

## Between Truth and Appearance: *Medea's* Emotional Manipulation through *gnomai*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This work seeks to examine how Medea uses γνῶμαι to manipulate the perception of her emotions by her interlocutors. The tragic genre, between its audience and its characters, generates a contrast that results in varying knowledge levels, to ultimately lead to a strong sense of tragic irony. These levels can be helpful in analysing the emotional manipulation. This is an important point to examine γνῶμαι and emotions in the context in which they are used, i.e., considering how Medea is presented on scene in terms of emotions, how the other characters perceive Medea, and how γνῶμαι are used for this purpose. I will consider the explicit and implicit information provided by γνῶμαι regarding who pronounces each of them and their interlocutor, as well as, when possible, the purpose for which they are used.

**Keywords:** Euripides; *gnomai*; emotions; manipulation; Medea.

### ESP Entre la verdad y la apariencia: manipulación emocional en *Medea* a través de *gnomai*

**Resumen:** Este trabajo pretende examinar cómo Medea utiliza γνῶμαι para manipular la percepción de sus emociones por parte de sus interlocutores. El género trágico, entre su público y sus personajes, genera un contraste que da lugar a distintos niveles de conocimiento, lo que desemboca finalmente en una fuerte ironía trágica. Estos niveles pueden ser útiles para analizar la manipulación emocional. Este es un punto importante para estudiar las γνῶμαι y las emociones en el contexto en el que se utilizan, es decir, considerando cómo se presenta a Medea en escena en términos de emociones, cómo perciben a Medea los otros personajes y cómo se utilizan las γνῶμαι para este fin. Para ello se tendrá en cuenta la información explícita e implícita que proporcionan las γνῶμαι respecto a quién pronuncia cada una de ellas y su interlocutor, así como, cuando sea posible, la finalidad para la que se utilizan.

**Palabras clave:** Eurípides; *gnomai*; emociones; manipulación; Medea.

**Summary:** 1. On emotions. 1.1. Emotions and rhetoric. 1.2. Emotions and γνῶμαι. 1.3. Emotions, γνῶμαι and Euripidean tragedy. 2. The case of Medea, analysis. 2.1. Medea and the Chorus. 2.2. Medea and Creon. 2.3. Medea and Jason. 3. Concluding remarks.

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## 1. On emotions

It is possible to analyse emotions through a rhetorical device like the γνώμη, but this requires considering three key premises: the relationship between rhetoric and emotion, the connection between γνώμαι and emotion, and their function within Euripidean tragedy. For the purposes of this paper, we will adopt Cairns' definition, as outlined in his work on *aidos*, which he references in other studies<sup>2</sup>. Since the focus of this paper is not on the foundational definition of emotionality itself, we draw on these existing studies. Instead, the central concern is a specific aspect of emotions: the rationalization and professionalization of emotions in relation to the use of the γνώμη, as discussed by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (1394a19-1395b20), and within the broader rhetorical framework. This analysis studies how Medea uses certain γνώμαι to manipulate the emotions of those she is addressing –both characters and public–, to change their position and opinion. The focus of the investigation, then, is the emotional response of the characters to a particular γνώμη.

### 1.1. Emotions and rhetoric

The approach between γνώμαι and emotions could be justified by the relationship between rhetoric and emotions that we find already in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*<sup>3</sup> and which has already been studied by precedent authors<sup>4</sup>. The treatise reveals that one of the objectives of rhetoric is to understand the nature of persuasion. Among its modes, there are techniques for manipulating and playing with the audience's emotions through specific strategies in an oratorical speech to achieve the persuasion. Understanding these techniques and methods increases the probability of persuasion.

Although we have no direct evidence on the content of earlier manuals, only the *Rhetoric to Alexander* attributed to Ps.Anaximenes<sup>5</sup>, Aristotle criticises the exclusion of the emotions by the preceding rhetoricians (*Rh.* 1354a11-24), which supposedly implies that Aristotle had already adopted a position by which he introduced the emotions as a rhetorical device<sup>6</sup>. This indicates a shift in perspective towards the efficiency of emotions in public speaking. As stated by Aristotle (*Rh.* 1356a14-16), emotions impact the audience's judgement: «[There is persuasion] through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion [*pathos*] by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile» (transl. Kennedy 2007)<sup>7</sup>. These statements assume that it is acknowledged that judgment among human beings is not wholly a rational act. There are morally valid emotions in every situation, and it is part of the orator's duty to clarify these in the minds of the audience (cf. Johnstone 1980: 1-24).

<sup>2</sup> Cairns 1993; 2008: 43-62; 2022: 3-34 and 35-41; Konstan 2003: 5-19; 2006; Chianotis 2012; Chianotis & Ducrey 2013.

<sup>3</sup> While there are other references to the use of emotions for rhetorical purposes, only those references to Aristotle as the basis for the conceptions of emotions held by orators and other authors of rhetorical manuals are included in the main text. On the presence of emotions in other rhetorical contexts before Aristotle, cf. Konstan 2006, 2007. On emotions in Aristotle, cf. Fortenbaugh 2002 [1975]; Brinton 1988: 207-219.

<sup>4</sup> Fortenbaugh 2002 [1975]; Cooper 1996: 238-57; Rapp 2008: 45-68; Konstan 2006; Dow 2009: 143-75; Rubinelli 2018: 361-74; Leighton 2018: 319-31.

<sup>5</sup> There are discussions still going on regarding the authorship and date of this work. For a comprehensive analysis of the question, cf. Chiron 2002: XL-CVII.

