

A STUDY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS' ADAPTATION OF
EURIPIDES' MEDEA

By

CHARLOTTE BENNETT McDOWELL

Bachelor of Arts

Illinois College

Jacksonville, Illinois

1955

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of
the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
August, 1961

OCT 10 1961

A STUDY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS' ADAPTATION OF
EURIPIDES' MEDEA

Thesis Approved:

Daniel R. Kroll
Thesis Adviser

Clinton C. Keeler

Robert Maclean
Dean of the Graduate School

472434

PREFACE

I first became interested in Euripides' Medea when I read the Gilbert Murray translation of the drama while enrolled in Theatre Appreciation 341 (1953) at Illinois College. My interest in the Jeffers adaptation of Medea was aroused in 1959 when a student in my Senior English class at Cushing High School raised a question about the adaptation during a discussion of tragedy. When I read the new version of the play, I became interested in the changes made by Jeffers and decided to make a study of these changes the subject of my thesis.

This paper is not intended to present a line-by-line comparison of the Jeffers adaptation with any of the many translations of the Euripides drama. Its purpose is to discuss generally the changes made in the drama and to suggest possible reasons for these changes.

I wish to thank my advisers, Dr. Daniel R. Kroll and Dr. Clinton G. Keeler, for their valuable guidance in the preparation of this paper. I am indebted also to Mr. A. P. Juhlin, Oklahoma State University Library, for his assistance in obtaining material from the libraries at Harvard University, Oklahoma University, Swarthmore College, and Ohio State University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE PROBLEM	1
II. INFLUENCES AND DOCTRINES	8
III. THE JEFFERS ADAPTATION OF <u>MEDEA</u>	21
IV. CONCLUSIONS	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Almost fourteen years ago, on October 20, 1947, a Greek classical drama opened in the National Theatre on Broadway. This drama, which featured such well-known stars as Judith Anderson and John Gielgud, was Robinson Jeffers' adaptation of Euripides' Medea. The excitement created by this presentation was unusual for a Greek tragedy, a type of drama generally reserved for one- or two-night performances by college theatre groups. A reviewer for the New Republic commented that "there are nightly ovations in the theater and lines waiting at the box office."¹

Many critics who reviewed the play gave credit to its stars for its success. Joseph Wood Krutch, however, in his review of the drama for Nation observed:

When the curtain went down after the performance I saw, spectators rose to their feet to shout "bravo" very much as if a new tenor were being welcomed at the Metropolitan, and though most of them no doubt thought that they were paying tribute to Judith Anderson's tempestuous acting, the total effect could not have been achieved without the contributions of both Robinson Jeffers, who made the new English version, and the original playwright.²

¹"Theater: Cavalry Charge at Corinth," New Republic, November 3, 1947, p. 36.

²Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," Nation, LXV (1947), 509.

Echoing Krutch's sentiments, Kappo Phelan noted: "It is necessary to say at once that Robinson Jeffers' 'free adaptation' of Euripides has resulted in an astonishing collaboration: a great performance."³

At first thought the idea of a "collaboration" between Euripides and Jeffers, two poets separated by more than two thousand years, does not seem reasonable. Closer examination of the idea, however, brings realization that the adaptation, while admittedly not all Jeffers, is certainly not all Euripides. The new version is actually the result of a collaboration, one-sided though it may be, between Euripides and Jeffers.

This new concept immediately raises a question concerning Jeffers' ethics in choosing to collaborate with an author whose consent to the collaboration he can never hope to obtain. Justification for the Jeffers' adaptation must be established.

Ralph Waldo Emerson stated in The American Scholar:

As no air pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity as to contemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.⁴

In adapting the Medea for this century, Jeffers has rewritten the story to make it "fit" this age. Jeffers is not alone in this undertaking; he is following a precedent set by Euripides himself. G. M. A. Grube points

³Kappo Phelan, "The Stage and Screen," Commonweal, XLVII (1947), 94.

⁴Ralph Waldo Emerson. The American Scholar, Self-Reliance, Compensation, ed. Orren Henry Smith (Chicago, 1921), p. 26.

out that the Medea of Euripides is a reflection of the fifth century B. C.

The need to speak in terms intelligible to one's fellow-citizens was thus absolute, nor is there any reason to think that a fifth-century dramatist ever wished to avoid it. For the Greek artist, the poet in particular, was the recognized teacher of his people. All three dramatists / Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides / not only reproduced the ideas of this time on the stage, but they consciously desired to convey a message to their contemporaries.

As an example of the above, Grube observes later that "Medea's description of the lot of women is a clear anachronism; she is thinking and speaking as a fifth-century woman might."⁶

Many besides Jeffers have followed this precedent set by Euripides. During the last twenty-three centuries, versions of the Medea story have appeared in many languages and under various guises. Perhaps the first to adapt the Euripides drama was Seneca. In more recent times the story has been used frequently. Corneille prepared a French version of the play, Medée (1635). Franz Grillparzer, one of Austria's great dramatic poets, used the Medea story as one of the books of his trilogy, Das goldene Vliess (1821). The Medea comprised the third book; the other two were Der Gastfreund and Die Argonauten. Another version was prepared by the well-known American Negro poet, Countee Cullen (1935).⁷ The Medea story

⁵G. M. A. Grube, The Drama of Euripides. (London, 1941), pp. 29-30.

⁶Ibid., p. 152.

⁷It is interesting to note that Cullen's version, although not written in Negro dialect, is still a reflection of the Negro race. The phrasing and word choice are very similar to those of the American Negro. For example, the Tutor refers to the Nurse as "you old buzzard," the children are called "brats," and the Chorus is given songs with Negro spiritual overtones.

was used as the foundation for the opera Medée by the Italian composer, Luigi Cherubini (1797). In the same year that the Jeffers version appeared, the story appeared again, this time as the contemporary French version, Medée, by Jean Anouilh.

All of the adaptors of the Medea story, Jeffers included, have retold the story to make it "fit" their respective historical periods. The very fact that the story has survived so many centuries and so many adaptations is evidence of its significance. The tragic story of a woman's love betrayed by faithlessness has proved to be timeless.

Care has been exercised to use the terms "version" and "adaptation" in referring to the various works based upon the Medea story. It is necessary to avoid any confusion between these terms and the term "translation." There have been many translations of the Medea made in various languages. The versions which have been previously mentioned, however, are not translations; they are adaptations. They have been specially prepared for presentation before particular audiences.

Jeffers' Medea enjoyed a long run on Broadway, closing May 15, 1948. In all, 214 performances were given. The play attracted the attention of the reviewers for many of the better-known magazines. It received feature coverage in Theatre Arts,⁸ being reprinted in that magazine as the play of the month. Life devoted an entire section of pictures to the production with the following comment:

When Euripides' Medea was first acted in 431 B. C. in the outdoor theater at Athens, it appeared with three other plays in one of the traditional

⁸ August, 1948, pp. 71-97.

Greek drama contests. It won only third prize, Greek critics looking down on it for being a bit too radical. But in spite of the critics the tragedy became a smash hit with actors and audiences. Today, some 2300 years later, Medea is again a hit on Broadway and gives Judith Anderson the juiciest role of her distinguished career, as Medea, the Asiatic hellcat.

On his Honor List in Theatre Book of the Year, 1947-1948, George Jean Nathan lists as the best play "the free modern rendering of Medea, by Robinson Jeffers"¹⁰ and gives the award for the best female acting to Judith Anderson for her performance as Medea.

Various reasons for the success of the adaptation have been offered. Nathan notes, in speaking of the Medea, that "a producer who hopes to keep any such Greek tragedy going beyond the next Saturday night necessarily has either to coat it with appetizing marquee names or bring it into some modern acceptance with an adaptation of one kind or another."¹¹ Both of these conditions were met in the Broadway presentation of Medea. The cast of Judith Anderson as Medea, John Gielgud as Jason, and Florence Reed as the Nurse was acclaimed as outstanding. Plays have been known to fail, however, even with an excellent and well-known cast, when the vehicle was weak or poorly written. Recognizing the fact that, particularly in Greek tragedy, a good cast does not guarantee a successful play, Nathan continues, "It is thus that Messrs. Whitehead and Rea have wisely seen to it that the Euripides drama has been filtered through the fluent

⁹"Medea: Anderson Triumphs as a Classic Hellcat," Life, November 17, 1947, p. 112.

¹⁰George Jean Nathan. The Theatre Book of the Year, 1947-1948 (New York, 1948), p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., p. 104.

modern verse of Robinson Jeffers and brought into the appreciation and convenience of the contemporary theatre. . . ."12

Jeffers, then, as an adaptor was faced with the task of making a classical Greek tragedy acceptable to twentieth-century audiences. To accomplish this, he had to change the drama of Euripides so that it reflected, not the fifth century B. C., but the twentieth century A. D. He altered the drama also by changing the primary emphasis of the play so that it would be acceptable to contemporary audiences. And, as he rewrote the play, he allowed it to become a reflection not only of the twentieth century but also of its contemporary author.

Dudley Fitts has observed, "A man who is making a free adaptation of an ancient play has every right to inject as much of himself as he likes. It is a perilous right, for the injection may kill; but it is his idiosyncratic way of seeing the material that can make his work valuable or otherwise."¹³ Jeffers has "injected" part of himself into the Medea, but he has not "killed" the play. Rather, he has given it new life. The Medea has become a work of the genius of Robinson Jeffers. George Sterling has commented:

And while it is true that there is no poetry that does not, however tenuously, stem from that of former poets and betray, however faintly, their influence, nevertheless the work of genius will be more decisively its own than that of the prior masters, and this to such a degree that such influence is often a thing to be patiently or shrewdly verified.¹⁴

¹²Nathan, pp. 104-105.

¹³Dudley Fitts, "The Hellenism of Robinson Jeffers," The Kenyon Critics, ed. John Crowe Ransom (New York, 1951), p. 307.

¹⁴George Sterling, Robinson Jeffers, the Man and the Artist (New York, 1926), p. 3.

This paper will be concerned with investigating to what degree and in what respects the contemporary version of Medea is a reflection of the twentieth century and of the doctrines and influences of the poet, Jeffers.

No exhaustive study has been made of Jeffers' Medea. Saralyn Daly of Midwestern University undertook a study of "Jeffers' Medea and Solstice," but she later abandoned the work. Radcliffe Squires discusses the Medea from the standpoint of the ideas it embodies in The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers (Ann Arbor, 1956). The Squires book is of value also as a key to the personality of the poet. Lawrence Clark Powell's book Robinson Jeffers, the Man and His Work (Los Angeles, 1934) gives many personal glimpses of the poet. Most valuable and revealing of all works are Jeffers' free adaptation of Medea (New York, 1946) and the two translations of the Euripides play used for comparison, the poetic translation of Gilbert Murray (New York, 1912) and the prose translation of Theodore Buckley found in The Tragedies of Euripides (Chicago, n.d.).

CHAPTER II

INFLUENCES AND DOCTRINES

In order to understand Jeffers, the student must spend some time reviewing those people and events which had a great influence on the poet's life. He must also investigate the primary doctrines which Jeffers has formulated. Since a complete dissertation upon Jeffers, the man and poet, would take this paper far beyond its proper scope, only the influences and doctrines which are basic to an understanding of Robinson Jeffers as the adaptor of the Medea will be discussed here.

John Robinson Jeffers is the product of an early religious environment. At the time of Jeffers' birth, his father, William Hamilton Jeffers, held the chair of Old Testament literature and exegesis at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. William Jeffers, an ordained Presbyterian minister and noted scholar, had travelled extensively in Egypt, Syria, and Greece and had at one time been professor of Greek and Latin. He undertook early to educate his son, and Robinson is reported to have been able to read Greek at the age of five.

