medea we never actually see is that they are two sides of one coin. There is an ideological consistency between the loving, happy wife and the helplessly devastated wronged woman: both reinforce a received idea of women as essentially dependent. The Medea who actually appears on stage is like neither of these two images: dignified, stately, altogether composed, she delivers a powerful diatribe not just against Jason, but against the patriarchal society which supports him.”¹³⁸

4. Conclusion: Dragon Age II and Imperfect Binaries.

Regardless of how Euripides' might feel out the moral *rightness* of Medea's actions, he certainly has not been lazy in her characterization. There is nothing to suggest that he thought Medea, as a woman, less interesting or less worthy of his poetic attention than a male character (and certainly not Jason.)

At the same time, every character in the play (including what might be called the character of the audience) turns against Medea in the end. She has been called a “pathetically confused imitator of heroic masculinity,”¹³⁹ as she incorporates both the

¹³⁶ “Jason mistakenly fails to treat Medea as a hero, to value their mutual oaths and her favors to himself.” Foley, Helene. “Medea's divided self.” *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1989): 83.

¹³⁷ Greek: “ἀπόλεσας”

¹³⁸ Collits, Terry. “Intimations of Feminism in Ancient Athens: Euripides' Medea.” *Sydney Studies in English* 26.0 (2008): 13.

¹³⁹ Foley, Helene. “Medea's divided self.” *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1989): 61-85.

craft of Odysseus and the furious vengeance of Achilles into one ideology. She mixes modern with archaic, public with private,¹⁴⁰ to the point where neither *polis* nor *oikos* remains intact in the wake of her rage. Her anger may be justified—but it is simply too bloody for the audience to stand. Again, we as a modern audience are stumped in our assessment.

This conflict, this inability of the audience to fully support any side, is an intrinsic part of the experience of the play. We'll next attempt to interpret this ambiguity by comparing it to that of the second installment in the *Dragon Age* series: *Dragon Age II*.

In the *Dragon Age* series, magic is a powerful gift—but one which comes at a terrible price. Powerful demons prowl magic users' dreams, waiting for their chance to possess unwary mages and turn them into abominations, terrible monsters, capable of slaughtering dozens of people. Through no fault of their own, inexperienced or weak mages can be possessed and induced to kill entire villages. To combat this danger the Chantry forces mages to join schools called Circles, where they are advised by more senior mages and watched over by Templars, knights who have been specially trained to resist magic.

In the Circles the mages must undergo a ceremony to ascertain if they are strong enough to resist Demons—if they do not pass their tests, their connection to the Fade, the dream world from which magic emanates, is severed and they become emotionless husks called Tranquils.

Depending on the Circle, mages are allowed more or less personal freedom. The

¹⁴⁰ For a more thorough discussion of how Medea moves into and effects the public polis, see: Shaw, Michael. "The female intruder: women in Fifth-Century drama." *Classical Philology* 70, no. 4 (1975).

Circle of Kirkwall, the city in which *Dragon Age II* occurs, is particularly restrictive. The Templar in charge abuses her power, making any resisting mages Tranquil and confining them to their rooms. The Templars rule over their prisoners with iron fists, and as the game goes on the tensions between the mages and Templars rise. The free mages in the city, known as Apostates, go to great lengths to keep from discovery, attempting to smuggle themselves out of the city at great cost and occasionally attempting to bind demons to their will.¹⁴¹

Anders, a party member and friend of Hawke, the main character, is an Apostate and former Grey Warden. He opens a free clinic in the slums, using his magic to help the refugees from the Blight pouring into the city.

Anders is a complicated character: he loves kittens, works tirelessly and without pay to help the suffering, and quests to free his brethren, the mages trapped in the Circles. He also shares a body with a spirit, a personification of Justice who is being corrupted by Anders' anger into a spirit of Vengeance.¹⁴² This spirit grows more and more volatile as the game wears on, as does Anders' temper.

The plotline of Anders' anger culminates in an act of terror: he blows up the Kirkwall Chantry, the symbol of oppression and the seat of the powers that keep mages in their place, killing hundreds of innocent people.