<sup>6</sup> The section 1354a11-24 contradicts the remarks on the passions in 1356a2-25, which may indicate a change of disposition, a development from considering the passions as something secondary, to considering them even as one of the *pisteis* or premises of the enthymeme.

<sup>7</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 1356a14-16: διὰ δὲ τῶν ἀκροατῶν, ὅταν εἰς πάθος ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου προαχθῶσιν· οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἀποδίδομεν τὰς κρίσεις λυπούμενοι καὶ χαίροντες, ἢ φιλοῦντες καὶ μισοῦντες (Greek text from Ross [1959] 1964).

The pursuit of emotions and empathy is demonstrated in preserved oratory exercises and practices, such as forensic speeches, rhetoric, and declamation exercises, like those of Gorgias. He stated in his *Encomium to Helen*: «The power of speech (*logos*) has the same relation (*logos*) with the arrangement (*taxis*) of the soul as the arrangement (*taxis*) of drugs has with the nature of bodies. [...] in the same way some speeches (*logoi*) cause pain, others pleasure, others fear, others dispose listeners to courage, others drug and bewitch the soul by some evil persuasion» (transl. Laks & Most 2016) (Gorg. D24 L.-M. = 82 B11 D.-K.)<sup>8</sup>. These examples demonstrate how speakers use emotional appeal in their efforts to gain the empathy of their audience.

This is evident not only in forensic speeches, but also in dramatic *agon*<sup>9</sup> and in long epic narrations. Since Aristotle takes tragedy –especially the Euripidean– as the main example for his study of rhetoric, it is possible to apply his conception of emotions to the study of emotional manipulation in tragedy.

## 1.2. Emotions and γνῶμαι

This theoretical framework enables the examination of almost any rhetorical device as functional component for manipulating the perception and emotions of the addressee of a discourse. The focus here is on γνῶμαι (Latin *sententiae*), which are concise, impersonal, and unfixed expressions of traditional wisdom relating to human traits, the relationship between mortals and gods, and the nature of the universe<sup>10</sup>. This universal and human truth stems from feelings, sentiments, and experiences that are susceptible of embrace or rejection, and that are part of a shared cultural, moral, and traditional heritage. Furthermore, γνῶμαι have cognitive, voluntary, didactic, and deliberative implications in their context.

However, since γνῶμαι are a type of language that universalises and generalises, without being individual or personal, it is worth studying how using γνῶμαι can be a manipulative tool. Are γνῶμαι –which adopt a universal and non-individual form of language– capable of conveying individual emotions, or are they restricted in this regard? If we examine the tragic context in which γνῶμαι are used, the answer is affirmative.

Firstly, although experiencing emotions is unique to everyone, the comprehension of these feelings is universal. In contrast, γνῶμαι are defined as universally applicable and can be related to individual examples. Despite this contrasting directionality, there is a connection between these two elements, as the expression of a γνῶμη is often driven by personal impulse, including emotions. Thus, γνῶμαι enable individuals to imply and indirectly communicate personal experiences without explicitly revealing them as their own. This leads us to an essential aspect of γνῶμαι: they function as a form of indirect language that corresponds to the techniques characters use to conceal their emotions, deceive, or redirect attention towards another emotion to manipulate the addressee's perception.

Secondly, according to Cairns (2021: 8-26) emotions play a role in social interactions among characters in a game where self-representation and mutual recognition are important. This characteristic is also shared with γνῶμαι, as they must be interpreted within the context of social interaction during dialogues between characters with specific intentions. This social interaction, using generalized language to discuss emotions indirectly, creates an opportunity to investigate emotional expression and manipulation practices through γνῶμαι.

Thirdly, from a wider perspective, themes related to emotions are often present in γνῶμαι, as they are commonly shared, timeless, and universal. Thus, depending on the speaker's intention when employing a γνῶμη, emotions can be referred to either directly or indirectly.

<sup>8</sup> Gorg. D24.14 L.-M. (= 82 B11.14) τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον ἔχει ἢ τε τοῦ λόγου δύναμις πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξιν ἢ τε τῶν φαρμάκων τάξις πρὸς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν. [...] οὕτω καὶ τῶν λόγων οἱ μὲν ἐλύπησαν, οἱ δὲ ἔτερψαν, οἱ δὲ ἐφόβησαν, οἱ δὲ εἰς θάρσος κατέστησαν τοὺς ἀκούοντας, οἱ δὲ πειθοῖ τινα κακῇ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐφαρμάκευσαν καὶ ἐξεγοήτευσαν (Greek text from Laks & Most 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd 1992: 1-6 who describes the Euripidean *agones* as genuine judicial discussions. For a bibliographical list, Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 52-55.

<sup>10</sup> For a more specific definition and a formal study of the γνῶμαι in the context of the Euripidean tragedy, Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 77-122, where other definitions are also discussed.

### 1.3. Emotions, γνῶμαι and Euripidean tragedy

Euripides is widely considered to be the most gnostic tragic author, both because of the large number of γνῶμαι found in his tragedies and because of their presence as quotations in late literature and papyri<sup>11</sup>. A comprehensive analysis of how γνῶμαι are characterised in Euripides' works provides the most appropriate framework for this study. This analysis demonstrates how γνῶμαι are related with emotional manipulation. This rhetorical resource, then, holds its significance in literary works and prompts a reconsideration of viewing it merely as an embellishment in rhetoric.

## 2. The case of *Medea*, analysis

*Medea's* tragic characters are full of affection, but the structural passion of the tragic plot is anger and shame, the suffering and the reaction to offence and disapproval (Mastronarde 2002: 17-18). The tragedy characterises the strong *pathos* of its protagonist Medea and her ability to manipulate those around her to her own benefit (Susanetti 2007: 52).