Robinson Jeffers' education seems to have been of two main types: part of his education was gained through the experience of travel and part of it was obtained by attending some of the best schools available

here in America as well as some abroad.¹ When he was five, he accompanied his parents on a trip to Great Britain, France, Switzerland, and Italy. His twelfth to his fifteenth years were spent in boarding schools in Geneva, Lausanne, Zurich, and Liepzig. At the age of fifteen, Jeffers entered the University of Western Pennsylvania. A year later, when his father's health necessitated a move to California, Jeffers matriculated at Occidental College in Highland Park, California.

In June, 1905, two years after entering Occidental College, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree. That autumn he entered the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles, to work toward a master's degree in letters. It was here that he met the woman he was later to marry, Una Call Kuster. In the hope of forgetting Una, who was married at that time, he accompanied his parents to Europe in 1907, intending to enter the University of Zurich. Soon, however, he became dissatisfied with the curriculum and returned to the United States to enter the College of Medicine at the University of Southern California. Although he was interested in medicine only as a science and had no intention of becoming a physician, he is reported to have excelled in his studies. According to Dr. Lyman P. Stookey, Professor of Bacteriology, in whose house he boarded, Jeffers "stood first in all his classes, and was a hard, brilliant worker."²

¹A comprehensive discussion of Jeffers' education and its implications is given in Chapter I of Lawrence Clark Powell's Robinson Jeffers, the Man and His Work (Los Angeles, 1934).

²Ibid., p. 11.

In 1910, yielding to an overwhelming desire to write poetry, Jeffers withdrew from medical school to devote his time to writing. To assure himself of ample outdoor exercise, he enrolled in the School of Forestry at the University of Washington. Here he remained until 1913, supplementing his study of forestry with studies in zoology and law. Of his education it has been noted that the only two fields which he did not explore were economics and contemporary politics. Of the fields which he did explore, Henry W. Wells makes the following observations:

He acquired a conversant knowledge of biology, botany, physics, chemistry, astronomy, philosophy, history, theories of history, anthropology, psychology, Greek, Latin, and English literatures, as well as medieval and especially medieval Teutonic culture, and the more modern French and German. He became equally at home in the pages of Aeschylus and Baudelaire. Contemporary literature he gathered almost imperceptibly in his stride, becoming no one's disciple but sharing much in common at one point or another with³ such diverse authors as D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and T. S. Eliot.

In 1913 Una obtained a divorce from her husband, and in August of that year she and Jeffers were married. When their plans to live abroad were thwarted by the war in Europe, they established their home instead at Carmel, California. Jeffers himself realizes the effect that Una and the Monterey Coast of California have had upon him. In speaking of his wife, he admits, "She never saw any of my poems until they were finished and typed, yet by her presence and conversation she has co-authored every one of them. Sometimes I think there must be some value in them, if only for that reason."⁴

³Henry W. Wells, "A Philosophy of War: The Outlook of Robinson Jeffers," College English, VI (1944), 82-83.

⁴Robinson Jeffers, The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers (New York, 1937), p. xv.

Lawrence Clark Powell makes the following observation:

Jeffers owes a great deal to his wife, Una. He might have gone the way of Poe and Verlaine had she not finally gained her freedom and shared his life. . . . This man and woman form a rare partnership which has produced extraordinary fruit. He himself says of his wife, "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears"⁵--quoting a line from Wordsworth's poem about his sister Dorothy--"and arranged my life."

The influence of the Monterey Coast can clearly be seen in Jeffers' narrative poems, for the coast has provided the setting for most of them. Descriptions of the rocky coastline, of the fog, and of the storms give strength to his poetry. Jeffers says, in giving his impressions of the coast, that

. . . for the first time in my life I could see people living--amid magnificent unspoiled scenery--essentially as they did in the Idyls or the Sagas, or in Homer's Ithaca. Here was life purged of its ephemeral accretions. Men were riding after cattle, or plowing the headland, hovered by white seagulls, as they had done for thousands of years, and will do for thousands of years to come. Here was contemporary life that was also permanent life; not shut from the modern world but conscious of it and related to it; capable of expressing its spirit, but unencumbered by the mass of poetically irrelevant details and complexities that make a civilization.

Speaking of the combined influence of Una and the Monterey Coast, Jeffers says that without them "some kind of verse I should have written, of course, but not this kind."⁷

The combination, then, of a wife who gave order to his life and a home on the Monterey Coast with its "magnificent unspoiled scenery" brought to the poet the peace so seemingly necessary for the production

⁵ Powell, Robinson Jeffers, p. 28.

⁶ Jeffers, Selected Poetry, pp. xv-xvi.

⁷ Ibid., p. xv.

of his poetry. Yet, it seems peculiar to speak of "peace" in connection with a poet whose poems exhibit as much violence as do the poems of Robinson Jeffers. A study of the man himself, however, will reveal that his theories and practices abound in paradoxes. He exalts pain and suffering in his poetry, yet he himself exhibits a reluctance to inflict pain, an inability, for instance, to kill birds and animals. He preaches death and violence in his poetry, yet his wife has reported that he never picks a flower wantonly or destroys a weed or prunes a tree if he can avoid doing so. His poetry predicts the downfall of Western civilization; it abounds in examples of humanity destroying itself; yet he, on his Monterey Coast with its rugged scenery and violent storms, has found a peace which the characters in his narratives never experience. And yet, the products of this peace are poems so violent, so despairing, so pessimistic that they seem to have been written by one of the devil's disciples, not by the kind, gentle lover of nature who is their author.

What, then, is responsible for these paradoxes? This question has two possible answers. The first is that Jeffers' extensive education has given him exceptional insight into humanity, into civilization, and into the world of which he is an unwilling part. He is able to look beneath the thin veneer of benevolence assumed by humanity and see the primitive cruelty, the selfishness, and the greed of the human race. The old man in The Double Axe prays:

. . . hear me, Lord God! Exterminate
 The race of man. For man only in the world, except for a
 few kinds of insect, is essentially cruel.
 Therefore slay also these if you will: the driver ant,

And the slave-maker ant, and the slick wasp
 That paralyzes living meat for her brood: but first
 The human race. Cut it off, sear the stump.

His knowledge of past and present civilizations has given him the deep-rooted belief that Western civilization, like the civilizations of the past, has reached its peak and is going through a period of decadence. His studies of the biological sciences have given him an admiration for the physical construction of man, but his studies of psychology and anthropology have given him a feeling of contempt for the nature of man. He has come to regard man essentially as a parasite or an illness from which the world is suffering. Speaking through his character, Bruce Ferguson, in "Mara," he has written:

I shot an eagle once,
 And looked at the gorgeous corpse, ruffled the plumes
 And saw the lice under them: we the white lice
 On this eagle world.

He feels that man is not needed on this planet; his cities and super-highways destroy natural beauty, and his wars wreak havoc on the beauties of nature and on the natural habitats of the true possessors of this earth: the birds, the fish, and all the other animals. In "The Broken Balance" he speaks bitterly of

. . . the hopeless prostration of the earth
 Under men's hands and their minds,

⁸Robinson Jeffers, "The Double Axe," The Double Axe and Other Poems (New York, 1948), p. 110.

⁹Robinson Jeffers, "Mara," Be Angry at the Sun (New York, 1941), p. 15.

The beautiful places killed like rabbits to make a city,
 The spreading fungus, the slime-threads
 And spores. . . .

This brings us, then, to the second possible explanation of the paradox noted above--war. War has had a powerful effect upon Robinson Jeffers. At the time of World War I Jeffers was a happy, newly-married young man. Because it was the acceptable thing to do, he volunteered for some type of military service, but the war ended before he was called. As the war progressed, however, Jeffers' attitude toward it changed from a passive acceptance to an unhappy awareness of the underlying causes and manifested effects of war. This new awareness had an immediately noticeable effect on his poetry. Henry W. Wells has written an excellent commentary upon this effect.

It [World War I] unquestionably increased the savageness and luridness of the poet's images and deepened his thirst for mystic peace. He viewed the subject of war broadly, philosophically, and imaginatively, not as so many of his less widely informed contemporaries, narrowly, impressionistically, and journalistically. As a true poet he envisaged war in terms of what he deemed "the politics of eternity."¹¹

War had another effect upon Jeffers. With his change of attitude regarding it, he began the formulation of a doctrine which, in 1948, he came to call Inhumanism. Yvor Winters has explained this doctrine by saying that it leaves two modes of action open to man--"he may renounce God and rely on his humanity, or he may renounce his humanity and rely

¹⁰ Jeffers, "The Broken Balance," Selected Poetry, p. 260.

¹¹ Wells, "Philosophy of War," p. 83.

on God."¹² Radcliffe Squires expresses his interpretation of Inhumanism in much the same way. "For Jeffers, to break away from humanity means to turn from contemplation of self to contemplation of God."¹³

Prior to World War I Jeffers had published one volume of verse, Flagons and Apples (1912), a volume of gentle poems exhibiting none of the violence which was to characterize his later work. In his second volume of poetry, Californians (1916), a volume published after the beginning of the war, he began the formulation of Inhumanism.

Borrowing from Catullus, he says of man, "Odi et amo! 'Loving thee I hate.'" The poem "Maldrove" then proceeds to question whether he should simplify his paradoxical position and make it the negative discernment of man as "all-abominable." But he decides for the sake of the few "flowers of beauty"--Achilles or Shelly--upon a tentatively optimistic position:

I call you all adorable, O men,
For the Gods' sakes you might be!

Later the characteristic phrasing tended toward the "all-abominable," but his attitude has, I think, retained the early ambivalence. His expressed "hatred" derives from and is inseparable from his unexpressed "love" of man. "Odi et amo!" is the touchstone to Inhumanism.¹⁴

A further clarification of his philosophy appeared in Roan Stallion (1925):

Humanity is
the start of the race; I say
Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to
break through, the coal to break into fire,
The atom to be split.¹⁵

¹²Yvor Winters, "Robinson Jeffers," Literary Opinion in America, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York, 1951), p. 440.

¹³James Radcliffe Squires, The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers (Ann Arbor, 1956), p. 48. For a complete discussion of Inhumanism see Chapter VII.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 118-119.

¹⁵Jeffers, "Roan Stallion," Selected Poetry, p. 149.

In The Women at Point Sur (1927) he further clarified his theory by warning that the mind which centers upon humanity will go mad. His later narratives exhibit what happens to those who fail to uncenter their minds from humanity, and they abound in madness, incest, and violence.

In particular, this exhibition of violence, which is the result of a humanity-centered mind, has come to be one of the outstanding characteristics of Jeffers' poetry. Jeffers believes that refusal to uncenter the mind from humanity will result in tragedy, and he looks upon violence as being the most tragic of subject matters because it is the most impassioned.

Yet to arrive at a correct estimate of this now famous violence one should set out from Jeffers' own explanation: that he does not love violence per se but chooses it because he wishes to write great tragic poetry. Such classic tragedy displays bloodshed and incest; the ambitious modern poet must reproduce this subject matter.¹⁶

In close relationship to his preoccupation with violence is his philosophy regarding pain. He seems to believe that man achieves dignity by exhibiting the ability to bear great physical pain and that he may attain greatness by achieving indifference to the pain of others. Happiness, he believes, is a fleeting and unreal quality; pain and suffering are more real and longer lasting than pleasure. The pain to be endured may occur in the form of physical pain like that experienced by Reave Thurso in Thurso's Landing or in the form of mental anguish like that felt by Helen Thurso as she realizes that her husband will be forced to suffer continuous pain. Of the two, however, only Reave achieves

¹⁶Harold H. Watts, "Multivalence in Robinson Jeffers," College English, III (1941), 109.

dignity, as he learns to live with pain and to resist the attempts of his wife to bring an end to his pain by ending his life. Helen fails to achieve greatness by being unable to feel indifference toward her husband's pain and by finally killing him and herself to end their suffering.