Until this time in the game Hawke, the protagonist, has been pulled in different directions: the Templars want her support in keeping the citizens of Kirkwall safe from demons, blood mages, and apostates, while the mages wish her help in freeing themselves from their captivity. Earlier in the game Hawke could choose a middle ground,

¹⁴¹ This goes about as well as one might expect.

¹⁴² Justice in fact resembles Medea's own heroic spirit: her thumos.

attempting to find compromise between the two factions; after the destruction of the church she must choose though, whether to support the Templars in trying to protect the common people, or the mages in their battle for freedom.

The mages, like Medea, have been egregiously wronged, and have every cause to rise up against their oppressors. Even in a social system which allows their subjugation, they have been treated lawlessly and abhorrently, just as Medea, even within the patriarchal world of the Greeks, has been betrayed and abandoned by someone from whom she had every right to expect loyalty. And Anders, like Medea, has done the unthinkable—he has slaughtered innocents for revenge. And then the game asks the player to choose a side.

Neither of the groups is completely in the right, and the game's forced choice is not one of its more effective or enjoyable mechanics, precisely because the protagonist is forced to choose between two options without a middle ground. Bioware itself takes great pains not to favor one side over the other:¹⁴³ the mages in Kirkwall are oppressed, but in the Tevinter Imperium, another part of Thedas, mages rule and terrorize those unfortunate enough not to be born into magic, whose plights may be so dire that they are willing to sell themselves into slavery. Fenris, another one of Hawke's party members, has magic marks branded into his skin from his years in captivity, and the things he's seen makes him very wary of any mages, and diametrically opposed to Anders and his cause. While the "default" setting for Dragon Age II is a mage Hawke who sided with the mages,¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ At an interview at PAX Prime, America's largest gaming convention, Mike Laidlaw, Dragon Age Creative director, acknowledged that some players wouldn't wish to play with Anders in the party after the bombing, and discussed how they took pains in the next game to allow players to build their parties of whatever companions they chose. (Dragon Age Team. "*Dragon Age: Inquisition* Developer Q&A." Panel, 2015.)

¹⁴⁴ This can be confirmed in the Dragon Age Keep, as the default Hawke when creating a new World State sided with the mages. (https://dragonagekeep.com/en_US/worldstates/)

either choice is available to carry into the next game, and as war spreads from Kirkwall and erupts over the rest of Thedas into the next game both groups devolve into bullying, looting, and killing, retroactively proving that neither side is pure. Choosing either side is not satisfying, because neither side is completely in the right.

Bioware's stance is purposefully neither pro-mage nor pro-Templar. Perhaps Euripides favors neither Jason's misogyny nor Medea's righteous slaughter. Perhaps the play is neither "for" or "against" women; perhaps it is meant, as Terry Collits put it, to make its audience "leave the theatre arguing intensely over matters difficult and important."¹⁴⁵

Any sort of feminist movement in the modern sense of the term seems precluded by the Athenian society in which the plays were performed; the bricks upon which the first suffragettes built their case had yet to be completely lain for over two millennia after Euripides' *Medea* premiered. And Medea's cause is not feminist, not in the simple way that someone who wished only to end woman's subjugation would be: Medea cleverly manipulates her fellow women into silence, "acts as if she were a combination of the naked violence of Achilles and the cold craft of Odysseus,"¹⁴⁶ and destroys that which her female instincts most strongly tell her to protect: her children.

But a misogynist reading of the play seems just as unlikely: if the play were meant only to reinforce negative stereotypes about women, to warn about what happens when women are not kept in their places, why is Medea's case against Jason so compelling? Why is her marriage, unlike that of a normal Athenian woman, secured by oaths

¹⁴⁵ Collits, Terry. "Intimations of Feminism in Ancient Athens: Euripides' *Medea*." *Sydney Studies in English* 26.0 (2008): 12.

¹⁴⁶ Knox, Bernard MW. "Word and action." *Essays on the Ancient Theatre* (1979). 300.

exchanged between equals, oaths that have been egregiously broken? And why would Euripides bother to make the complex, nuanced character we have explored above, if she were only a plot device indicating how dangerous women could be when given too much leash?