In this case, Medea is a woman whose honour has been violated due to preceding circumstances leading up to the situation in this scene. She is determined to exact revenge upon the individual who tarnished her honour, and this act of revenge is linked to her anger. Medea's dire situation can be attributed to her relationship with Jason, who was, at least in Medea's eyes, her spouse. She has become an outsider in a hostile land, a woman left alone to face all those who might aid her in her predicament. The tragedy's plot is established on this premise. The Tutor reveals this situation in the γνῶμη in 85-86<sup>12</sup>, implying the cause of the situation: Jason previously sought to gratify his sexual urges and thirst for power.

Medea conceals herself and her emotions through a linguistic mask and various forms of language and actions. She employs a specific linguistic mask –deception and concealment of information– depending on the situation and her interests. This is the basis of Medea's situation. This specific use enables analysis of γνῶμαι used by this character as one of the tools for emotional manipulation on different characters. She employs her human and female impulses as a rhetorical tool, which may trigger alterations in identity and disturb the established order.

Even though Medea appears to be a wretch in the palace, only lamenting (more or less aggressively), when she arrives onstage, she is portrayed as a real strategist depending on her interlocutor, and when she uses a γνῶμη, this deals with her and her emotions directly or indirectly. She plays and speculates with her emotions and those of others, and she implicitly manipulates her interlocutors by showing different masks. Medea uses emotion as a game of deception, she portrays herself differently and can conceal or reveal her emotions at will.

The distribution of the γνῶμαι according to Medea's interlocutors is as follows. Medea uses four γνῶμαι and one general reflection<sup>13</sup> in the presence of the Chorus, a female interlocutor. When in the presence of a male character, however, she utters seven γνῶμαι –two to Creon and five to Jason. Medea adapts the γνῶμαι to her objectives in every speech.

### 2.1. Medea and the Chorus

The Chorus of women exhibits a sympathetic outlook towards Medea. Before Medea makes her entrance, the Chorus conveys concern for her and attempts to comfort her.

In this speech (215-266) Medea recounts the events that have led her to the present situation. The speech includes multiple maxims –up to four– and a section of 21 verses that generalises the women's challenges in marriage. Medea skilfully intertwines these universal observations with

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 64-68; 2023b: 103-21; 2022: 5-18.

<sup>12</sup> E. *Med.* 85-86: ἄρτι γινώσκεις τόδε, | ὥς πᾶς τις αὐτὸν τοῦ πέλας μᾶλλον φιλεῖ, «[...] Are you only now learning that each man loves himself more than others?» (Eur. trans. are from Kovacs [1994] 2001) (Eur. Greek texts are from Diggle 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 194-200.

her personal musings about her own situation<sup>14</sup>. Her goal is to evoke empathy and solidarity from her audience, whom she views as equals in her speech (215-259), to secure their complicity (263 σιγᾶν, cf. Mastronarde 2002 *ad loc.*; Tedeschi 2010 *ad loc.*). Even though Medea is not compelled to persuade the Chorus, she must present herself as a deserving victim who warrants their empathy so that they will sympathise with her.

The first γνώμη is pronounced in 219-221:

δίκη γὰρ οὐκ ἔνεστ' ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς βροτῶν, ἢ ὅστις πρὶν ἀνδρὸς σπλάγχχον ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς ἢ  
 στυγεῖ δεδorkῶς, οὐδὲν ἡδικομένης.

There is no justice in the eyes of mortals: before they get sure knowledge of a man's true character, they hate him on sight, although he has done them no harm.

This auto-characterising<sup>15</sup> γνώμη, pronounced by Medea following the opening verses of her speech (215-218), serves as a digression on pride, aimed at evading collective censure of conduct that might be regarded as inappropriate, since it is something she herself understands (οἶδα 215), but which happens on a universal scale (βροτῶν 215). This blend of personal and universal perspectives remains a central theme in her discourse. Her speech is imbued with a fusion of individual and general viewpoints.

The *topos* of this γνώμη focuses on the genuine essence of humanity, wherein opinions can become incompatible with truth. In other words, preconceived opinions can lead to erroneous judgments due to a reflection on human nature (a *topos* by Simonides fr. 93/598 *PMG*, which is very present in the archaic poets). Medea employs this γνώμη to establish the basis of her discourse and indirectly to express her intentions. She requests that her situation should not be judged before it is explained. It can serve as a cautionary message to her listeners to heed her words. Medea makes this request while simultaneously appealing for their quiet agreement, as we have previously observed. These verses initiate a step-by-step discussion which sees Medea present the reasoning and rationale for her position from two perspectives.

In the following verse, 222, we have the second γνώμη:

χρὴ δὲ ξένον μὲν κάρτα προσχωρεῖν πόλει·

Now a foreigner must be quite compliant with the city.

This γνώμη serves to portray Medea as a non-threatening presence in the city. It is an auto-characterising one, implying certain traits of Medea without explicitly stating them. In this instance, Medea is portrayed as rational and harmless character, avoiding actions that may cause harm to others. She refrains from expressing subjective judgments, presenting herself as a woman who has fulfilled the typical role of a foreigner by adapting easily to any circumstances. In doing so, she exhibits an apparent assimilation to the country that has taken her in (Susanetti 2007: 47).