Jeffers' poetry also has another characteristic, a reliance upon symbols. In particular, two of them are noteworthy, the hawk and the stone. The hawk symbolizes pride, force, and courage. It is a self-sufficient creature and a deadly one. It may be cruel or indifferent; it is its own master and its own law. "Assertive, fearsome, aggressive--like the eagle in Nietzsche's Zarathustra--it is an idea of god-like humanity."¹⁷

Opposed to the symbol of the hawk is the symbol of the stone. The stone embodies peace and quiet strength. It is characterized by its immobility and rigidity as opposed to the vitality of the hawk. Its noteworthy qualities are a freedom from feeling and an absence of desire.

Another symbol used to a lesser degree is the symbol of the horse or stallion. In Roan Stallion Jeffers contrasts the haughty magnificence of the beast with the slaving obscenity of the man. The woman, California, senses the contrast. When she attempts to tell her child of her vision of Jesus, she confuses the stallion and God. Finally, after she has seen the horse kill her husband, "some obscure human fidelity" causes her to lift the rifle in her hands and fire at the animal. As the magnificent stallion sinks to the earth, she turns to her daughter "the mask of a woman/ Who has killed God."¹⁸

¹⁷ Delmore Schwartz and Frajam Taylor, "The Enigma of Robinson Jeffers," Poetry, LV (1939), 39.

¹⁸ Jeffers, "Roan Stallion," Selected Poetry, p. 157.

Robinson Jeffers relies heavily upon the classics for the forms, purposes, and themes of his poetry. His narratives, in particular, owe a debt to Aristotle. Lawrence Clark Powell notes:

I have mentioned Jeffers' knowledge of Aristotle's Poetics. His major narrative poems are Aristotelian in their form and purpose. Constructed after classical models, the narratives "Cawdor," "Thurso's Landing," and "Give Your Heart to the Hawks" succeed in effecting a katharsis on the reader, showing him the burning away of destructive emotions through pain and suffering¹⁹ and death, even as in life, with corresponding relief at the end.

Jeffers has borrowed freely from the classics for subject matter as well as for form and purpose. Four of his major dramas are adaptations of classical legends or dramas. At the Fall of an Age dramatizes the story of Polyxo's revenge and the death of Helen of Troy. The Tower Beyond Tragedy outlines the death of Agamemnon, slain by his wife Clytemnestra, and the eventual death of Clytemnestra at the hands of her children, Orestes and Electra. The Medea, Jeffers' most important and successful adaptation of a classic drama, tells the story of Medea's revenge upon her husband, Jason. Jeffers' most recent adaptation, The Cretan Woman, is a new version of Euripides' Hippolytus.

Jeffers explains his reliance upon the classics in a letter to Sydney S. Alberts, dated May 13, 1929: "We turn to the classic stories, I suppose, as to Greek sculpture, for a more ideal and also more normal beauty, because the myths of our own race were never developed, and have been alienated from us."²⁰

¹⁹Lawrence Clark Powell, "The Double Marriage of Robinson Jeffers," Southwest Review, XLI (1956), 281.

²⁰Sydney S. Alberts, A Bibliography of the Works of Robinson Jeffers (New York, 1933), p. 27.

In addition to adapting classic dramas for the twentieth century, Jeffers has borrowed themes from the classics to use in his own poetry. A few examples should suffice to illustrate this. In Cawdor Jeffers uses the Hippolytus theme of the father causing the death of his innocent son. He employs an Oedipus incident in the same poem by having Cawdor, overcome by the enormity of what he has done, gouge out his eyes. Perhaps his most significant use of a classic source occurs in the poem Solstice, a narrative based on the Medea story. Medea, turned out of her home by her former husband, kills her children to keep them from becoming contaminated by civilization and the "advantages" of the city.

This, then, is Robinson Jeffers--the poet, the exalter of nature, the Inhumanist. As a man, he has been criticized; as a poet, he has been misunderstood. For a time during the 1920's and 1930's he was hailed as one of America's outstanding poets. Today he is largely neglected. Squires comments: "Jeffers' literary reputation has ebbed steadily since 1935, and he is now being dropped from anthologies and consigned to the ranks of those who present only 'historical' interest."²¹ So far has interest in him and in his writings dropped that a recent history of American poetry devotes only one sentence to him: "Later, the isolated Robinson Jeffers was to begin to construct a peculiar misanthropic world through a series of dramatic poems acted out against a wild background of California coastline."²² Today his best known work is probably Medea, and it is familiar to many only because it once played on Broadway.

²¹Squires, Loyalties, p. 10.

²²Louise Bogan, Achievement in American Poetry, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 77.

But in the thirties, William Van Wyck stated of Jeffers:

His poetry makes the work of every other contemporary American prosodist seem almost to be of little more than doggerel value. This man, and God only knows where or how he caught the comet's tail to ride down the Milky Way with the great ones of the past, those great who run one or two to a century, this man sees too terribly for the average mind to follow him. He tears down all of the accumulated superstitions of the world with a few wonderwords. . . .²³

Perhaps this is the reason that Jeffers' poetry is losing popularity. Perhaps many lack the imagination to follow Jeffers' thought. Perhaps, too, the reading public finds his ability to see the degrading side of humanity to be discomfiting.

²³William Van Wyck, Robinson Jeffers (Los Angeles, 1938), p. 6.

CHAPTER III

THE JEFFERS ADAPTATION OF MEDEA

It is appropriate, indeed, that Robinson Jeffers would choose to adapt Euripides' Medea for the contemporary stage. First, the drama contains a full portion of violence which Jeffers believes is inseparable from tragic poetry. Second, the tragedy is one such as might be reported by any present-day newspaper as having occurred yesterday or last week; its significance is timeless.

As Jeffers himself rather inelegantly phrased it in speaking of the Medea and other tragedies:

Lately I had occasion to read more attentively the Medea of Euripides, and considering the reverence that cultivated people feel toward Greek tragedy I was a little shocked by what I read. Tragedy has been regarded, ever since Aristotle, as a moral agent, a purifier of the mind and emotions. But the story of Medea is about a criminal adventurer and his gun-moll; it is no more moral than the story of Frankie and Johnny. . . . What makes them / Greek tragedies / noble is the poetry; the poetry, and beautiful shapes of the plays, and the extreme violence born of extreme passion. . . . These are stories of disaster and death, and it is not in order to purge the mind of passions but because death and disaster are exciting. People love disaster, if it does not touch them too nearly--as we run to see a burning house or a motor crash--and¹ also it gives occasion for passionate speech; it is a vehicle for poetry.

¹Robinson Jeffers, "Poetry and Survival," Perspectives USA, No. 9, 1954, p. 105.

One of the first reflections of the contemporary poet to be noticed in the Jeffers adaptation is the style of the poetry. According to Gilbert Highet, Jeffers' poems are written

. . . in large, muscular, unrhymed lines, with an irregular pulse which is basically a new sort of blank verse, with a long rhythm (about ten beats to the line) which reminds me irresistibly of the Pacific Ocean hammering at the rocks.² It is intended to echo the ebb and flow of excitement. . . .

The first few lines of Jeffers' adaptation will serve to illustrate that the poet has made use of the lengthened line and "new sort of blank verse" which, according to Highet, are characteristic of his poetry.

I wish the long ship Argo had never passed that perilous channel
 between the Symplegades,
 I wish the pines that made her mast and her oars still waved in the
 wind on Mount Pelion, and the gray fishhawk
 Still nested in them, the great adventurers had never voyaged
 Into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for the Golden
 Fleece.³

If, then, as Highet suggests, the rhythm of Jeffers' lengthened line was inspired by "the Pacific Ocean hammering at the rocks," the influence of the Monterey Coast can be felt in the Medea as it can in most of his narrative poems.

It would be well to point out here that the poetry of the Jeffers' adaptation is unique. It bears no resemblance to the rhymed iambic pentameter of the Gilbert Murray translation, a style of poetry modeled after

²Gilbert Highet, The Powers of Poetry (New York, 1960), p. 131.

³Robinson Jeffers, Medea, freely adapted from the Medea of Euripides (New York, 1946), p. 3.

that used by Euripides, nor to the prose of a literal translation, as exemplified by the translation of Theodore Buckley. Comparable lines of the Murray translation read:

Would God no Argo e'er had winged the seas
 To Cholchis through the blue Symplêgades:
 No shaft of riven pine in Pélion's glen
 Shaped that first oar-blade in the hands of men
 Valiant, who won, to save King Pelias' vow,
 The fleece All-golden!⁴

The Buckley translation begins:

Would that the hull of Argo had not winged her way to the Colchian land through the Cyanean Symplegades, and that the pine felled in the forests of Pelion had never fallen, nor had caused the hands of the chiefs to row, who went in search of the golden fleece for Pelias. . . .⁵

In addition to the changes made in the poetic style of the drama, Joseph Wood Krutch points out that Jeffers has made radical changes in the language of the play to ready it for the contemporary audience. Krutch characterizes Jeffers' adaptation as "simple, perfectly clear, almost prosaic."⁶ In contrast to this, he says that the Murray translation, upon which the Jeffers adaptation is based, is

. . . stilted and fuzzy. Its awkwardly 'poetic' phrasing can hardly be spoken except in a poetical singsong fatal to any attempt at dramatic expressiveness, and its faded archaisms, though highbrows may put up with them, hang like a fog between the audience and the dramatist who is trying to reach them.

⁴Gilbert Murray, tr., The Medea, by Euripides (New York, 1912), p. 3.

⁵Theodore Buckley, tr., "The Medea," The Tragedies of Euripides (Chicago, n. d.), p. 137.

⁶Krutch, p. 510.

⁷Ibid.

Kappo Phelan corroborates Krutch's opinion in his remarks concerning Jeffers' handling of the language as he notes: "Jeffers' several slow ascents into the formal simile. . . seemed to me current history."⁸

Many of the symbols which Jeffers uses time and again in his poems are present in the Medea. In fact, the first one appears in the second line of the drama, a reference to the "gray fishhawk" which the Nurse wishes still nested in the pines used in the construction of the Argo. Since the hawk symbolizes the freedom of a creature which is its own master and owes allegiance to no one, it is possible to contrast the fishhawk in this instance with Medea, who the Nurse wishes were free to "nest" where she pleased, not bound by allegiance to her faithless husband Jason.

Again the symbol of the hawk appears, this time used by a member of the Chorus. Speaking of death, which Medea is calling upon the gods to allow her to experience, the Second Woman admonishes her by noting that death often comes too soon: "He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk."⁹ Once more the hawk symbol is used to denote the cruel indifference of that which knows no master and is free to strike unexpectedly if it chooses and to refuse to obey all commands and entreaties.

The next use of the hawk symbol is by Creon. Begged by Medea to allow her the remainder of the day to prepare for her exile, he agrees against his better judgment, but warns her, "We shall watch you: as a hawk does a viper."¹⁰ Tragic irony seems to be present here, for, although the hawk may imply cruelty and courage, it does not exhibit the sinister

⁸Phelan, p. 94.

⁹Jeffers, Medea, p. 10.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

cunning of the viper, which strikes to inject its poison into an unsuspecting victim. By equating Medea with the viper, Creon speaks the truth more clearly than he realizes.

Later on, Medea is pictured as a hawk, this time by the First Woman of the Chorus, who speaks of Medea as a bird of prey. She notes:

She fled from her father's house in a storm of blood,
In a blood-storm she flew up from Thessaly,
Now here and dark over Corinth she widens
Wings to ride up the twisted whirlwind
And talons to hold with. . . .¹¹

Again the symbol is appropriate, for, when the deaths of Medea's brother and Pelias are coupled with the deaths of Creon and his daughter, Medea does indeed appear to be a bird of prey, preying upon the weaker human beings, those who do not possess her supernatural powers. Her cruelty, like that of the hawk, has a certain superiority, a certain inevitability about it. She is like the magnificent hawk, swooping down upon creatures who have no defense against her relentless talons.

Appearing in significant numbers are references to another of Jeffers' familiar symbols, the stone. Medea longs for the peace of the stone as she is caught up in the torment of her despair and hopeless anger over losing Jason; she longs also for the quiet protection it offers.

