PLAYING THE VICTIM IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*

By Marcel Lysgaard Lech

Summary: This article argues that in Euripides' *Medea*, suffering functions not as an inner emotional state but as a performative and rhetorical resource. By tracing Medea's repeated deployment of the language of suffering, it shows how she claims and monopolizes victimhood to control the play's moral economy. Building on Levett's account of verbal self-restraint and Zerba's conception of Medea as *hypokrites*, the article contends that Medea does not simply manipulate language strategically but actively performs victimhood as a theatrical role. Euripides thereby exposes tragedy's dependence on staged, persuasive suffering.

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* the chorus sings the famous words πάθει μάθος (*Ag.* 177), that it is through suffering that we learn about the proper order of the world, if that is indeed how the words should be understood.[1] Although many suffer in the *Oresteia,* it is hard to see who really learns anything from the murder and the suffering, other than the spectators perhaps, although what they might learn still seems rather unclear. In Aristotle's terminology, suffering (πάθος) is the third plot element in a tragedy, and *pathos* is "when the action is destructive or painful, e.g. death on the stage, severe pain, injury, and the like."[2] However, because of the Attic theatre's convention of not showing violence on stage, which is why messengers report the gory details, very few people actually experience physical suffering on stage; Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Heracles in *Trachiniae* are probably the best examples of staged physical suffering. Conversely, the suffering a person undergoes when losing loved ones (e.g. Antigone, Electra) or the actions they have performed (e.g. Aias, Orestes) are numerous, and watching the suffering of these

1 See Hall 2024 *ad loc.*

2 Arist. *Poet.* 1452b.

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characters on stage makes the audience engage emotionally with them.[3] Similarly, the most 'pathetic' moment for the audience watching Euripides' *Medea* was probably when the children are murdered backstage. Euripides is aware of this and rubs salt in the spectators' emotional wounds by having the children sing themselves to death, only to be cut short, leaving the antode to the chorus (1270-1293).

However, *pathos* can also be used rhetorically, as I shall demonstrate by tracing the verb πάσχω in its different instantiations in Euripides' *Medea*.[4] In *Medea*, πάσχω is found 19 times (not counting an instance in an obviously inauthentic passage (38-43), which is twice the average in Euripides' other tragedies.[5] πάσχω does not necessarily refer to *pain*, as the verb can also just refer to an effect of some kind, and I will show where and when the verb appears in Euripides' *Medea* and discuss the reasons for its uses. The analysis developed here converges with Brad Levett's account of Medea's verbal autonomy and verbal self-restraint in its emphasis on Medea's control of language,[6] while diverging in how it conceptualizes the nature and implications of that control. This convergence can, I believe, be sharpened into a more comprehensive account of Medea as a figure who does not merely manipulate speech or suffering but actively performs identities, including that of the victim if we use Zerba's conception of Medea as *hypokrites* – actor, interpreter, and dissimulator.[7] Thus, we may reframe Medea's rhetoric as fundamentally performative rather than psychological or ethical. Levett argues that Medea's power derives from her acquisition of verbal self-control: she learns to resist persuasion and to restrain her own speech, especially lamentation, thereby achieving a form of heroic autonomy traditionally coded as masculine.[8] This analysis explains how Medea can deploy suf-

3 Arist. *Poet*. 1453a.

4 The same strategy can be found in forensic speeches (e.g. Lys. 1.1, 3.9, 3.38, 3.48, 7.13, 8.2, 9.20.).

5 The average number of occurrences is 10,7.

6 Levett 2010: 55: "The complete autonomy, self-control, and strength she develops in her use and response to language results in her decision to kill her children, and she thereby proves herself resistant even to her own better judgment."

7 Zerba 2002: *passim*.

8 Levett 2010: 55.

fering selectively, rather than impulsively. Building directly on this insight, Medea's repeated use of πάσχω is neither incidental nor purely descriptive, but rhetorical, and thus she casts herself as the one who suffers most in order to dominate the moral economy of the play. Using Zerba's line of thinking complicates Levett's argument by suggesting that Medea's manipulation of πάσχω is not merely strategic but performative, and thus according to the argument of this paper, Medea does not simply use the language of suffering strategically and rhetorically; she plays the role of the sufferer, adopting and discarding it as one of several theatrical postures available to her as *hypokrites*,[9] while performing the victim within the framework of Athenian culture.