In this instance, Medea indirectly eliminates any inference of her pride or negative opinion towards her attitude from the Chorus. Like the γνώμη, this serves as a *captatio* and precludes any misinterpretation of her forthcoming words. Medea has no justification to disregard the customs and laws of the city that is hosting her, as she explains to the Chorus. According to this indirect information, Medea seeks to manipulate the predisposition of the Corinthian women towards her potential future actions, even though it should not be negative to begin with. Medea is conveying the message that these women want to hear.

<sup>14</sup> This arrangement is somewhat reminiscent of Phaedra in E. *Hipp.* 373-430, who delivers a gnomic reflection of almost 10 verses and 4 γνώμαι.

<sup>15</sup> I have sourced the terminology from de Temmerman & van Emde Boas 2018: xii, which I follow in its theory of characterisation. Auto-characterisation is defined as the «characterization by a character of him/herself; contrast altero-characterization». Whereas altero-characterisation is defined as the «characterization by one character of another character; contrast auto-characterization».

This interpretation is based on different aspects of the γνώμη and its context. On the one hand, this is a prescriptive γνώμη that implies a duty, obligation, or convenience. Therefore, when Medea uses a gnomic statement to express her personal convenience, it is assumed that she will act accordingly. This assumption is based on implicit information (cf. Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 148-58 and 299). In addition, Medea also assumes that she will not act arrogantly. Thus, it can be inferred that she also utilizes this γνώμη to deceive and create an expectation in her listener, expectation which she subsequently breaks when she ventures to murder part of the Corinthian royal household. The following two verses after the γνώμη serve as an epilogue and bolster this interpretation in 223-224:

οὐδ' ἀσπὸν ἦνεο' ὅστις αὐθάδης γεγώς | πικρὸς πολίταις ἐστὶν ἀμαθίας ὕπο.

Nor do I have any words of praise for the inhabitant who, through their insensitivity, becomes haughty and causes pain to the citizens.

In these verses, Medea once again establishes a positive characterization of herself, reinforcing what was conveyed in the previous γνώμη (222). She indirectly identifies herself with the ἀσπὸν (223), an inhabitant of the city (though not a citizen), while dissociating herself from a negative type of inhabitant: the haughty one (αὐθάδης) who causes pain (πικρὸς) to the πολίτης (citizen) and is insensitive (ἀμαθίας) towards them. By drawing a distinction between types of inhabitants and disassociating herself from the negative category, Medea, as ἀσπὴ, seeks to demonstrate that she does not intend to be a burden or annoyance to the citizens of Corinth<sup>16</sup>. In this way, Medea reinforces her loyalty to Corinthian values and prevents any potential misunderstandings that might arise from her previous gnomic statement (cf. Mastronarde 2002 *ad loc.*).

This γνώμη, along with the previous one, fosters an atmosphere of trust between the interacting characters, Medea and the Chorus, since Medea uses this kind of gnomic *peroratio* to avoid any subsequent negative judgements by the Chorus, and to ensure their complicity at the same time. This intention will progressively intensify as the discourse unfolds. Although Medea has not yet made a specific request, she is preparing the Chorus for a future appeal. With these two auto-characterising γνώμαι, Medea presents herself as a woman who should not be feared for the simple reason that she is a foreigner.

Immediately after these γνώμαι Medea shifts from the general to the individual level and reveals her desperation. Her words of despair, in which she declares her misfortune and then her desire to die, precede the first mention of Jason in her entire speech (οὐμὸς πόσις 229).

Medea continues this gnomic presentation with a gnomic passage about the unfortunate situation of married women. She starts that passage with the well-known γνώμη 230-231:

πάντων δ' ὅστ' ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει | γυναικῆς ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν.

Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate.

This γνώμη, combined with the entire gnomic passage that follows (232-251) as an apostrophe to the γνώμη, aims to bring the women on stage closer together. This is a descriptive<sup>17</sup> γνώμη whose function is to express a reality, which is the case here. This enunciative tendency continues in the generalising verses that come after the γνώμη and thus share the same objective. By stating these words immediately after hearing the news of the betrayal, Medea considers it legitimate to make such a statement and makes the women believe it too. As a woman who has endured marriage and has been abandoned by her husband, Medea presents herself as an authority on the subject. In this passage, Medea presents a view of the commonly experienced suffering of married women. Firstly (πρῶτα μὲν 232), she highlights the challenge of obtaining a marriage contract and the subservient and powerless status of women in the institution of marriage. Secondly (δέ 238), she

<sup>16</sup> I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on the contraposition ἀσπός/ πολίτης, which has significantly improved the analysis.

<sup>17</sup> On descriptive and prescriptive γνώμαι, cf. Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 124-25, 148 and 229; Fernández Garrido 2013: 119; Cuny 2007: 21-23.

compares the dangers of marriage to those of slavery, arguing that women are confined to their homes while men are free to pursue leisure activities outside. In this passage, Medea presents a structured and logical argument for why women are the most wretched of all creatures, without subjective evaluation. In conclusion, Medea's argument emphasizes the objective evidence for why women are the most wretched in a precise and balanced manner. The most compelling part of this passage can be found in 248-251<sup>18</sup>:

λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὥς ἀκίνδυνον βίον | ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί, | κακῶς φρονοῦντες·  
ὥς τρίς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα | στήναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ.

Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while they fight with the spear. How wrong they are! I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.

Although these verses are not a γνῶμη, they do contain a general reflection. In these verses, Medea rejects and challenges the subordinate role of women that she has been elaborating on in all the previous verses. By forcefully declaring her preference for the life of a hoplite over the experience of childbirth, Medea disputes the notion that married women lead peaceful lives free from danger. Medea positions herself alongside the women of the Chorus to gain their empathy and attention. These verses serve as prelude for the ultimate *coup de scène*.