Hear me, God, let me die. What
I need: all dead, all dead, all dead,
Under the great cold stones. For a year and a thousand
years and another thousand: cold as the stones,
cold. . . .¹²

¹¹Jeffers, Medea, p. 82.

¹²Ibid., p. 9.

Later, as Medea struggles for self-control and achieves at least an outward manifestation of it, she is regarded as possessing the characteristics of the stone. The First Woman of the Chorus says of her: "She is terrible. Stone with stone eyes."¹³ Once she has gained composure, she does not lose it until she debases herself to beg a day from Creon. Creon himself, speaking to her as they first meet, refers to her as "woman of the stone forehead,"¹⁴ seeming to indicate that the rigidity of stone is noticeable in her expression.

The next character to use the stone symbol is Medea, and she uses it insincerely as she flatters Creon by suggesting that he possesses the qualities of granite. "I know that your will is granite. But even on the harsh face of a granite mountain some flowers of mercy/ May grow in season."¹⁵

Medea employs the stone again in her conversation with Creon in her promise that, if he will grant her the right to spend the remainder of the day in Corinth, she will go her "sad course and vanish in the morning quietly as dew/ That drops on the stones at dawn and is dry at sunrise."¹⁶ Creon, possibly charmed by the figure of speech containing the comforting reference to the solidity of stone which is unaffected by the departing dew, does not stop to consider that the meanings of words, like the drops of dew as they fall on a stone, are easily transformed.

¹³ Jeffers, Medea, p. 15.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

Therefore, he fails to comprehend the implication of Medea's next words as she promises: "You will never again be troubled by any word/ Or act of mine."¹⁷

After her first interview with Jason, Medea generates within herself a sensation of self-hate. She hates the flesh of her body which Jason has touched; she longs to be able to rid herself of this defiled flesh.

If I could tear off the flesh and be bones;
naked bones;
Salt-scoured bones on the shore¹⁸
At home in Colchis. . . .

In her wish she unconsciously turns to the quiet peace and insensibility of the stone by wishing to become as nearly like a stone as possible. Since the bones of the human body bear a resemblance to stone, her wish to be able to peel off her flesh has two implications. If she possessed such ability, she would be able to dispose of her hated flesh and, at the same time, assume the characteristics of the much-envied stone.

In addition to dwelling on the symbols of the hawk and the stone, Jeffers has made significant use of another of his symbols, the stallion. The stallion, a magnificent beast radiating haughty grandeur or, as in Roan Stallion, symbolizing the super-male and becoming a non-human, god-like creature, appears only once in Medea. The limitation of the symbol to one appearance does not, however, lessen its significance.

The use of the stallion symbol is striking because it is unexpected. When the Nurse is sent to summon Jason into her mistress' presence so that

¹⁷ Jeffers, Medea, p. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

Medea can gain his permission to send presents to his bride, her mission takes her to the racetrack, where she witnesses an unusual event.

. . . a young mare broke from the chariot
 And tore with her teeth a stallion. . .
She tore
 him cruelly.
 I saw him being led away: a black racer: his blood
 ran down
 From the throat to the fetlocks.¹⁹

The stallion symbol used here seems to suggest two levels of meaning. First, it may be understood as a portent of evil to come. This would be in keeping with the traditional idea that the deaths of great persons are forecast by unusual and frightening events in nature. The idea that the stallion's misfortune is intended to foreshadow the horrible deaths of Creon and his daughter gains added strength when further speeches of Medea and members of the Chorus are considered.

MEDEA

Frightening irrational things
 Have happened lately; the face of nature is flawed with
 omens.

¹⁹ Jeffers, Medea, pp. 64-65. It is interesting to note the similarity between Jeffers' treatment of the stallion symbol in this quotation and Shakespeare's use of maddened horses in Macbeth to indicate nature's rebellious attitude toward the murder of Duncan.

Ross: And Duncan's horses--a thing most strange and certain--
 Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
 Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
 Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
 War with mankind.

Old Man: 'Tis said they eat each other.

Ross: They did so, to th' amazement of mine eyes
 That look'd upon't.

(William Allan Neilson, and Charles Jarvis Hill, eds., The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, [Chicago, 1942], II, iv, 14-20.

FIRST WOMAN

Yesterday

evening a slave
 Came up to the harbor-gate, carrying a basket
 Of new-caught fish: one of the fish took fire
 And burned in the wet basket with a high flame: the thing
 was witnessed
 By many persons.

THIRD WOMAN

And a black leopard was seen²⁰
 Gliding through the market-place. . . .

The second interpretation of the use of the stallion symbol is made possible by equating Jason with the stallion and Medea with the mare. When this is done, the act of the mare becomes symbolic of what Medea intends to do to Jason. The main difference between the two acts is that, although the mare injures the stallion physically, Medea's injury to Jason will be largely psychological. Of the two injuries, Medea's will in all probability cause longer-lasting pain, and the pain which it causes will not be subject to reduction by an application of soothing salve. This interpretation allows the use of the stallion symbol to have more significance. When Jason is equated with the stallion, he becomes the haughty super-male. His injury at the hands of Medea, the weak and colorless mare, then takes on an added indignity, for the elevating of his station to super-male provides him with a greater distance to fall when he is vanquished. As the "underdog," then, Medea gains more support and more sympathy for her cause.

²⁰Jeffers, Medea, p. 66.

In addition to allowing himself a great amount of freedom in his use of symbols, Jeffers has also demonstrated his love of violence in his adaptation of the Medea. So violent are some of the speeches of Medea in particular that Louise Bogan, in her criticism of the drama, was moved to observe that "his Medea's mania for grinding, mashing, slicing, pulverizing, and beating her enemies into a bloody froth soon paralyzes and numbs our sensibilities."²¹ The criticism is justified, although perhaps the point is overstressed. The reference seems to apply directly to Medea's first speech, an utterance filled to the brim with violence. Jeffers has taken pains to point out, however, that Medea is lamenting, not threatening her enemies. Actually, in this speech, as in the corresponding speeches in the translations, Medea is wishing for death. It is not in the sentiment, then, but in the violence of the wording that the difference lies. And it is this violence of wording which is a reflection of Jeffers. It would be well to illustrate this point by contrasting the speech in Jeffers' adaptation with corresponding speeches in the Murray and Buckley translations. Jeffers' Medea cries:

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my
 children. Destruction.
 That's the word. Grind, crush, burn. Destruction.
 Ai. . . Ai. . . .²²

²¹Louise Bogan, Selected Criticism: Prose, Poetry (New York, 1955), p. 304.

²²Jeffers, Medea, p. 7.

Murray's poetic translation reads:

Oh shame and pain: O woe is me!
Would I could die in my misery!²³

The Medea in Buckley's literal prose translation wails: "Wretch that I am, and miserable on account of my misfortunes, alas me! would I might perish!"²⁴

Particularly outstanding in the violent speeches of the Jeffers' version are references to blood and pain. When, early in the drama, Medea voices her desire to die, she seems to promise violence to come if her death is met with relief or happiness instead of with the respect which she feels she should command.

As for me, I want simply to die,
But Jason is not to smile at his bride over my grave,
nor that great man Creon
Hang wreaths and make a feast-day in Corinth. Or let the
wreaths be bright blinding fire, and the songs a
high wailing,
And the wine, blood.²⁵

A few lines later the idea gains further strength as Medea says, "Let them / the gods / watch my enemies go down in blood."²⁶ It has not taken her long, once she has become aware of the presence of the Chorus and of their sympathy, to change her spoken desire for death to an open, if seemingly hopeless, threat to punish her enemies with death. In this

²³ Murray, tr., p. 8.

²⁴ Buckley, tr., p. 140.

²⁵ Jeffers, Medea, p. 15.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

she differs from Euripides' Medea, who, at this point, makes the Chorus promise not to betray her as she seeks a means of gaining her revenge.

Later in the Jeffers' adaptation, when Medea is well launched upon her plan to punish her enemies and is waiting for news from the palace, the First Woman of the Chorus speaks of blood as she comments:

She fled from her father's house in a storm of blood,
In a blood-storm she flew up from Thessaly. . . .²⁷

The Second Woman of the Chorus adds:

Blood is the seed of blood, hundredfold the harvest,
The gleaners that follow it, their feet are crimson. . . .²⁸

The final violent act of the play is foreshadowed by violent speeches and violent descriptions. The most terrible of these belong to Medea, as illustrated by her speech to the Tutor when he returns from the palace with the children and the news that Jason's bride has received them kindly.

If this were all, old man--
I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth²⁹
For the good news you bring.

²⁷ Jeffers, Medea, p. 82.

²⁸ Ibid. Again it is interesting to note a similarity between this speech and one by Macbeth: "It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood." (Neilson and Hill, eds., III, iv, 122) The basic ideas are much the same. The speech in Medea, coming as it does late in the drama, marks the realization of the Chorus that Medea is a confirmed murderess. Each new murder becomes easier for her, and each seems to require another following it. In his speech, Macbeth is realizing that each of his murders compels him to commit another murder.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

Perhaps the most violent description in the drama, the Nurse's description of Medea's vengeance upon Creon and his daughter, exhibits only one noteworthy departure from the Euripides translations. The Messenger in the Euripides drama has observed the deaths of the unfortunate pair before leaving the palace. He tells Medea, "But at length the wretched man swooned away, and gave up his life; for no longer was he able to endure the agony. But they lie corpses, the daughter and aged father near one another. . . ." ³⁰ Their deaths do not seem to occur so quickly in the Jeffers' adaptation. In answer to Medea's question if they had died, the Nurse replies:

I am not able. . . have
mercy. . . No, the harsh tides of breath
Still whistled in the black mouths. No one could
touch them. ³¹

Again Jeffers has succeeded in incorporating additional pain and violence into his drama, this time by lengthening the period of suffering endured by the unfortunate couple.

Gassner has observed that "it / Medea / follows the outlines of Euripides' celebrated tragedy, but Jeffers' style and grim view of life are his own." ³² Structural changes in Jeffers' adaptation are few, and they will be discussed here only incidentally as they affect the characterizations or the emphasis of the drama. The changes in the movement

³⁰ Buckley, tr., p. 167.

³¹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 91.

³² John Gassner, ed., Best American Plays, Third Series--1945-1951 (New York, 1952), p. 396.

of the play and in the characterizations, which are more sweeping, will receive primary consideration.

Nathan says that "an integration of the disturbing chorus into the body of the drama" is one of the devices which have brought Medea "into the appreciation and convenience of the contemporary theatre."³³ Although a stage direction in Jeffers' adaptation mentions that the members of the Chorus come in "by twos and threes,"³⁴ the Chorus in the Broadway production was limited to only three women to correspond to the three speaking parts in the drama. By their own words the women admit they are curious about the situation now that Jason has deserted Medea to take another wife. Their attempts to excuse their curiosity as they first appear on stage make them sound like "gossipmongers" gathering the latest "news."

FIRST WOMAN

I hear her crying again: it is dreadful.

SECOND WOMAN

Her lamentation,
She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't
help coming.

THIRD WOMAN

We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts us.³⁵

³³Nathan, pp. 104-105.

³⁴Jeffers, Medea, p. 8.

³⁵Ibid., p. 9.

The members of the Chorus hover about the edges of the scene, morbidly longing for the sight of Medea's sorrow and offering their advice. They merit the censuring words of Jason in a way that the Chorus of Euripides never would have deserved. As Jason first comes on stage seeking Medea, he comes face to face with this group of women whom he seems to classify as "meddlers." He speaks roughly to them:

What business have you here, you women
 Clustered like ³⁶buzzing bees at the hive-door?
 Where is Medea?