I believe we can consider the character of Medea feminist. In a world where the fastest billion-dollar-grossing entertainment property of all time features female characters defined by their gender roles, and in which only 15% of games feature playable female protagonists,¹⁴⁷ a character of Medea's complexity and drive is truly rare. From Medea's first entrance onto stage she captivates the audience, commanding the attention and demanding the respect of all other players in the drama. She controls the action until the very end, where she rises above the *skene* like a *dea-ex-machina*, giving us yet another reminder of how foolish Jason was to break his oaths like he did. A 1994 review of Diana Rigg's Tony-winning performance called Medea "the Mount Everest"¹⁴⁸ of roles; and this role centers on a woman, a wife and a mother (though by the end of the play she is only one of these things.)

However, the play itself cannot easily be dismissed as misogynist or elevated as feminist. Plays need not be, as George W Bush might say, "with us or against us" in the fight for equal rights and representation. As *Dragon Age II* reminds us, choosing between options in imperfect binaries is not satisfying in the 21st century—why should it have been two millennia earlier?

¹⁴⁷ Starr, Michelle. "The Risk of the Female Game Protagonist." CNET. August 06, 2014. Accessed April 06, 2016. <http://www.cnet.com/news/the-risk-of-the-female-protagonist/>.

¹⁴⁸ Richards, David. "Amid Pain and Din, A Mighty Medea." *New York Times*, 1994. APGRD General Collection

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This thesis was made possible by the generous donation of Jeanne Scott Varnell in the form of Rhodes' Jeanne Scott Varnell Award in Classical Languages, a grant enabling a Greek and Roman Studies Major to research in the summer before Senior year. Funds from this award were used for travel to Oxford University's Archive for the Performance of Greek and Roman Drama, where I was able to consult documents related to the reception of several performances of the Medea. I've listed the productions below.

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The award was also used to attend PAX Prime 2015, America's largest video game expo. I've listed the panels attended below:

Al-Massari, Asia, Kitty Plays, Sara Ventura, Holly Conrad, Brittney Bombacher, Katey Houseman. "Women in Geek Media." Panel, 2015.

Britten, Ben, Mike Laidlaw, Miellyn Fitzwater Barrows, Hilary Heskett Shapiro, and Sean Baptiste. "Foreplay: Romance in Games." Panel, 2015.

Corriea, Aleca Ray, Becky Taylor, Brittney Brombacher, Paola Alejandra, and Andrew Rene. "The Power of Games: Games Influence our Lives of the Better." Panel, 2015.

Creators of Dark Echo, Darkest Dungeon, From Light, Grapple, and Tumblestone. "The Pax 10 Panel: Part 1." Panel, 2015.

Creators of Zarvot, Ninja Tag, Battle Chef Brigade, Assault Android Cactus, and Adventures of Pip. "The Pax 10 Panel: Part 2." Panel, 2015.

Dragon Age Team. "*Dragon Age: Inquisition* Developer Q&A." Panel, 2015.

Horner, Kristina, Brittney Brombacher, Mike Robles, Tifa Robles. "Damsels and Distress Exploring Tropes in Gaming." Panel, 2015.

Laidlaw, Mike, Matthew Goldman, Melanie Fleming, and Matthew Rhodes. "Dragon Age: Past, Present, and Future." Panel, 2015.

Miller, Leah. Tom Abernathy, Bobby Stein, Anne Toole, Qais Fulton, Toiya Kristen Finley. "So, You Want to Be a Game Writer..." Panel, 2015.

Pink, Harrison G, Chris Avellone, Tim Rogers, Stephanie Bayer, Susan Arendt, and AJ Glasser. "Top Women Game Charaters: The 2015 Edition!" Panel, 2015.

Sachs, RaeRae, Bijhan Valibeigi, Mia Gipson, Les Banks, Godfrey Harris. "We're Not NPCs: It's a (Straight White Cis) Man's World." Panel, 2015.

Williams, Kate. Aevee Bee, Rowan Kaiser, and Zachary J Alexander. "More Than A Score: Critical Discussion of Games." Panel, 2015.