After this extended passage, Medea returns to the individual sphere (252-258) to refute the expectations that she and the Corinthian women have encountered (or could encounter) similar misfortunes. Medea's situation is far worse than the comparison being drawn (252 «But your story and mine are not the same»), as she is not only in a foreign country but also abandoned by her husband who had brought her to Corinth. Furthermore, she lacks support from her family and relatives, who leave her exposed and defenceless. Considering that Medea is creating a sphere of complicity, this twist in events for the women in the Chorus serves to further emphasize the *pathos* of Medea's story. If being in her situation already elicits compassion, her sudden claim that her situation is even worse intensifies such compassion. Medea is bound by the customs and laws of Corinth, which is entirely Jason's fault.

These verses precede Medea's actual request and serve as a preparation for the addressee, especially the γνῶμη. Medea has used various rhetorical strategies, including γνῶμαι, to shape the image that the women of the Chorus have of her. The aim is to evoke compassion for her, rather than just sympathy or understanding. Medea would request their silent involvement to carry out her revenge, stating that it must not infringe on the laws and traditions of Corinth (although this will not be the case).

Finally, after the request, Medea concludes her *rhexis* with a final γνῶμη, 263-66:

γυνὴ γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα | κακὴ τ' ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾶν· | ὅταν δ' ἐς εὐνήν  
ἡδικομένη κυρῇ, | οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρήν μαιφονωτέρα.

In all other things a woman is full of fear, incapable of looking on battle or cold steel; but when she is injured in love, no mind is more murderous than hers.

Again, this is an auto-characterising descriptive γνῶμη about the temperament of women in two very specific situations: in their daily lives, when there are no unexpected events or setbacks, and when they see their marriage bed in danger. This γνῶμη serves as a moral justification for any acts of revenge that Medea may propose or carry out. Furthermore, it legitimises such relation by declaring it universal, implying that anyone can feel the same need. In this way, Medea once again justifies the complicity of the Corinthian women, suggesting that it is fair, non-threatening, and lawful because Medea's bed has been invaded.

<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in these verses Medea cannot bear the idea of being mocked or perceived as weak. Her wounded honor transforms into homicidal madness, a pattern also observed in *S. Ai.* 367, 454, 961; cf. Susanetti 2007: 48-49. The outraged wife reacts like a warrior.

This passage, like her speech, ends with a γνώμη about women's attitudes towards the defilement of their own marriage bed: if someone takes away their marital rights, the female gender can become very ruthless. But beyond that, these verses implicitly indicate a declaration of intent; even if the Corinthian women may not grasp it, the audience might perceive it: Medea will be cruel. Nonetheless, by utilising a γνώμη in a heavily gendered speech<sup>19</sup>, it does not seem to be a genuine threat.

As a reflection of this γνώμη, Medea echoes the idea in her monologue (364-409) that women possess a formidable aptitude for plotting schemes, as evidenced by 407-409:

πρὸς δὲ καὶ πεφύκαμεν ἱ γυναῖκες, ἐς μὲν ἔσθλ' ἀμηχανώταται, ἱ κακῶν δὲ πάντων τέκτονες σοφώταται.

And furthermore we are women, unable to perform noble deeds, but most skilful architects of every sort of harm.

Since this descriptive γνώμη is part of a monologue, it is not addressed to any character in the scene. However, it cannot be ignored because of the play of echoes it presents. These are the final verses of the soliloquy in which Medea reveals her deception before the plea to Creon (see below) in which she asks for one more day in Corinth, apparently to leave her children's lives in order. This is a speech outlining Medea's plans to kill her enemies –especially Jason, but Creusa, and Creon too. Medea believes any woman would take such actions and justifies them in this γνώμη. Like her previous speech, this includes the appropriation of a misogynistic stereotype, highlighting her intentions before encountering Jason. This statement is fundamental to Medea's perception of herself as the archetypal victim. By framing herself as an impoverished woman and characterizing women as intrinsically unable to act righteously, she establishes a distinct feminine identity. In these verses, Medea concludes her speech by openly expressing her true intentions, defying the Chorus's anticipations. Now, as previously, Medea behaves as a woman with feminine emotions, opposing emotions, thus precluding the likelihood of the Chorus assessing her unfavourably. She is a victim and is compelled to act.

Through these γνώμαι we have already discussed and the monologue, Medea presents herself as a woman who, although in an extreme situation, acts like any other woman. She must take revenge on the one who refused her. These verses represent the culmination of Medea's auto-representation as the only victim, the most unfortunate victim, who will react as any woman would, once again seeking the prior acceptance of her actions by the Chorus and, in the case of the monologue, the audience's sympathy.

The generalising language of this first speech is of the utmost importance because it is through γνώμαι that Medea exposes herself as the only victim who does not correspond to her reality. Medea seizes the opportunity to disguise herself as a prototypical victim, suffering from the usual misfortunes that come with an unhappy marriage, when in fact her misfortunes are exceptional and not shared by ordinary married women. This initial speech foreshadows Medea's later use of γνώμαι. In subsequent γνώμαι, she employs this form of concealment to manipulate her interlocutors by creating concrete expectations: that Medea is a woman like any other, with the same worries as any other married woman; but she is not. Her γνώμαι evoke empathy for female emotional turmoil. Medea's audience realises that she has deceived her interlocutor when the Chorus leader says in verses 267-268:

δράσω τάδ'· ἐνδίκως γὰρ ἐκτίσῃ πόσιν, ἱ Μήδεια. πενθεῖν δ' οὐ σε θαυμάζω τύχας.