And the women, in answering his question concerning the whereabouts of Medea, openly censure him, as the First Woman points and replies: "There: mourning for what you have done."³⁷

The members of the Chorus have a new and important function in the Jeffers' adaptation. In keeping with their new characterization, they provide needed information about the affairs of Corinth to the other characters. For example, when the Nurse asks them for the name of the guest staying in Creon's house, they are able to tell her that he is Aegeus, Lord of Athens. They are also able to supply her with the unsolicited information that his ship arrived the previous night and that he is planning to set sail again that very day.

By integrating the Chorus more carefully into the drama, Jeffers has removed from the women their seeming ability to communicate with the gods. No longer do they offer lengthy prayers for the deliverance of

³⁶Jeffers, Medea, p. 32.

³⁷Ibid., p. 33.

Medea from her despair. Fitts has observed that the "choral odes disappear almost wholly."³⁸ In their places are short, earthy speeches. Jeffers' Chorus would rather listen and gather information than lament and philosophize.

By his integration of the Chorus into the action of the play, Jeffers has avoided an awkwardness existing in the Euripides drama. Following the dramatic convention of the fifth century B. C., Euripides caused his Chorus to remain on stage from their entrance until the end of the play. Grube comments:

The awkwardness that their continuous presence may cause to conspirators is obvious, and has often been noted, though its frequency has been exaggerated. It undoubtedly exists in Medea, where we cannot but wonder that the Corinthian women should keep their promise of silence to Medea to the extent of conniving at the murder of their own princess and king, not to mention the children, even though they had no reason to protect Jason. The ³⁹ bond of common womanhood seems hardly strong enough to bear that strain.

Euripides' Medea, then, swore the members of the Chorus to secrecy and then proceeded to divulge all of her plans to them. Jeffers' Medea does not tell the Chorus her plans.⁴⁰ Only after the children have been sent to the palace with the gifts does the Chorus learn of the destructive power within these gifts. Their horrified reactions are normal. The Third Woman shows concern for the peril of the princess and the royal family.

³⁸Fitts, p. 308.

³⁹Grube, p. 105.

⁴⁰This would seem to be in keeping with Jeffers' characterization of members of the Chorus as "gossips." To a truly sympathetic friend Medea might have felt justified in confiding her woes and her plans. To a group of women who had a reputation for "spreading tales" she, who had her own reputation for cunning, could hardly be expected to lay bare her evil intentions.

She moves to leave: "I am sick with terror./ I'll run to the palace, I'll warn them."⁴¹ Jeffers' Medea does not rely on a promise of silence. The women of the Chorus owe her no loyalty. To keep them from betraying her, she uses a powerful persuasion; she threatens their lives. In reply to the Third Woman she says:

Will you?--Go. Go if you will.
God and my vengeful goddess are doing these things:
you cannot prevent them, but you could easily fall
In the same fire.⁴²

In this way Jeffers overcomes the awkwardness of supposing the loyalty of the Chorus to Medea and at the same time observes the Greek custom of keeping the Chorus on stage until the end of the play.

The parts of the two boys are also pointed up in the Jeffers' adaptation. Dudley Fitts has commented:

In Euripides they [the boys] appear on the stage, but they have no lines until we hear their death-cries within the house. Mr. Jeffers has provided them with speaking parts that are economical, moving, and right. Moreover, Jason's playing with them. . . is finely handled; and the scenes dealing with their carrying the poisoned gifts to Creusa-Glauke⁴³ are piercing in their compassionate irony.

Euripides does not allow the boys to do more than just greet their father when Medea summons them for Jason to see. Then they return to her and remain until they are sent to Creusa with the gifts. Jeffers has the boys react timidly to their father's advances of friendship until, finally, they confidently take his hands. The scene is touching, particularly so

⁴¹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 79.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Fitts, p. 308.

since it seals the children's fate--Medea sees that Jason is truly fond of his sons.

When the children return from bearing the gifts to the palace, each carries a toy, a present from the bride. Euripides has the children return empty-handed. The children play with their toys, and the Elder Child cries, "Look, Mother," as he demonstrates for Medea the use of his little bow.⁴⁴ When Medea can bear their play no more and sends them into the house, they return to stand in the doorway, as children will, not understanding the events, but nevertheless curious.

By allowing the children to stand in the doorway, Jeffers has overcome another awkwardness in the Euripides drama. Several ideas have been put forward by authorities concerning the positions of the children during this scene. The Gilbert Murray arrangement, which seems to be most prominent among the translations, has been severely criticized by Grube. Murray would have the children leave the stage as Medea says: "Depart/ Out of my sight, ye twain."⁴⁵ The children then re-enter sixteen lines later as Medea commands that they be summoned: "I would fain/ Speak with them, ere I go."⁴⁶ Grube points out that, although "this arrangement is undoubtedly preferable to wholesale excisions,"⁴⁷ some difficulties do remain.

. . . such rapid exit and re-entrance is very unusual in Greek tragedy. . . . it is dramatically weak to have the children, whose presence on the stage

⁴⁴ Jeffers, Medea, p. 85.

⁴⁵ Murray, tr., p. 60.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁷ Grube, p. 160.

is most significant throughout, pop in and out of the house in this way. . . . the slave must go in at 1020, the children are then left alone, and withdraw alone at 1053; 1069 then requires an attendant to fetch them out again, but there must be no one on the stage to hear 1059-68. The silence of the chorus about Medea's plot is difficult enough, but a group of attendants at this point is quite impossible, and out of keeping with Medea's present circumstances. We then have to make her shout (at 1069), so that she can be heard within, and even this leaves no time for the children to come out.⁴⁸

By placing the children in the doorway, Jeffers has located them far enough from the center of the scene that they can be prevented from hearing what they should not hear, but near enough to their mother that she can address them at will without having them summoned from the house. To strengthen the idea that not all of the proceedings would be understandable to the boys, Jeffers, in a stage direction, refers to "the children who have been standing by the doorway, fascinated, not comprehending, but watching."⁴⁹

The scene is particularly poignant in the Jeffers version, for it is while the boys are standing thus in the background, but in full view of the audience, that the Nurse enters with the news that Creon and his daughter have been consumed by fire. It is this news which necessitates the immediate deaths of the children. Medea realizes that the Corinthian citizens will extend no mercy to the bearers of the fatal gifts, and she determines to kill the boys herself rather than subject them to the fury of the mob. More important, she realizes also that the time has come for her to commit her final act of vengeance against Jason. She observes:

⁴⁸ Grube, p. 161.

⁴⁹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 92.

No one has ever injured me but
 suffered more
 Than I had suffered. Therefore this final sacrifice
 I intended glares ⁱⁿ my eyes
 Like a lion on a ridge.

By expanding the parts of the boys, Jeffers has greatly increased their effect upon the audience. They have become more than just Medea's pawns; they have become flesh-and-blood children. Since the audience has become acquainted with the boys, has seen them play and heard them speak, their deaths become even more tragic--like the deaths of friends, not strangers. The children in Jeffers' adaptation are much like many children today: they love their parents; they trust their parents; and, tragically, their love and trust are betrayed by these same parents, who cannot settle their differences.

The part of the Nurse has also received its share of revisions in the Jeffers adaptation. In both dramas the Nurse is a servant who has a certain amount of freedom in speech and action. She frequently takes liberties. In the Jeffers version, however, these liberties go beyond those in the Euripides play. In Jeffers' drama, it is the Nurse who takes it upon herself to summon Aegeus into Medea's presence. It is the Nurse who continually suggests to Medea that she ask Aegeus to provide a refuge for her in her exile. And it is the Nurse who finally mentions to Aegeus their need of asylum.

The part of the Nurse is considerably expanded and is given added significance by Jeffers in his assigning the description of the deaths of Creon and his daughter to her. Euripides had given this speech to a

⁵⁰Jeffers, Medea, p. 92.

Messenger, a character whose one appearance on stage was for this purpose. By eliminating the Messenger and giving the speech to the Nurse, Jeffers has abandoned the classical convention of the Nuncio. Nathan fully approves of Jeffers' innovation. He writes that "giving the original Messenger's speech detailing the horror of Jason's bride's cremation to the Nurse character with whom the audience has been acquainted throughout the play" is another of the devices which have brought Medea "into the appreciation and convenience of the contemporary theatre."⁵¹ Coming from the Nurse, then, the speech, one of the most important speeches in the play, becomes less formal and impersonal, more intimate and moving.

The Nurse is essentially a sympathetic character, fiercely devoted to her mistress. Early in the play, in answer to the Tutor's accusation that she has deserted Medea in order to meditate upon a trouble of her own, she says:

Yes, it is mine,
My trouble. My lady's grief is my grief. And it has
hurt me
So that I had to come out and speak it to the earth and sky.⁵²

Later in the play she is capable of a compassionate speech after being rebuked by Medea for trying to persuade her to seek shelter with Aegeus in Athens.

I lifted you in my arms when you were. . . . this long.
I gave you milk from these breasts, that are now dead
leaves.
I saw the little beautiful body straighten and grow tall:

⁵¹Nathan, pp. 104-105.

⁵²Jeffers, Medea, p. 5.

Oh. . .child. . .almost my child. . .how can I
Not try to save you? Life is better than death. . . .⁵³

Neither the above speech nor its equal appears in Euripides' Medea. The Nurse in the Euripides drama does not try to persuade Medea to ask Aegeus for asylum; Medea does not need persuading, for she is only too eager to ask for shelter. In fact, it is doubtful that the Nurse in Euripides' play would have had grounds to make such a speech. Grube points out that "Medea's nurse has undoubtedly seen service in a rather high-class Athenian household."⁵⁴ Assuming this to be true, then, Euripides' Nurse in all probability is a nurse to the children, a servant probably acquired after Jason had brought Medea from Colchis to Greece, but before their flight to Corinth. Obviously, then, she would not have known Medea as a child. The Nurse in Euripides' version is merely a servant whose years of acquaintance with Medea have earned her the right to privileges not usually accorded to servants. Jeffers has allowed her to gain added stature. She is Medea's best friend, one who would willingly make any sacrifice necessary to aid her mistress.

The character of Jason, the faithless husband, has undergone drastic changes in Jeffers' Medea. As he is characterized in this version, he certainly merits the words of one of the critics, who describes him as "a man too stupid even to appreciate his own caddishness."⁵⁵ In the Jeffers version, he reveals himself to be a conceited man who has little sympathy

⁵³ Jeffers, Medea, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁴ Grube, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Drama," Catholic World, CLXIX (1949), p. 229.

for his deserted wife. His first words to Medea are utterly cold and heartless. In fact, his first speech to her, which in the Euripides version could hardly be called more than a reproof for her behavior, in Jeffers' adaptation becomes a diatribe.

You have once more affronted and insulted the head of Corinth.
 This is not the first time
 I've seen what a fool anger is. You might have lived happily,
 secure and honored--I hoped you would--
 By being just a little decently respectful toward those in power.
 Instead, you had to go mad with anger
 And talk yourself into exile. To me it matters little what you
 say about me, but rulers are sensitive.
 Time and again I've smoothed down Creon's indignation, then you
 like a madwoman, like a possessed imbecile,
 Wag your head and let the words flow again; you never cease
 From speaking evil against him and his family. So now--you've
 got it. Call yourself lucky, Medea,
 Not to get worse than exile. In spite of all this, I have your
 interest at heart and am here to help you.⁵⁶

Compare this speech, then, with Grube's description of Jason's first speech in the Euripides play.