During the conversation of the Nurse and the Tutor in the prologue, it emerges that Creon wants to exile Medea and the children, and the Nurse is astonished that Jason will allow the children to suffer this fate (75: πάσχοντας) simply because he and Medea are at odds, but it is the Nurse's fear of Medea that most clearly suggests that the children's lives are in danger.[10] That the Nurse believes that Jason is the villain is clear from the prologue (17-23, 26, 33, 74-75, 82-85), but we must remember that she is not an objective voice: she clearly sides with Medea, though she does not understand or acknowledge the paradoxical nature of the situation, namely that Jason has betrayed his family, Medea and the children (16-19), and now seems indifferent to the children they share. Medea, on the other hand, has betrayed *her* family in Colchis (31-33), and having been betrayed by Jason, she now hates their children (36). The nurse understands the pain of being without her homeland (34-35) but fails to recognise that Jason is in the same situation as the prince of Iolcus, because Medea had Pelias murdered by his own daughters (9-11), resulting in the couple going into exile in Corinth: Medea and Jason are

9 Zerba 2010: 317-19.

10 See Ruffell 2014 and Blankenborg 2022; the latter argues (57-59) that the Nurse in the prologue of Euripides' *Medea* is deliberately constructed as a figure who exceeds the conventional boundaries of a tragic servant. Her prologue resembles those delivered by omniscient or influential figures - such as gods in Euripidean drama - since she frames the causal background of the play and signals the exceptional level of transgression that will follow.

more alike than the Nurse is prepared to acknowledge.[11] Most strikingly, she is the only character who anticipates Medea's infanticide from the outset (36-37, 89-95), a form of foresight that Blankenborg (2022: 59-60) interprets as epic-style providence rather than mere psychological insight. At the same time, the Nurse remains powerless to prevent the catastrophe she foresees, embodying a paradox of knowledge without agency that mirrors epic patterns of double motivation, where human action unfolds in accordance with an already determined trajectory (2022: 60). This advance framing shapes the audience's emotional alignment and conditions their later responses to Medea's claims of suffering.

When in the prologue Medea finally screams her song from the back of the stage, she first wishes for her own death, then for the end of her children, Jason, and their whole family, because she has suffered what she herself says causes her great grief (111-112: ἔπαθον τλάμων ἔπαθον μεγάλων | ἄξι' ὀδυρμῶν). What Medea is thinking about is not specified here,[12] and it is this ambivalence that Medea uses with rhetorical skill to manipulate the people around her, and which Euripides uses to capture the attention of the audience. Medea works systematically to portray herself as a victim, not only to the characters in the universe of the play, but also to the audience. Euripides makes the rhetoric of Medea strike at two levels at once.

Medea's emotional state as performed from backstage has disturbs the Nurse, who fears what the children will suffer (118: πάθηθ'), but Medea brings the suffering back to herself in her plea to Themis and Artemis: Do you see what I suffer? (161: λεύσσεθ' ἃ πάσχω); note that she now speaks of her situation in the present tense. More generally, Euripidean characterization depends on externally mediated perspectives rather than privileged access to the characters' interior states. As van Emde

11 On the function of the Nurse and Tutor in the prologue as providing a sympathetic perspective on Medea before she appears on stage, see Van Emde Boas 2018: 359.

12 The audience will however notice that the τλά-stems are connected solely with Medea's murder of the children (796, 865, 1274, 1328), while the τλή-stems are used of Creon (1204) and Jason (1306), having both unknowingly lost their children, and with the emphasis on the daring of the child murder (797, 1067-1068, 1326, 1340). At 115 the nurse unwittingly echoes Medea's use of the word.

Boas 2018 emphasizes, tragedy lacks a primary narrator and instead presents motivations and emotions through intradramatic speech, which is "therefore open to questioning."[13] Medea's insistence on making her suffering visible should thus be understood as a necessary rhetorical act, rather than a transparent disclosure of inner pain. According to Levett, Medea has already begun to discipline her speech, shaping her emotions rather than being overwhelmed by them.[14] Zerba, however, insists that this moment should also be read metadramatically. Medea is not only presenting herself as a victim within the fictional world of the play; she is also demonstrating her capacity to step into a role that the audience recognizes and is prepared to endorse as a victim.[15] The suffering that Medea performs is thus inseparable from the theatrical conventions that render suffering legible and persuasive in tragedy. Either way, the chorus and audience are called upon as witnesses to Medea's pain.