I will do so. For you will be justified in punishing your husband, Medea, and I am not surprised that you grieve at what has happened.

<sup>19</sup> Medea appropriates the negative *topoi* elaborated by the androcratic tradition. As Susanetti (2007: 45-46) observes, Medea draws strength from these misogynistic *topoi* throughout the play and employs them as a means of legitimizing her subsequent actions.

This is the introduction of Medea, which is crucial to understanding her character in terms of γνώμη and emotions. It marks her first step in creating expectations in her interlocutors. Medea manages to gain the support of the women in the Chorus for her revenge on Jason, without revealing her true intentions. By portraying herself as the most ill-fated casualty of a matrimonial breakdown, Medea has advanced her personal conception of justice as an impartial and all-encompassing justice system, via which she has garnered the support of her conversational partners. This self-portrayal has influenced the Chorus, as she has manipulated their view of her and in turn the compassion she evokes in the female members of the Chorus. This is a clear example of emotional manipulation, achieved without dishonesty, but by altering reality to suit her own and projecting it as universal. Medea evokes commiseration and an intense sense of fairness in her interlocutors, and these positions reinforce each other.

## 2.2. Medea and Creon

Although the Pedagogue and the Nurse have already announced the news of Medea's exile, Creon enters the stage determined to banish Medea and her children from the country. Despite his intransigence, this appearance provides Medea with a new opportunity to enact her plan: to gain more time to carry out her revenge, which is a necessary factor in the play's progression.

From the beginning, Creon is blunt and even aggressive: he demands the immediate exile of Medea and her offspring. There are two reasons for this: first, his fear of Medea, whose reputation represents a danger to Creon<sup>20</sup>, and second, the difference in status and power between the two characters, since Medea is a foreigner who is nothing in Corinth, while Creon is the monarch of that country<sup>21</sup>.

The γνώμη that Medea addresses to Creon in this section are fewer, comprising only two statements, and they are structured differently from the previous ones (all in a single *rhesis*). The first γνώμη, 294-295, is part of a speech after Creon's violent intervention, in which he openly expresses his fear of Medea. In this speech, Medea aims to discredit Creon's reputation as a wise leader in his community, drawing attention to the social hostility he shows towards those who possess wisdom. The γνώμη is:

χρή δ' οὔποθ' ὅστις ἀρτίφρων πέφυκ' ἀνὴρ | παῖδας περισώσ' ἐκδιδάσκεισθαι σοφούς·

No man who is sensible ought ever to have his children educated beyond the common run.

With this γνώμη, Medea tries to convince Creon that his image of her is wrong, unfounded, and undeserved. Medea's aim is to persuade Creon to overcome his fear of her, thus initiating a self-defence speech. The anti-Protagorean philosophical tone about the transmission of knowledge and the usefulness or futility of a wise person in society serves to establish Medea at the core of this discourse (Tedeschi 2010 *ad loc.*). That is, according to her own words in 302-305, she is also a victim of this tendency. However, despite the γνώμη and the various devices used in this speech, Medea is unable to achieve her goal. Creon continues to fear Medea, especially because she is a woman and because she is angry, as he says in the γνώμη of 319-320, which again functions as an echo of the γνώμη uttered by Medea before the Chorus in 265-266 (see above).

In response to Creon's denial, Medea changes her strategy and decides to appeal to a more pathetic element: paternity. The love that every father feels towards their children becomes the basis of the second γνώμη which she addresses to Creon. This γνώμη, 331, is found in the *stichomythia* between these two characters:

ὅπως ἄν, οἶμαι, καὶ παραστῶσιν τύχαι.

I fancy that depends on the circumstances.

<sup>20</sup> Creon's fear is present in many of his speeches, especially in the short speech of verses 271-276, which is full of terms referring to his terror of Medea.

<sup>21</sup> Studies on sociolinguistics and Politeness in ancient Greek, cf. van Emde Boas 2017: 26-39; Rodríguez Piedrabuena 2022: 79-102; Willi 2003. Studies on Politeness, cf. Berger 2017: 11-35; Catrambone 2016; Battezzato 2012: 318-324; Lloyd 2004, 2006, 2009.

We have this γνώμη expressed in the *stichomythia* with Creon after she has begged him to help her. The *topos* of this γνώμη was motivated by the king when he declared that the fatherland was the dearest thing after his children (329), a feeling of φιλία which he had already mentioned (327). This allusion to love motivates the γνώμη that concerns us on the famous topic of the bittersweet nature of love. This γνώμη functions as an introduction to the appeal of parental love for children, a sentiment which will aid Medea in achieving her goal of securing one more day to plan her exile. By making this appeal, she gains Creon's empathy. The γνώμη also serves to portray Medea as a typical woman with conventional emotions. In this instance, Medea's attempt to elicit sympathy from Creon does not depend on his position of power. Both characters are parents, but Medea is portrayed as a suffering woman in need of assistance, and thus identified as a victim. Therefore, Creon's disposition does not influence Medea's position. She is placed within the same referential group and is presented as a victim of love. Consequently, this viewpoint is employed in an indirect manner to present Medea as a typical woman with typical emotions.

Creon's love for his daughter leads him to her death. Indirectly, this opinion also serves as a foreshadowing of events to come. The sequence enables the audience to interpret Medea's words in two ways: as a genuine expression of a distressed woman's response to a fresh calamity, or as a tactfully crafted manipulation. When seeking the support and approval of her interlocutors, Medea uses γνώμαι to elicit sympathy by presenting herself as a victim.