His words and manner are those of a man who is weary of his passionate wife, of her utter lack of prudence and common sense. Often before now, he tells us, he has seen the bad results of anger. What Medea says against him matters little, but why those foolish threats against the royal house? She is indeed fortunate that only exile is her penalty. However (and here we feel him shrug his shoulders), he has come to provide her with what she and the children need for their journey. . . .⁵⁷

The Jason in Jeffers' play is more than "weary of his passionate wife." A man who is merely "weary" of his wife would not compare her to "a mad-woman" or "a possessed imbecile." And certainly there is no implied "shrug" of the shoulders as Jason says: "In spite of all this, I have your interest

⁵⁶ Jeffers, Medea, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁷ Grube, p. 154.

at heart and am here to help you."⁵⁸ These words embody a feeling of malicious superiority not present in the corresponding speech in the Euripides drama. The Buckley translation reads: "But nevertheless even after this am I come, not wearied with my friends, providing for thee, O woman, that thou mightest not be banished with thy children, either without money, or in want of any thing."⁵⁹

The interview then follows much the same outline as the one in the Euripides play. Medea reminds Jason of the many services she has performed for him. She asks him to remember that she helped him to obtain the Golden Fleece, although to do so she was forced to betray her father and kill her brother. She reminds him, also, that she arranged for his enemy, Pelias, to be killed by his own daughters. In payment for these services, she believes that she merits his loyalty, not his desertion. Then, in a significant departure from Euripides, Jeffers' Medea calls her faithless husband a "dog." Euripides' Medea contented herself with referring to Jason as "thou vilest of men"⁶⁰ and "mine enemy."⁶¹ Jeffers' epithet gains special significance when the circumstances occasioning its use are compared to the appearance and disappearance of the dog in Jeffers' narrative The Double Axe. The dog, a rather undernourished specimen in desperate need of help, appeared one day to beg food from the old man with the double axe. It remained with him, accepting his food and sharing his shelter, until it mated with a wolf. The dog, then, having profited by

⁵⁸ Jeffers, Medea, p. 34.

⁵⁹ Buckley, tr., p. 148.

⁶⁰ Ibid.,

⁶¹ Murray, tr., p. 27.

the friendship of the old man who had saved its life, proved, like Jason, to be disloyal and left its benefactor to seek a more advantageous alliance.

According to Squires, "Euripides portrayed a middle-aged Jason who, finished with the arduous adventures of youth, deserts Medea and her two sons to make an advantageous marriage with the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth."⁶² In this way, his family will be related to royalty. The Jeffers adaptation emphasizes that Jason is interested only in himself. His statements setting forth his reasons for leaving Medea to marry Creusa have no ring of sincerity. When asked by Medea if he had not considered the effect that the breaking up of their home might have had upon the children, he replies:

Certainly I considered them.
 It was my hope that they would grow up here,
 And I, having married power, could protect and favor them. And
 if perhaps, after many years, I become
 Dynast of Corinth--for that is Creon's desire, to make me his
 heir--our sons
 Would have been a king's sons. . . .I hope to help them, wherever
 they go; but now⁶³ of course must look forward
 To younger children.

No mention is made in this speech, as was made in Murray's translation of Euripides, that the children will live "prince-like and happy"⁶⁴ lives. Nor does Jeffers' Jason, speaking like the Jason in the Buckley translation, offer as an excuse "that I might bring up my children worthy of my house, and that having begotten brothers to those children sprung from thee, I

⁶²Squires, Loyalties, p. 115.

⁶³Jeffers, Medea, p. 34.

⁶⁴Murray, tr., p. 31.

might place them on the same footing,"⁶⁵ implying that all of his sons will be princes. The primary emphasis here is placed upon the idea that Jason may one day become a king, thus causing his sons to be, not princes, but "king's sons."

Although the character of Jason has degenerated in Jeffers' adaptation, the character of Medea has been ennobled. At the beginning of each play, Medea, speaking from within the house, wishes to die. Euripides' Medea does not seem, however, to wish for death so sincerely as does Jeffers' Medea. Euripides' Medea seems to be planning to punish her enemies when she makes her first speech to the Chorus.

Therefore of thee
I ask one thing. If chance yet ope to me
Some path, if even now my hand can win
Strength to requite this Jason for his sin
Betray me not!⁶⁶

Having extracted the Chorus' promise to the above conditions, Medea then is free to throw herself to her knees before Creon to beg for more time before she is forced into exile. She and the Chorus know that this extra time will be spent to gain revenge on Jason, but she has no fear that the Chorus will betray her intention to Creon.

After Creon has granted the additional time and has left, Medea's first speech leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that she intends to have her revenge.

⁶⁵Buckley, tr., p. 150.

⁶⁶Murray, tr., p. 16.

Dost dream I would have grovelled to this man,
 Save that I won mine end, and shaped my plan
 For merry deeds? My lips had never deigned
 Speak words with him: my flesh been never stained
 With touching. . . Fool, Oh, triple fool! It lay
 So plain for him to kill my whole essay
 By exile swift: and, lo, he sets me free
 This one long day: wherein mine haters three
 Shall lie here dead, the father and the bride
 And husband--mine, not hers!⁶⁷

It does not take her long to decide upon the weapon of death, poison,
 because she has been pondering the question of what to use for some time.
 One problem, however, does present itself:

And they [my enemies] being dead--what place shall hold me then?
 What friend shall rise, with land inviolate
 And trusty doors, to shelter from their hate
 This flesh?. . . None anywhere!. . . A little more
 I needs must wait: and, if there ope some door
 Of refuge, some strong tower to shield me, good:
 In craft and darkness I will hunt this blood.⁶⁸

Euripides' Medea is concerned with her own safety. She does not wish to
 fall victim to the wrath of the citizens of Corinth.

Following her first interview with Jason, Medea is greeted by Aegeus
 of Athens, who has caught sight of her while passing with his train. Since
 he can provide Medea with the place of refuge which she so desperately needs,
 she loses no time in begging him for asylum.

But, Aegeus, by thy beard, oh, by thy knees,
 I pray thee, and I give me for thine own,
 Thy suppliant, pity me! Oh, pity one
 So miserable. Thou never wilt stand there
 And see me cast out friendless to despair.

⁶⁷Murray, tr., p. 22.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 23.

Give me a home in Athens. . .by the fire
 Of thine own hearth! Oh, so may thy desire
 Of children⁶⁹ be fulfilled of God, and thou
 Die happy!

When Aegeus leaves, after swearing an oath to shelter and protect
 Medea, she is gleeful.

God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies!
 At last the victory dawneth! Yea, mine eyes
 See, and my foot is on the mountain's brow.
 Mine enemies! Mine enemies, oh, now
 Atonement cometh! Here at my worst hour
 A friend is found, a very port of power
 To save my shipwreck. Here will I make fast
 Mine anchor and escape them at the last
 In Athens' walled hill.--But ere the end
 'Tis meet I show thee all my counsel, friend:
 Take it, no tale to make men laugh withal!⁷⁰

So relieved is Medea at finding refuge and so sure is she of her own power
 that she brazenly outlines in detail to the Chorus her plan to murder
 Creusa and then kill her own children. The horrified Chorus advises her
 to take revenge if she must, but to abandon the plan to kill her sons.
 Once launched upon her plan, however, Medea is not to be swayed from her
 intent to bring pain to Jason.

The Medea pictured in the first act of Jeffers' play is not the harsh,
 plotting woman described above. Her outstanding characteristic is her hope-
 lessness. She is violent; she wishes for death for herself and her enemies,
 but her most violent speeches have an air of hopelessness about them. Even
 when she says, "Let them [the gods] watch my enemies go down in blood,"

⁶⁹Murray, tr., p. 42.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 45.

she speaks her line "dully, without hope."⁷¹ She does not seem to have any hope of gaining revenge; instead, she seems almost to be attempting to punish her enemies with harsh words. Paramount over all is her often-repeated and seemingly-sincere wish for death.

I do not know what other women. . . I do not know how much a Greek woman
 Will endure. The people of my race are somewhat rash and intemperate.⁷²
 As for me, I want simply to die.

Her one fear is that her death will give joy to Jason and to the people of Corinth. She makes violent threats to cover such a circumstance, but even her threats are hollowed by her hopelessness. So great is her despair that she is not at once able to overcome it; she does, however, mask it by assuming the "stone-like" expression described by the other characters.

When she is banished from Corinth by Creon, her grief-numbed mind is slow to comprehend the significance of her new predicament.

MEDEA

You mean. . . banishment?

CREON

Exile: banishment:
 go where you may, Medea, but here
 You abide no more.

MEDEA

. . . I with my children?

CREON

I will not
 take them away from you.

⁷¹Jeffers, Medea, p. 16.

⁷²Ibid., p. 15.

MEDEA

Because we have suffered evil

We are to suffer more evil. Death was my wish.⁷³

The injustice of her banishment, of her being forced to bear wrong heaped upon wrong, provides Medea a release from her despair; she is angered. For the first time her threats are not merely empty words; she has suffered one injury too many. For the first time she becomes cunning; she debases herself to beg from Creon the remainder of the day "to prepare in. . . / Before I go out of Corinth forever."⁷⁴ Creon is in haste; he has a guest to whom he must return. Finally, he agrees to allow Medea to remain in Corinth until the next day.

At the mention of Creon's guest, the Nurse is hopeful. She begs her mistress to ask Creon for his name, thinking that he may be a friend who is willing to provide a refuge for them. Medea is not interested in insuring her own safety; she ignores the importuning of the Nurse. She still intends to die; but now, driven by the unfairness of her banishment, she does not intend to die alone.

I shall not die perhaps

As a pigeon dies. Nor like an innocent lamb, that feels a hand on
its head and looks up from the knife
To the man's face and dies.--No, like some yellow-eyed beast that
has killed its hunters let me lie down⁷⁵
On the hounds' bodies and the broken spears.

Unlike Euripides' Medea, however, she has no ready plan of death for her victims.

⁷³ Jeffers, Medea, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

Then how to
 strike them? What means to use? There are so many
 Doors through which painful death may glide in and catch. . .
 Which one, which one?⁷⁶

The Nurse, feeling that Medea should arrange for her own safety, questions the Chorus as to the identity of Creon's guest. Upon learning that he is Aegeus of Athens, she begs Medea to see him to ask for shelter. Again, Medea refuses to listen to her advice. She is not concerned with anything except gaining her revenge.

After my enemies are punished and I have heard the
 last broken moan--Corinth?
 What's that? I'll sleep. I'll sleep well. I am alone against
 all; and so weary
 That it is pitiful.⁷⁷

During Medea's interview with Jason, then, the Nurse undertakes to help her mistress gain a refuge. She goes to the palace herself to ask Aegeus to pay Medea a visit. When she returns with news that Aegeus is coming, however, Medea refuses to see him. When he appears on the scene, she first refuses to talk with him. Soon, however, she relents and tells him of her troubles. Again the Nurse begs Medea to ask Aegeus for refuge, and again Medea refuses to heed her servant's advice. Finally, Medea answers Aegeus' question concerning where she will go. "To death of course,"⁷⁸ Then the Nurse can restrain herself no longer.

⁷⁶ Jeffers, Medea, p. 29.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

Oh. . .She is all bewildered, sir,
In the deep storm, and ocean of grief, or she would ask of you
Refuge in Athens.⁷⁹

Seeing Aegeus hesitate at the thought of sheltering an exile, Medea perversely adds her request to that of the Nurse. "Aegeus;/ Will you shelter me in Athens?"⁸⁰ After receiving his promise that he will, however, Jeffers' Medea is not gleeful. Neither does she outline her plan to gain revenge for the benefit of the Chorus. She is quiet and thoughtful, finally rousing herself to announce that she wishes to be reconciled with Jason and to send the Nurse to fetch him.

Wyatt has commented that "Jeffers concentrated on making credible Medea's last act of vengeance."⁸¹ To accomplish this task, he has shown Medea through the first half of the play as the oppressed. She is not a craven witch in the first few scenes. She is merely a despairing woman, abandoned by her husband, cruelly turned out alone into the world by the ruler of Corinth. Jeffers allows the injustices to accumulate--essentially to drive Medea to take her revenge.

The audience during Euripides' day did not have to be prepared for the end of the play. The story of Medea and her vengeance was well-known. Euripides was not faced with the problem of making the conclusion of his play credible.