The chorus of women, who like the Nurse are sympathetic to Medea, sing that they have heard Medea's plea to Themis and now add a specification of Medea's suffering: it is unjust and it is Jason's fault (208: ἄδικα παθοῦσα), and therefore, after Medea's first monologue, the chorus can unhesitatingly support Medea in taking revenge on him (267-268), which is quite extreme considering that Jason is the future prince of the Corinthian girls: Medea has the chorus in the palm of her hand. Her story of the oath she and Jason swore, and Jason's breach of trust has convinced them, even though Medea may indeed have fabricated the oath[16] to hide

13 Van Emde Boas 2018: 355. He reads Medea's rapid shift from backstage lament to composed public rhetoric as "a first and forceful sign that Medea is able to subordinate her wildest emotions to her outstanding intelligence whenever it seems necessary for the achievement of her goals" (360). This observation supports my interpretation of Medea's language of suffering as controlled and strategic rather than impulsive.

14 Levett 2010: 58-61.

15 Zerba 2002: 321-24. I refrain from the idea of metatheatricality here, since even within the play, Medea acknowledges her rhetorical ambiguity (579 with Mossman 2011 *ad loc.* and Manuwald 2024 *ad loc.*). However, that she is performative in a cultural sense is essential to this paper.

16 On the ambiguity of the oath Medea claims Jason swore, see Allan 2007, who gives a detailed analysis of oath-making rituals and right-hand pledges in *Medea* and argues

the fact that in the eyes of the audience of Athenians, their oath may not be as valid as she would have us believe.[17]

When Creon tells Medea of her coming exile, she has to resort to a more violent use of πάσχω, emphasising to him that she is (in the present tense) suffering (280: κακῶς πάσχουσ'), while he defends his decision by saying that he does not want anything to happen to him or his future family (the princess and Jason) (289: πρὶν παθεῖν); he, like the Nurse before him, fears what Medea might do. Since Medea understands that Creon knows about her potential for mischief (282-288, 316-323),[18] she must reassure him that he will not be subjected to anything monstrous from her (306: μὴ τί πλημμελὲς πάθῃς). But this only reinforces the spectator's sense that Medea never intends to make amends, since Euripides (and Medea?) seem to be referring to the fable of the hyena's dual nature,[19] thus manipulating Creon into giving her a single day to get her affairs in order before going into exile. Medea's deliberate self-sacrifice is emphasised by the chorus's belief that Medea's situation is indeed terrible (358-363) – they have not heard her say otherwise, and, needing their complicity, she reinforces this idea (364). Although she has indeed exploited Creon's weakness to get revenge on him and the bride and groom (374-375), the chorus does not react with disapproval as we might

that Medea's accusations may represent a retrospective elevation of a weaker bond into an oath to strengthen her rhetorical position, rather than evidence of an actual oath violation by Jason.

17 Garstad 2006 shows that the oaths in *Medea* are neither marriage vows nor standard betrothal agreements, but irregular lovers' oaths whose cultural ambiguity would have been apparent to a fifth-century audience; Medea's rhetorical success therefore depends not on the oath's legitimacy, but on her ability to suppress that ambiguity.

18 On Medea's capacity to adapt her speech to different interlocutors, see van Emde Boas 2018: 360, who characterizes her as "supremely skilled at gauging and manipulating other people's desires" and acutely aware of others' perceptions of her.

19 Chambry 340: The hyenas. Hyenas are said to change sexes throughout the year, becoming male at one time and female at another. It is said that when a male hyena once treated a female badly, she replied: "Just remember that if you do this to me, you will soon be subjected to the same by me!" This is a reasonable thing to say to the one currently in power, if one suffers something unseemly (εἰ πλημμελές τι πάσχοι) and stands to gain power oneself (My own translation.). The notion of the double nature of hyenas is refuted by Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 757a3-12.9).

expect, for Medea uses her own suffering to propel herself (and the plot) forward (404: ὁρᾶις ἃ πάσχεις;).