### 2.3. Medea and Jason

Medea's attitude towards Jason is twofold, as has been extensively studied, since in their initial encounter, Medea portrays herself as a formidable figure that Jason ought to fear. Medea accuses Jason of all the harm he has caused her. In contrast, in her second intervention, Medea presents herself as a woman who is now calm and remorseful for her previous behaviour. This dual disposition is illustrated in the use or absence of γνώμαι.

In the first encounter with Jason, 446-626, Medea is presented as enraged and furious, as she herself conveys in her first and last words of this episode, creating the predominant tone of this passage (*cf.* Battezzato 2017: 169). Medea's accusations against Jason subsequently emerge from her wrath. This scene exhibits a considerable amount of hostility, with recurrent intimidation and language of significant brutality, and is marked by its inflexibility, as none of those involved alter their stance or demonstrate any inclination to do so.

In this context of reproaches, we find in Medea's mouth three γνώμαι –although only two are used to manipulate Jason's perception of her– with another gnomic reflection in her agonistic speech (465-519), characterised by a rational restraint of the protagonist's emotions. Contrary to the previous ones, neither of them has any reference to the feminine or to something similar, and therefore they do not have the same function as the previous ones: to present herself as a victim. In this case, the γνώμαι reflect the real Medea, without frills; Medea tells the reality of her situation and the γνώμαι she uses are meant to justify and support her story.

In the first γνώμη, 469-472, Medea attacks Jason directly, albeit through such indirect expressions:

οὔτοι θράσος τόδ' ἐστὶν οὐδ' εὐτολμία, | φίλους κακῶς δράσαντ' ἐναντίον βλέπειν, | ἀλλ' ἡ  
μεγίστη τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις νόσων | πασῶν, ἀναίδει'.

This is not boldness or courage—to wrong your loved ones and then look them in the face—but the worst of all mortal vices, shamelessness.

This is an altero-characterising γνώμη and informs us of a characteristic of his interlocutor: shamelessness. The function of this γνώμη is clear, it is to embarrass Jason, a direct attack on his social position (positive face in politeness theory; *cf.* Berger 2017: 15-16). This *gnome* precedes all of Medea's accusations against Jason and serves as an indirect statement of intent.

To this speech the Chorus leader responds with a γνώμη on anger in 520-521:

δεινὴ τις ὄργη καὶ δυσίατος πέλει, ἢ ὅταν φίλοι φίλοισι συμβάλωσ' ἔριν.

Terrible and hard to heal is the wrath that comes when kin join in conflict with kin.

This γνώμη openly defines Medea's state of mind in her speech to Jason, a speech full of rancour. Due to this altero-characteriological γνώμη, Medea is no longer the stereotypical victim previously presented. This γνώμη reveals how Medea feels in her confrontation with Jason. It is evident that Medea is much more straightforward and, at least for the moment, does not avoid speaking plainly or concealing anything. But this will change in the next conversation, after she realizes that she will not be able to carry out her plan unless Jason believes that she has repented.

At the end of the same discourse we find the gnomic reflection in verses 516-519:

ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δὴ χρυσοῦ μὲν ὃς κίβδηλος ἦι | τεκμήρι' ἀνθρώποισιν ὥπασας σαφῆ, | ἀνδρῶν δ' ὅτωι  
χρῆ τὸν κακὸν διειδέναι | οὐδεὶς χαρακτήρ ἐμπέφυκε σώματι;

O Zeus, why, when you gave to men sure signs of gold that is counterfeit, is there no mark on the human body by which one could identify base men?

In this passage, Medea laments her inability to make the right choice, but she does not present herself as a victim of typical female misfortune. Instead, these verses serve both to characterise Jason as one of the wicked men and to reveal a bleak outlook of human nature that was widespread in Greek culture and reflected in literature.

The following γνώμη is part of a brief intervention by Medea immediately after Jason's agonistic intervention, in verses 580-581:

ἐμοί<sup>22</sup> γὰρ ὅστις ἄδικος ὦν σοφὸς λέγειν | πέφυκε, πλείστην ζημίαν ὀφλίσκάνει·

To my mind, the plausible speaker who is a scoundrel incurs the greatest punishment.

Once again, we find another altero-characterising γνώμη directly attacking Jason. Medea looks for her interlocutor's weakness to arouse some empathy, or at least a sense of guilt. In this case, Medea uses a common *topos* in Euripidean tragedy which critiques the censorship of the art of good speech, to warn of the danger of Jason's ability to manipulate language to alter the truth and conceal justice. But Jason remains adamant, and indeed the *agon* ends as it began: with its two participants at loggerheads.

This aggressive disposition of Medea, and therefore the tone of her speeches and the γνώμαι she will use in them, changes in the next episode, during the second encounter with Jason. In fact, Medea reveals in her speech that she has changed her mind<sup>23</sup> and refers to her thought process, meaning that Medea has changed her mind and has apparently been persuaded by Jason's earlier words<sup>24</sup>. In this speech Medea changes her mask, she presents herself as she did before the Chorus, as a helpless and defenceless woman, as a victim.

In this passage, the γνώμαι are crucial to understanding why Jason really believes that he has successfully convinced Medea and made her change her mind. Medea pronounces three γνώμαι, although only two are intended to manipulate Jason's perception: one in Medea's first speech (889-890) and one in the following dialogue (928). As Battezzato observes, Medea's use of other rhetorical techniques reinforces Jason's expectations of her, creating the illusion of a heartfelt apology<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> To such seemingly personal and subjective introductions of the γνώμη, cf. Boscà Cuquerella 2023a: 176-70 and 299-303; Cuny 2007: 28-31.