Such is not the case with the twentieth-century audience. Universal education coupled with a rudimentary knowledge of psychology has sharpened

⁷⁹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Horrors of Hatred," Catholic World, CLXVI (1947), p. 263.

the desire of the contemporary American audience to be able to pick out the influences motivating a character to follow a certain course of action. To make Medea's last act credible, Jeffers had to supply her with motivation acceptable to his audience.

First of all, then, he provided a speech with psychological overtones to capture the interest of the audience. After Medea has uttered one of her hopeless but violent threats, she is warned by the Chorus:

Daughter of sorrow, beware.
It is dangerous to dream of wine, it is worse
To speak of wailing or blood:
For the images that the mind makes⁸²
Find a way out, they work into life.

This would seem to be a suggestion to the audience that not all of the violence in the drama will be in the form of words.

To provide acceptable motivation, Jeffers was obliged to make significant changes in the drama. Medea's plotting the deaths of her enemies before receiving the final motivation of banishment was unwarranted. Allowing Medea to be overly concerned for her own safety would be unacceptable to the audience. Creon's banishing her, then, coupled with Jason's harsh censure of her before the Chorus, provided adequate motivation for the multiple murders which she committed.

Louise Bogan observes that "Jeffers, following the Romantic tradition, depends upon suspense for his big effects."⁸³ The Nurse's many attempts to force Medea to ask Aegeus for refuge create a certain amount

⁸²Jeffers, Medea, p. 16.

⁸³Bogan, Selected Criticism, p. 304.

of suspense by raising the problem of what will happen to Medea if she does not find someone to provide her with shelter.

Another instance of suspense is occasioned by Medea's failure to tell the Chorus her plans to kill her sons and Creusa. The Nurse's attitude when she is sent for Jason, overjoyed and frightened at the same time, excites curiosity; and her words which close the first act are full of foreboding.

Oh, I'll go. I'll run. Let me pass, please.
 But I am terrified. I do not know. . . I am terrified.
 Pray to the gods, women, to keep
 Evil birds from our hearts!⁸⁴

Once Medea is launched upon her quest for revenge, she exhibits the utmost cunning. Acting contrary to the Medea in Euripides' drama, she cleverly masks her purposes until the last possible moment, thus creating rising suspense. She does not confide in the Chorus; often she does not seem to be aware of their presence.

Jeffers' second act opens with Medea seated before her house holding the golden cloak and coronet which she plans to send to Creusa. There is an atmosphere of suppressed evil which is heightened by Medea as she says, "See, it is almost alive. Gold is a living thing: such pure gold./ But when her body has warmed it, how it will shine!"⁸⁵

The suspense is intensified by the Nurse, who returns with the story of a mare which attacked a stallion. It is also intensified by the members

⁸⁴ Jeffers, Medea, p. 59.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

of the Chorus, who discuss a variety of ill omens which have happened recently. Jason's entry provides a diversion, but soon he too becomes a factor in the mounting horror. Medea's plan to kill her children becomes obvious as she questions Jason about his feelings concerning them. It is not difficult for the observer to remember her words to Aegeus when it became apparent to her how much he desired children:

Then--if you had a dog-eyed enemy and needed absolute ven-
 geance--you'd kill
 The man's children first. Unchild him, ha?
 And then unlife him.⁸⁶

Medea's questioning of Jason gains significance when, after he assures her that nothing could happen to the boys if they were left in his care, she continues to pursue the same idea.

You must pardon me: it is not possible to be certain of that.
 If they were. . .killed and their blood
 Ran on the floor of the house or down the deep earth--
 Would you be grieved?⁸⁷

Medea begins to show strain; nevertheless, she summons the boys to see their father. As Jason greets his sons and Medea sees how much he cares for them, her intention seems to falter. "She turns, and stands rigidly turned away, her face sharp with pain."⁸⁸ She soon recovers, however, and says "fiercely" to the Chorus:

⁸⁶Jeffers, Medea, p. 47.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 70.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 72.

Look at him: he loves them--ah? Therefore his dear children
 Are not going to that city but a darker city, where no games are
 played, no music is heard.--Do you think
 I am a cow lowing after the calf? Or a bitch with pups, licking
 The hand that struck her?⁸⁹

Even so, she is not completely cruel. When she sends the children
 with the cases of gold ornaments to Creusa, she exhibits a flash of motherly
 consideration as she takes the heavy cases from the children and gives
 them to the Nurse and the Tutor with the words: "Gold is too heavy a
 burden for little hands. Carry them, you."⁹⁰ She is obviously over-
 wrought, for she bursts into a torrent of weeping as the children leave.
 She soon regains her composure, however, and turns boastfully to the Chorus.

Rejoice, women. The gifts are given; the bait is laid
 The gods roll their great eyes over Creon's house and quietly smile;
 for no rat nor cony
 Would creep into the open undisguised traps
 That take the proud race of man. They snap at a shiny bait; they'll
 believe anything. I too
 Have been fooled in my time: now I shall triumph. That robe of
 bright-flowing gold, that bride-veil, that fish-net
 To catch a young slender salmon--not mute, she'll sing: her
 delicate body writhes in the meshes,
 The golden wreath binds her bright head with light: she'll dance,
 she'll sing loudly:
 Would I were there to hear it, that proud one howling.
 --Look, the sun's out again, the clouds are gone,
 All's gay and clear. I wish the deep earth would open and
 swallow us--
 Before I do what comes next.
 I wish all life would perish, and the holy gods in high heaven die,
 before my little ones
 Come home to my hands.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 73.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 77. This act by Medea is also a very clever bit of staging
 by Jeffers. It places the Nurse at the palace, where she must be to observe
 the deaths which she must later describe to Medea.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

The above speech is characteristic of her throughout the remainder of the play. She is gloating and cruel when she speaks of gaining her revenge, but the thought of killing her children forces her to become a grief-stricken mother again. When the children return from the palace with toys from the princess, Medea is unable to touch them. She resolves to kill them and falters time and again. Only after the Nurse returns with the news of the success of her plan does she realize that her choice has been removed. Yet, once again she falters.

O my little ones!
 What was I dreaming?--My babes, my own!
 Never, never, never, never
 Shall my own babes be hurt. Not if every war-hound
 and spear-slayer in headless Corinth
 Were on the track.⁹²

Soon, however, she strengthens in her intent and takes the children into the house, pausing to say:

Would you
 say that this child
 Has Jason's eyes?
 . . . They are his cubs. They
 have his blood.
 As long as they live I shall be mixed with him.⁹³

Once the door of the house is bolted and the cries of the children are heard, there is no longer any doubt as to their fates. Jeffers allows for more suspense in the drama to sustain the conclusion by failing to have the Chorus inform Jason that his sons are dead. When he enters in

⁹²Jeffers, Medea, p. 94.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 95-96.

search of them, he concludes, first, that Medea has locked them in the house with her for protection. Hearing the wailing of the Nurse and the sound of lamentation from the house, he next believes that Medea has killed herself. Then, with dawning horror and disbelief, he flings down his sword to try in vain to force open the door of the house. He is indeed pitiable as he turns to the women to whom he had previously spoken so roughly and pleads: "Women, I am alone. Help me./ Help me to break the bolt."⁹⁴

Their aid is not needed, for the doors open. Servants place two flickering lamps outside on either side of the door, and Medea steps out to stand between them. Even she, at first, does not tell Jason that his sons are dead. When he wishes to threaten her and cannot find his sword, she, from above, helps him to locate it on the step where he dropped it when trying to open the door. Only after he is armed does she warn him that the two lamps are her protection.

You must be careful, Jason.

Do you see the two fire-snakes
That guard this door? Here and here: one on each side:
Their throats are swollen with poison,
Their eyes are burning coals and their tongues are fire.
They are coiled ready to strike: if you come near them,
They'll make you what Creon is.⁹⁵

She then allows him to view the bodies of his sons, and he realizes fully for the first time the extent of his loss. Medea has fulfilled her wish; Jason is a broken man. The final blow comes when Medea prophesies his death beside the Argo, an event which will come too soon to prevent his getting other children. For Jason it is as Aegeus said:

⁹⁴ Jeffers, Medea, p. 101.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 103-104.

When death comes, Medea,
It is, for a childless man, utter despair, darkness, extinction.
One's children
Are the life after death.⁹⁶

The conclusion of the Jeffers drama is a dramatic departure from that of the Euripides play. Jeffers has abandoned the deus ex machina, the dragon chariot sent by "my father's father, the high Sun."⁹⁷ In so doing, he ignores Medea's relationship to Helios, the sun god. This is not the first time he has overlooked this relationship. Euripides' Medea claims to have received the gifts she sent to Creusa from "the sire/ Of all my house, the Sun."⁹⁸ Jeffers' Medea says merely that "the God of the Sun gave them to my father's father."⁹⁹ By refusing to recognize this relationship, Jeffers has removed from Medea her kinship with the gods. She is dependent only upon herself.

Grube has said of the Euripides drama:

The play ends in an atmosphere of unrelieved vengeance and hatred--there is no peace here, even on earth. And if Medea reaches more than human stature at the end, is it not just because she alone is possessed by a theos, an eternal force, until she herself almost becomes a goddess or, if you prefer, a devil?¹⁰⁰

Such is not the case with Jeffers' Medea. She is neither a "goddess" nor a "devil." She is a human being, although she is a murderess. She does

⁹⁶ Jeffers, Medea, p. 47.

⁹⁷ Murray, tr., p. 74.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁹ Jeffers, Medea, p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Grube, p. 48.

not, as does Euripides' Medea, institute an annual feast for the Corinthians "to purge them yearly of the stain/ Of this poor blood."¹⁰¹

Jeffers Medea is triumphant, but her triumph was not gained without suffering. To Jason she says, "I tore my own heart and laughed: I was tearing yours."¹⁰²

The conclusion of the Jeffers drama seems to have met with the favor of the critics. Dudley Fitts notes:

Mr. Jeffers, with perfect realism, yet creating an even heightened atmosphere of sorcery--the Colchian aura--has his Medea pass through the portal, mysteriously protected by two flickering lamps which her women have placed at the base of the central pillars, lamps beyond which Jason cannot penetrate and between which he falls exhausted at the end. A trick, admittedly; but a better trick than the aerial car.¹⁰³

George Jean Nathan describes the conclusion as

. . . an ending in which the impossibly spectacular dragon-drawn chariot with the dead children is supplanted by Medea's more practical barricade of her house against Jason and the baring of his sons' corpses within the doorway and within range of his grimly punished vision.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Murray, tr., p. 77.

¹⁰² Jeffers, Medea, p. 105.

¹⁰³ Fitts, pp. 308-309.

¹⁰⁴ Nathan, p. 105.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Radcliffe Squires contends that "Jeffers wanted his poetry to be of this age, while aimed at no age. Even when adapting from Aeschylus or Euripides he has slanted the implications toward modern society."¹ Jeffers' Medea is an excellent example of the truth of this statement; it contains reflections of both the author and the twentieth century.

The Jeffers version is written in the author's own peculiar poetic style, which features a lengthened, unrhymed line. Woven through the drama are references to some of Jeffers' favorite symbols--the hawk, the stone, and the stallion. And dominating all are the violence of the speeches and the vivid imagery of the drama. Squires remarked that "only his adaptation of the Medea realizes Jeffers' own aim in tragedy as 'poetry. . . beautiful shapes. . . violence.' And this only because of the organic simplicity that Euripides imposes on Jeffers' restive imagination. . . ."²

Significantly absent from the adaptation, however, is Jeffers' doctrine of Inhumanism. Squires points out that "Medea cannot use her powers as a sorceress to bring about good, but one does not question the abstract

¹Squires, Loyalties, p. 104.

²Ibid., p. 166.

justice of her decision to revenge herself."³ It is this decision, coupled with Jeffers' retention of the Euripides solution of having Medea seek refuge in Athens, which prevents Jeffers from applying Inhumanism to the character of Medea. Had Medea become an Inhumanist, she would probably not have sought vengeance, nor would she have needed to flee to Athens. She would have divorced herself from humanity, as did Orestes,⁴ and all of the wrongs done to her would have ceased to concern her. The plot of the drama, then, prevents Medea from becoming an Inhumanist and thereby restrains Jeffers from incorporating his doctrine of Inhumanism into the play.