What is interesting about Euripides' Medea is the way she exploits others while still appearing as a victim, even when she reveals that she is overtly manipulating them and has obviously sinister intentions (368-409). This time she is not addressing the higher powers, but herself (402) – she is, after all, of the lineage of Helios (406) – and her suffering becomes her catalyst for revenge, for one must never be laughed at (404: ὁρᾶις ἃ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν). Note also how she again describes suffering as something to be seen, be it the gods (161: λεύσσεθ' ἃ πάσχω) or herself (ὁρᾶις ἃ πάσχεις), while the chorus and the audience stand as witnesses; she creates her 'self' as an object of pity, the victim, while plotting the death of others. At this point, the chorus endorses Medea's victim narrative to such an extent that they do not even listen to Medea's crude generalisation about the woman's capacity for evil (409-410), for in their subsequent choral singing they sing not only of the woman's reputation turning from evil to good, but also of Medea's victimhood, ignoring Medea's record of sins and her desire to do evil again. The chorus' judgement of Medea is based solely on what she has told them and on the scene between Medea and Creon, that is, the present and the future. This is in stark contrast to Medea's own narrative in her first meeting with Jason, in which she tells *her* version of their shared past adventures. In this narrative, Medea is the active party, and Jason is the passive one in the fight against the oxen and the dragon. It is worth noting that Medea tells her story from an adventurous angle with herself as the hero, while Jason sees their shared past from an emotional angle, where she was in the clutches of Eros, and not the heroine herself. In Medea's account, however, she is also the active agent in betraying her family (483). She killed Pelias in the most painful way possible, by letting his own children do the killing (486-487). Furthermore, she deftly omits to mention that by destroying Pelias' house, she also destroyed her own and Jason's opportunity to settle in Iolcus, but it may be that her accusation against Jason contains precisely this ambivalence (488: ταῦθ' ὑφ'

ἡμῶν ... παθὼν): "After all I have done for you".[20] It is relevant, then, that Euripides allows Medea to use πάσχω about Jason, not because she wants him to appear as a victim, but because it defines him as passive, while she is the active party in their adventure together. For the spectator, however, the whole sentence is coloured by her betrayal of her own family and the murder of Pelias; after all, it is Medea who causes the fall of families (113-114, 487,[21] 794, 1130, 1268-1270). She recognizes having caused the most painful death to Pelias (486: ἄλγιστον) and calls Jason the most evil man (488: κάκιστ'), yet she fails to see the obvious moral parallel between herself and the Jason that she presents to the chorus and the spectators:[22] women, according to Medea, are the craftiest in all kinds of evil (409: κακῶν δὲ πάντων τέκτονες σοφώταται).

Medea's own victimhood is underlined by the chorus' next song, where they sing first of the power of jealousy (636-645), which they hope will never strike them, not realising that it already *has* struck Medea,[23] and then of Medea's lack of shelter and friends (Aegeus is 'fortunately' on his way[24]) despite her terrible suffering (656-657: παθοῦσαν δεινότατα παθέων). The chorus again agrees with Medea's point of view that ingratitude is punishable by death and is thus completely in her power. The audience certainly is too. Euripides makes us all accomplices because we sympathize with a murderess, who, we know, is planning another murder; though which one, we do not know yet.

In the following scene, Aegeus arrives in Corinth and meets Medea. He is, overall, sympathetically portrayed and realizes that Medea, whom he respects as a sensible woman, is in trouble. She replies that Jason is unjust to her without her having done anything to him (again Jason appears as the passive one): οὐδὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ παθών (692). This is a slightly ironic statement, given her remark to Jason earlier, where she recounted

20 Literally, "this you suffered from me". Note the explosion of p- and k-sounds in 486-490, as well as the implicit threat to Jason by Pelias being killed by his own children, just as Jason also has children (see 487 and 490).

21 See Mastronarde 2002 *ad loc.* and Mossman 2011 *ad loc.*

22 Note the double passive construction in 487 (παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, of the murder Pelias) and 488 (ὑφ' ἡμῶν, of what she had done to Jason, *viz.* betrayed her own family and destroyed Pelias' family).

23 That Medea's anger is rooted in jealousy, is well argued by Sanders 2013.

24 On the significance of the scene, see Blankenborg 2026.

all that she had done for him (see above). Now, she has done nothing (οὐδὲν). The spectator knows this, but not Aegeus, whom Medea obviously wants to manipulate for her own purposes from the beginning.[25] According to Medea, Jason's greatest crime is his breach of the oath, a fundamental breach of trust that any Athenian would be able to relate to and therefore part of the narrative from which Medea stages her character as that of the victim. It is therefore also interesting that in the Aegeus scene we get a glimpse of what the original oath between Jason and Medea could have sounded like (731-755), or at least how she imagines it sounded,[26] and that Medea already here focuses on what Aegeus must suffer (754: πάθοις) if he does not honour their agreement. Aegeus' answer is clear to Medea, but not to the spectator: the punishment meted out to godless (δυσσεβοῦσι) people.[27] It is particularly interesting that this very word is used later, first by the chorus about Ino's murder of her children (1287), then by Jason about Medea's murder of the children (1328), and finally again about the murder of the children, but this time by Medea herself (1383).[28] Medea thus already knows that when Aegeus swears her oath, she will murder her own children (791-793) and then find shelter with Aegeus (757-758, 770-771). Rarely has "everything is all right now" (πάντα γὰρ καλῶς ἔχει: 756) sounded so bleak. As spectators and connoisseurs of the wider mythology, we know that Aegeus has his hands full when Medea comes to him in Athens, as Euripides emphasizes in the chorus of the Song of Athens (824-850). We have now seen Medea manipulating the men she confronts, as well as the women in the chorus. Medea admitted how she tricked Creon (368-375), and now she openly plots to trick Jason to murder the king's daughter (776-789). Yet she still plays the victim card in front of the horrified chorus, when she tells them that to avoid the jeers of her enemies, she must kill the children: but, she says, they, the women of the chorus, do not suffer pain as she does (815:

25 Blankenborg 2026: 106: "Medea presents an unprecedented show of feminine manipulation and power in this scene."

26 On the complexities concerning the oaths in *Medea*, see Allan 2007 and Garstad 2006.

27 Compare Medea's own words against Jason in 492-495.

28 At 796 Medea calls the murder τλᾶσ' ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον, while at 1328 the chorus corrects it to ἔργον τλᾶσα δυσσεβέστατον. At the end Medea acknowledge that the murder is in fact δυσσεβοῦς (1383).

μὴ πάσχουσαν, ὡς ἐγώ, κακῶς.), and are thus, according to Medea, not in a position where they can understand her pain or actions. She is privileging herself as the victim, a strategy she likewise used in the conversation with Creon, to impose her will: who can say no to a victim?[29]

Now that we know that Medea wants to manipulate Jason, it comes as no surprise that the way in which she uses πάσχω is turned upside down. In an excellent performance of a fictional inner monologue, she tells Jason, with deep irony, that she has changed her mind, for now that the gods have bestowed good upon her (What is wrong with me? τί πάσχω, θεῶν ποριζόντων καλῶς;). Medea thus allows her suffering to be personal rather than Jason's fault: since psychology is not Jason's strength, this speech is something that he can understand (908-913).

We hear what is wrong with Medea but in a completely different and far more sombre context when she laments that she must kill her children (1019ff). Doubts nag, and it is suddenly not so easy to send the children off with the princess's death sentence, but in an echo of 404 (see above) it turns out that Medea's innermost nature has in no way changed (1049-1050: καίτοι τί πάσχω; βούλομαι γέλωτ' ὀφλεῖ etc.); revenge is the only thing that matters (see also 1260, 1333), and the children are the means to that revenge. They must not only bring the poisonous gift to the princess (murder by proxy, as in the case of the murder of Pelias), but by their own deaths they must embody the very act of revenge against Jason (1377-1381, 1398-1404).

After the macabre deaths of the princess and Creon and the killing of the children, Euripides shifts the role of the victim. Medea is no longer the weak woman, and the chorus, who tried in vain to talk her out of the murder, almost apathetically tells the desperate Jason, who wants to save the children not from Medea but from the Corinthians, that he has been wrong about the situation all along and that he is too late: The children are dead at Medea's hands. Jason's self-assurance has suffered a defeat:

29 Or as Kets de Vries so eloquently puts is: "Victims' talent for high drama draws people to them like moths to a flame. Their permanent dire state brings out the altruistic motives in others. It is hard to ignore constant cries for help. In most instances, however, the help given is of short duration. And like moths in a flame, helpers quickly get burned" (2014: 131).

No one wins in *Medea*. Jason's belated adoption of the language of suffering accordingly lacks persuasive force, not because suffering is absent, but because his rhetorical modulation comes too late to compete with Medea's established control of victimhood.[30] Medea may fly away on Helios' chariot, high above Jason, but she is not a *dea ex machina* in the traditional sense, for she does not untie the knot of tragedy; she merely carries it with her to the Athens of the spectators. Nowhere else in the surviving tragedies does a mortal, here Jason, criticize the god of the machine, in the form of Medea; nowhere is the god's motive to be mocked; nowhere is the god the problem itself and the cause of the tragedy. Just as Medea once played the victim, she now plays the avenger, but under these masks she is, after all, merely a mother who has murdered her children (1245-1250, 1397-1398).