<sup>23</sup> 869-870 ἴδσον, αἰτοῦμαι σε τῶν εἰρημένων | συγγνώμον' εἶναι, «Jason, I beg you to forgive what I said».

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Battezzato 2017: 168-171, esp. 170.

<sup>25</sup> Battezzato 2017: 170, «She manages to be so convincing to Jason precisely because she rejected his advice in the agon: it took her time to restrain her emotion (haste is an enemy of good deliberation, as Diodorus states in Thucydides) and when she finally managed to restrain herself she accepted his point of view».

Similarly, the γνῶμαι employed in this scene will again present a Medea who is reflecting on the most commonplace female *topoi*. The γνῶμαι used endeavour to present a repentant Medea who also acknowledges her own culpability for her actions, simply due to her gender.

Medea uses this idea in her first speech, in verses 889-890, expressing this γνώμη:

ἀλλ' ἐσμὲν οἷόν ἐσμεν, οὐκ ἐρῶ κακόν, | γυναῖκες

Well, we women are, I will not say bad creatures, but we are what we are.

Medea once again justifies her actions by making a universal statement about women's nature. She now conceals about her real intentions, a technique she has employed before with both honesty and deceit. After these verses, Medea "gives up", and Jason seems to have to forgive her because she didn't know how to act in a way that is not typical of women. She seems to retract her previous threats. This is a turning point.

Among other rhetorical devices, almost all based on the principle that she has acted only as a woman is expected to act, Medea manages with this speech to make Jason believe that he has convinced her and that she regrets having acted as any woman would act and spoken as any woman would speak, as Battezzato points out (*ibid.*) «keeping with the frequent language of self-abuse adopted by women».

Similarly, we have the second γνώμη, 928:

γυνὴ δὲ θήλυ κάπῃ δακρύοις ἔφυ.

Yet a woman is by nature soft and prone to tears.

Medea presents her stereotypically feminine emotions, reinforcing the standard portrayal of women as fragile and incapable of overcoming hardship without tears. Once more, she conceals herself in this descriptive γνώμη. This creates an impression of her authority and allows her audience to relate to her words. This γνώμη is an ideal preamble to Medea's speech, making it sound credible.

This is not the only function of this γνώμη. With it, Medea not only portrays a feminine trait but also conceals another possible reason for her weeping: the execution of her plan to murder her own offspring. This brief dialogue between Medea and Jason thereby presents a duality that is obvious to the spectators, but not to Jason. Using universal language, Medea conceals the actual reason for her tears and justifies herself to Jason with a truly feminine excuse. Furthermore, Medea manages to evoke Jason's compassion and understanding for her, a hapless and wretched woman who merely desires the welfare of her offspring.

At the end of this second scene with Jason, he accepts the image presented by Medea for her new disposition: like any prototypical woman, Medea is morally, ethically and intellectually inferior. This self-image makes her repentance seem more credible to Jason, given that he has presented himself as the prototypical example of a misogynist who, like Hippolytus in the eponymous play, yearns for a world in which women are not necessary (*cf.* Battezzato 2017: 170). Therefore, this image of a weak and inferior woman is the basis of the mechanism by which Medea manages to manipulate the negative emotions that Jason had and presented towards her.

In these two scenes with Jason we can see how Medea plays with her gender identity using certain γνῶμαι in this regard. In line with Battezzato's work, through the analysis of the γνῶμαι used, it is possible to perceive Medea's transformation towards a prototypical woman, which she presents in the second encounter with Jason, breaking with the image of the masculine Medea that she presented in their first encounter. In this way, by presenting herself as a submissive woman, Medea manages to convince Jason, who feels compassion for her.

### 3. Concluding remarks

Medea uses γνῶμαι to deceive or attempt to deceive her interlocutors. On the one hand, Medea uses auto-characterisation γνῶμαι to portray herself as a woman with prototypical emotions to exploit a particular emotion. On the contrary, it is only during Medea's first encounter with Jason that she employs

altero-characterising γνῶμαι to reveal his true nature. However, Medea is not attempting to mislead her interlocutor, rather she is striving to expose his genuine wickedness and unmask him.

Medea presents herself as a skilled manipulator, deceiving all the characters who interact with her –except Aegeus– through γνῶμαι and other resources. In this tragedy, the γνῶμη is shown to be an element of manipulation, as when Medea does not need to manipulate her interlocutor (as in the case of Aegeus) she does not use any γνῶμη, since it is unnecessary to achieve her goals. As demonstrated, manipulation and persuasion are two sides of the same coin.

Medea plays with her language that blends feminine and masculine traits, resulting in emotional manipulation of her interlocutors. She uses the stereotype of submissive and unhappy wives to underscore her plight and gain the Chorus' support, leading to acceptance and complicity among the women of Corinth. In the case of Creon and Jason, as male interlocutors, Medea uses her role as a submissive and inferior woman to achieve her aims. She presents herself as a simple woman, an inferior being for whom they should compassion rather than fear. This contrasts with Medea's γνῶμαι and disposition in her first encounter with Jason, in which she appeared violent, and her remarks were intended to berate her interlocutor. The purpose of this scene diverges from the previous ones. Medea aims to shame Jason into acknowledging his wrongdoing and seeking penance. These two motivations underlie the arrangement of the *topoi* of γνῶμαι and thus the manipulation of the emotions of the chorus, Creon, and Jason. Medea alternates between “inappropriately” masculine and feminine language according to her objectives and her interlocutor.

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