In adapting the Medea, Jeffers has taken a drama which has proved, throughout its 2300-year existence, to be adaptable to fit any age and has changed it to fit the twentieth century, much as Euripides must have changed the Medea legend to fit the fifth century B. C. To accomplish this, Jeffers has had to make significant departures from the drama of Euripides.

Squires has stated that he believes the success of Jeffers' Medea to be due to the fact that it is "contained by the architecture of Euripides."⁵ It is true that the Jeffers drama follows the outlines of the fifth-century play and departs from its structure only when a change in idea demands such a departure. However, in other respects the two dramas are very different.

³Radcliffe Squires, "Robinson Jeffers and the Doctrine of Inhumanism" (unpub. Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), p. 315.

⁴Cf. Jeffers, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," Selected Poetry, pp. 89-140.

⁵Squires, Loyalties, p. 31.

Jeffers is striving for realism according to twentieth-century standards. He has taken a drama setting forth a series of events which could happen at any time and in any place and has tried to make these events real, plausible, believable to contemporary audiences. His Medea is first and foremost a woman. She may possess supernatural powers, but she suffers as any woman does who is deserted by her husband. Jeffers dismisses her relationship to Helios by removing the deus ex machina at the end of the play. He does not deny that she is Asiatic and a barbarian according to Greek standards, but he refuses to acknowledge that she is related to the gods.

Jeffers' Medea is despairing during the first act of the play. She wants to die--plans to die. Only after she has been wronged time and again does she resort to cunning to gain revenge. Her motivation in this respect is clearly outlined for the audience. She has been deserted by Jason, banished by Creon, and finally publicly chastised by Jason before a group of Corinthian women "who have come to pay her a visit and discover in a neighborly way the ins and outs of the scandal."⁶ She does not, as does Euripides' Medea, plot her revenge from her first speech to the Chorus. She seems to be forced to take action to gain revenge in order to retain her senses.

By striving to make the play conform to modern theatrical conventions, Jeffers has eliminated some of the awkward situations in the drama. No longer does Aegeus notice Medea as he is passing by her house at a most opportune moment. In Jeffers' drama he is summoned before Medea by the

⁶Wyatt, "The Drama," p. 229.

Nurse, who has discovered his presence in Corinth from conversation with the "neighborly" Chorus. And it is the Nurse, not Medea, who initiates the plea for refuge when Aegeus appears on the scene. Throughout the first scenes of the play, Medea is not pictured as a cunning, conniving woman wishing to gain revenge but concerned for her own safety; she is portrayed as a depressed, despairing woman whose sincere wish is to die. Only after she has been wronged by Jason and Creon does she seek vengeance. Her plan does not, as does the plan of Euripides' Medea, depend upon her finding shelter after her revenge has been taken.

Another awkwardness overcome in the Jeffers adaptation is in Medea's relationship to the Chorus. Euripides, exercising the undeniable dominance of a Greek dramatist over the actions of his Chorus, assumes that the Chorus, bound to Medea by the ties of womanhood, will keep their rashly-made promise of silence as they see Medea make preparations to kill members of the royal family. Jeffers makes no such assumptions. His Medea cleverly hides her intentions until her plan has been put into operation. Then her appeal to the Chorus for silence is not based upon the flimsy excuse that they are all women and must be loyal to each other. To prevent the Chorus from warning Creon of her intentions, Medea threatens their lives. In the light of this threat, then, it is little wonder that the members of the royal family go unwarned.

Alterations of character are apparent throughout the play. By concentrating upon Medea as a human being, Jeffers has ennobled her character. On the other hand, the character of Jason has lost any of the saving graces it might have had in the Euripides version. The fact that Jason is interested only in himself is stressed. His one ambition is to succeed Creon as ruler of Corinth; he points out that he plans for his sons to be "king's sons."

Jeffers has expanded the parts of the children. He has increased the dramatic appeal of the play by causing the boys to be in view of the audience during the scene in which Medea determines that she has no choice; she must kill them.

The part of the Nurse has also been enlarged. In Jeffers' play she is more than a servant. She is a friend to Medea. Although the Nurse in Euripides' drama probably joined Medea and Jason after their voyage from Colchis, the Nurse in Jeffers' drama, by her own words, indicates that she has been nurse to Medea since the latter's birth. To the Nurse has been given the description of the violence of Medea's revenge upon Creon and his daughter, and this description is less formal and more moving than the corresponding speech in Euripides' drama because it comes from a sympathetic character instead of from an impersonal Messenger.

Throughout all of the adaptation, Jeffers has strived for suspense. Suggestions are made here and there that tragedy is approaching. However, the form of the disaster is not apparent until the tragedy itself is imminent. Medea does not reveal to the Chorus her plans to kill the royal family; the full horror of the vengeance is allowed to unfold bit by bit before the eyes of the audience. The conclusion, considered by many to be anticlimactic, has been sustained by the added suspense of Jason's failure to discover the deaths of his sons until Medea informs him of the murder.

It is the combination of unique poetic style, realism of character and situation, understandable motivation of action, and suspense that has produced a drama reflecting both its author and the century for which

it was adapted. Certainly the mastery exhibited by the adaptation justifies Gassner's classification of the Medea as "the one distinguished high tragedy written by an American poet."⁷

⁷Gassner, ed., p. 396.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adamic, Louis. Robinson Jeffers, a Portrait. Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1929.
- Alberts, Sydney S. A Bibliography of the Works of Robinson Jeffers. New York: Random House, 1933.
- Bogan, Louise. Achievement in American Poetry, 1900-1950. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951.
- _____. Selected Criticism: Prose, Poetry. New York: Noonday Press, 1955.
- Bush, Douglas. Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937.
- Canby, Henry Seidel, Seven Years' Harvest, Notes on Contemporary Literature. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936.
- Chapman, John, ed. The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1947-48. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1948.
- Cullen, Countee. The Medea and Some Poems. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935.
- Deutsch, Babette. Poetry in Our Time. New York: Columbia University Press, 1956.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The American Scholar, Self-Reliance, Compensation. Ed. Orren Henry Smith. Chicago: American Book Company, 1921.
- Euripides. The Medea. Tr. Gilbert Murray. New York: Oxford University Press, 1912.
- _____. The Medea of Euripides. Ed. Frederic D. Allen. Boston: Ginn, Heath and Company, 1882.
- _____. The Tragedies of Euripides. Tr. Theodore Buckley. Chicago: American Book Company, n.d.
- Fitts, Dudley. "The Hellenism of Robinson Jeffers." The Kenyon Critics. Ed. John Crowe Ransom. New York: World Publishing Company, 1951.

- Fletcher, John Gould. "The Dilemma of Robinson Jeffers." Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, XLIII (March, 1934), 338-42.
- Gassner, John, ed. Best American Plays, Third Series--1945-1951. New York: Crown Publishers, 1952.
- Gates, George G. "The Bread That Every Man Must Eat Alone." College English, IV (December, 1942), 170-74.
- Gierasch, Walter. "Robinson Jeffers." English Journal, (College Edition), XXVIII (April, 1939), 284-95.
- Grube, G. M. A. The Drama of Euripides. London: Methuen, 1941.
- "Half-New Play in Manhattan." Time, L (November 3, 1947), 68.
- Hight, Gilbert. The Powers of Poetry. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Jeffers, Robinson. Be Angry at the Sun. New York: Random House, 1941.
- _____. Cawdor, and Other Poems. New York: Random House, 1928.
- _____. Dear Judas and Other Poems. New York: H. Liveright, 1929.
- _____. The Double Axe and Other Poems. New York: Random House, 1948.
- _____. Give Your Heart to the Hawks and Other Poems. New York: Random House, 1933.
- _____. Hungerfield and Other Poems. New York: Random House, 1954.
- _____. Medea, freely adapted from the Medea of Euripides. New York: Random House, 1946.
- _____. "The Medea." Theatre Arts, XXXII (August, 1948), 71-97.
- _____. "Poetry and Survival." Perspectives USA, No. 9 (1954), 102-107.
- _____. The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers. New York: Random House, 1938.
- _____. Solstice and Other Poems. New York: Random House, 1935.
- _____. Thurso's Landing and Other Poems. New York: Liveright, 1932.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Drama." Nation, LXV (November 8, 1947), 509-510.
- "Magic by Medea." Newsweek, XXX (November 3, 1947), 76.

- "Medea: Anderson Triumphs as a Classic Hellcat." Life, XXIII (November 17, 1947), 112-14.
- Nathan, George Jean. The Theatre Book of the Year, 1947-1948. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1948.
- Neilson, William Allan, and Charles Jarvis Hill, eds. The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare. Chicago: Houghton Mifflin, 1942.
- Phelan, Kappo. "The Stage and Screen." Commonweal, XLVII (November 7, 1947), 94.
- Powell, Lawrence Clark. "The Double Marriage of Robinson Jeffers." Southwest Review, XLI (Summer, 1956), 278-82.
- _____. Robinson Jeffers, the Man and His Work. Los Angeles: Primavera Press, 1934.
- Roberts, R. Ellis. "Lonely Eminence." Saturday Review of Literature, XXV (April 25, 1942), 8.
- Rosenheim, Ned. "One Tiger on the Road." Poetry, LXXIII (March, 1949), 351-54.
- Schwartz, Delmore, and Frajam Taylor. "The Enigma of Robinson Jeffers." Poetry, LV (October, 1939), 30-46.
- Short, R. W. "The Tower Beyond Tragedy." Southern Review, VII (Summer, 1941), 132-44.
- Southworth, James G. Some Modern American Poets. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950.
- Squires, James Radcliffe. The Loyalties of Robinson Jeffers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956.
- _____. "Robinson Jeffers and the Doctrine of Inhumanism." Unpub. Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.
- Sterling, George. Robinson Jeffers, the Man and the Artist. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.
- "Theatre: Cavalry Charge at Corinth." New Republic, CXVII (November 3, 1947), 36.
- Van Wyck, William. Robinson Jeffers. Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1938.

Waggoner, Hyatt Howe. The Heel of Elohim: Science and Values in Modern American Poetry. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950.

Warren, Robert Penn. "Jeffers on the Age." Poetry, XLIX (February, 1937), 279-82.

Watts, Harold H. "Multivalence in Robinson Jeffers." College English, III (November, 1941), 109-20.

_____. "Robinson Jeffers and Eating the Serpent." Sewanee Review, XLIX (January, 1941), 39-55.

Wells, Henry W. The American Way of Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.

_____. "A Philosophy of War: The Outlook of Robinson Jeffers." College English, VI (November, 1944), 81-88.

Winters, Yvor. "Robinson Jeffers." Literary Opinion in America. Ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951.

Wyatt, Euphemia Van Rensselaer. "The Drama." Catholic World, CLXIX (June, 1949), 228-29.

_____. "The Horrors of Hatred." Catholic World, CLXVI (December, 1947), 263-64.

VITA

Charlotte Bennett McDowell

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: A STUDY OF ROBINSON JEFFERS' ADAPTATION OF EURIPIDES' MEDEA

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born at Belvidere, Illinois, June 14, 1933, the daughter of Harold L. and Alice D. Bennett.

Education: Attended grade school in Belvidere, Illinois; was graduated from Belvidere High School in 1951; received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Illinois College, with a major in Speech, in June, 1955; completed requirements for the Master of Arts degree in August, 1961.

Professional experience: Accepted position to teach Speech and Dramatics at Ellicott High School, Ellicott, Colorado, 1955-1956; taught English and French at Cushing High School, Cushing, Oklahoma, 1956-1960; received appointment as Temporary Instructor in the English Department, Oklahoma State University, 1960-1961.