After Jason's outburst of anger (1323-1350), Medea deftly puts all the blame on him, while calling Zeus to witness what Jason has suffered from her and what *he* has done to her (οἷ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ πέπονθας οἷά τ' εἰργάσω.). What Jason has suffered is the plainly visible revenge – the children's bodies can be seen on the chariot[31] – while Jason's betrayal becomes the explicit reason for revenge (1354-1369). The oath is no longer the real cause of her revenge, but simply her jealousy (1366-1369). Echoing Medea, but just as futilely, Jason calls Zeus to witness what he has suffered (1406: οἷά τε πάσχομεν) because of Medea. This is the first time he uses this verb, but he also emphasizes that Medea is the active one; she is the child killer (1393, 1407). Jason suffers in the present tense, but his future looks bleak too: He is no longer safe in Corinth and must once again go

30 Notice that he calls upon the gods (1410: μαρτυρόμενος δαίμονας) to no avail, just as Medea in the prologue did, according to the Nurse (22: θεοὺς μαρτύρεται). In both scenes, the call for witnesses is a sign of being a victim of the other part's transgressions *viz.* the oath breaking and the child murder. At the end of the agon (619) he calls upon the gods (δαίμονας μαρτύρομαι) to bear witness to everything he has done to Medea and the children, but at this point Medea's role as the victim is unshakeable. At the end of the play, he can call the gods as his witnesses, but only the chorus and the audience will see his suffering.

31 Notice that just as the bodies of the still living boys trigger Medea's feelings of motherhood (1071-1075), their dead bodies trigger Jason's fatherhood (1399-1402); φίλτατον ... στόμα (1071) - φιλίου ... στόματος (1399); μαλθακὸς χρὼς (1075) - μαλακοῦ χρωτὸς (1402).

into exile (1405) and as Medea tells him, his ship will become the cause of his death. Medea, on the other hand, now travels voluntarily to Aegeus in Athens, where she is to be his wife (1384-1385, even though Aegeus is already married, 673); the hypocrisy of Medea's revenge is striking (notice the emphasis on *my bed*, τἄμ' ἀτιμάσας λέχη, at 1354). The situation of the warring partners is turned upside down. The victim is the criminal, and the criminal is free to leave.

The final reversal of victimhood in the play shows that Medea achieves complete verbal mastery by the end of the play, rendering Jason's words futile and empty.[32] When Jason adopts the language of πάσχω (1406) for the first time, it is too late to reclaim agency or sympathy. By contrast, Medea no longer needs to claim this role explicitly. Having mastered the mechanisms of theatrical persuasion, she can abandon the mask of the victim and assume a position of godlike detachment without forfeiting the audience's uneasy engagement.[33]

Medea's resistance to persuasion – her refusal to heed Jason, the chorus, or even her own maternal impulses – marks a tragic excess of heroic self-control,[34] and allows Medea to monopolize victimhood by silencing rival claims to suffering, especially those of her own children. However, rather than embodying a coherent heroic or anti-heroic identity, Medea continually shifts ethical ground, adopting whatever posture – wronged wife, helpless exile, seductress,[35] calculating avenger, grieving mother – best serves her immediate rhetorical aim.[36] Victimhood, on this reading, is not Medea's essence but one role among many she performs, albeit one with exceptional persuasive power.

32 Levett 2010: 70-71.

33 Lawrence 1997 argues that Medea's appearance in the chariot of Helios does not resolve the play's ethical tensions but intensifies audience uncertainty, since the supernatural elevation preserves continuity with her earlier humanity and reifies the victim-agent ambiguity that has structured the audience's response throughout the play.

34 Levett 2010: 63-66.

35 See Blankenborg 2026.

36 Zerba 2002: 318-22.

To conclude. I have demonstrated that by delaying and regulating expressions of suffering,[37] Medea turns πάσχω into a tool against the people around her rather than being an uncontrolled response, and by postponing lament, she heightens its eventual impact and preserves the credibility of the role she is performing at any given moment.[38]

Thus, Medea is not a character whose suffering motivates action but a figure who understands suffering itself as a performative resource. The ethical disturbance of Medea thus arises not only from what Medea does, but from the unsettling recognition that tragedy itself – like Medea – depends on the audience's willingness to believe in suffering that is, at the same time, expertly staged.

In Euripides' play, Medea manages to control the emotions, sympathies, and antipathies of the audience, so Euripides, as easily as Medea, can manipulate us and reveal how gullible, self-assertive, and hypocritical we, the audience, are. This is, if anything, a learning (μάθος) that causes suffering (πάθος).

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37 Levett shows that Medea's ability to restrain lament marks her movement away from stereotypically feminine excess toward a grim, masculine-coded fortitude (2010: 67-69).

38 Zerba 2002: 328-30.

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