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MODERNIST INTERIORIZATION IN MEDEA BY T. STURGE MOORE

Background. *This article examines Medea (1920), the dramatic poem by T. Sturge Moore, through the analytical framework of modern receptions of classical myth (Chevrel, 2006). Rather than treating Moore's text as a straightforward rewriting of Euripides' tragedy, the study approaches it as part of a broader modernist engagement with antiquity, in which myth is reinterpreted in response to changing aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural conditions.*

Methods. *Drawing on reception theory, modernist poetics, and gender studies, the article argues that Moore's Medea represents a psychological and symbolic reconfiguration of the ancient myth rather than a direct adaptation of Euripides' tragedy (del Árbol Fernández, & Vázquez Marruecos, 2002). The analysis situates Moore's work within the intellectual climate of early twentieth-century modernism, emphasizing its investment in interiority, ethical ambiguity, and highly symbolic language. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of dramatic structure and characterization, as well as to the shifting representation of responsibility.*

Results. *Unlike classical tragedy, which foregrounds external action, public confrontation, and divine intervention, Moore's play internalizes conflict and presents violence as the outcome of unresolved psychological struggle and moral isolation. The study highlights the significance of the post-infanticide structure of the play, the sustained lyrical tone of the dialogue, and the complex portrayal of Medea as both grieving mother and self-conscious moral agent. This reinterpretation displaces spectacle in favor of introspection.*

Conclusions. *The analysis demonstrates that Moore's Medea transforms myth into a modern meditation on responsibility, loss, subjectivity, and ethical self-awareness, reflecting the broader cultural and moral concerns of the post-First World War period.*

Keywords: *Medea, modernist drama, myth reception, psychological tragedy, T. Sturge Moore.*

Background

The figure of Medea has a central role in the Western literary imagination for over two millennia. Since Euripides' *Medea* first appeared on the Athenian stage in 431 BC, the myth has generated a remarkable sequence of reinterpretations that continually renegotiate questions of gender, violence, foreignness, and moral responsibility. Medea's transgressive actions, most notably the murder of her own children, have rendered her both repellent and compelling, ensuring her survival as one of the most frequently revisited figures of classical mythology.

Early twentieth-century reworkings of Medea increasingly emphasized psychological interiority and symbolic abstraction, distancing themselves from the action-driven structure of ancient tragedy (Pappa, 2014). Within this context, T. Sturge Moore's *Medea* (1920) occupies a distinctive position. Moore, a British poet, dramatist, and critic associated with early modernism, consistently privileged lyrical expression and philosophical inquiry over theatrical realism in his dramatic works. His *Medea* is conceived not as a dramatic spectacle but as a poetic meditation on guilt, remorse, and moral responsibility in the aftermath of violence (Moore, 1920).

In the modern period, and particularly in the early twentieth century, classical myth became a privileged resource for writers seeking to articulate the psychological and ethical crises of their time. Modernist authors turned to ancient narratives not as stable cultural inheritances, but as flexible symbolic frameworks capable of expressing fragmentation, alienation, and moral uncertainty. Myth, in this context, functioned less as a repository of timeless truths and more as a medium through which modern subjectivity could be explored.

T. Sturge Moore's *Medea* (1920) must be understood within this modernist re-engagement with classical material. Written in the aftermath of the First World War, Moore's dramatic poem reflects a cultural moment marked by disillusionment with

traditional moral and social structures. Rather than reproducing the dramatic conflict of Euripides' tragedy, Moore radically restructures the myth, relocating the action to a psychological and symbolic space that foregrounds interior suffering over external action. Moore's *Medea* constitutes a distinctly modernist reinterpretation of the myth, one that transforms tragedy into an exploration of ethical responsibility, maternal identity, and psychological isolation.

Methods

The present study adopts a qualitative literary methodology grounded in classical reception theory, modernist literary criticism, and myth criticism. Reception theory provides the primary conceptual framework, emphasizing the idea that modern adaptations of classical myths are not derivative imitations, but creative acts of reinterpretation shaped by their historical and cultural contexts. This approach allows Moore's *Medea* to be examined as a dialogic engagement with earlier versions of the myth, particularly Euripides' tragedy, rather than as a subordinate adaptation.

The analysis is based on close reading of Moore's *Medea*, with attention to narrative structure, characterization, language, and symbolic motifs. Comparative references to Euripides and to selected modern reinterpretations of Medea are employed to clarify points of divergence and innovation. Rather than attempting an exhaustive survey of the Medea tradition, the study focuses on those aspects most relevant to Moore's modernist transformation of the myth: psychological interiority, ethical ambiguity, and the reconfiguration of maternal identity.

Results

Structural Innovation and Temporal Displacement

One of the most striking features of Moore's *Medea* is its radical restructuring of dramatic time. In distinction to Euripides' tragedy, which builds toward the act of infanticide, Moore situates the entire play after the children's deaths. This post-infanticide setting fundamentally alters the nature of the drama. Action is replaced by retrospection, and

suspense by psychological intensity. The audience is not invited to witness Medea's decision-making process as it unfolds, but to confront the emotional and ethical aftermath of her actions.

This temporal displacement transforms the play into a meditation on memory, remorse, and moral reckoning. Medea's interactions with other figures—Proto, the Curtain-Bearer, and her invisible children—function less as conventional dialogue than as externalizations of her inner conflict. The absence of visible interlocutors reinforces the sense of isolation that defines Moore's protagonist and underscores the modernist emphasis on interiority.

Psychological Interiorization of the Protagonist

In Moore's version, Medea is primarily defined by psychological struggle rather than rhetorical power. Whereas Euripides' heroine articulates her intentions with formidable clarity and engages in public confrontation, Moore's Medea is introspective, fragmented, and emotionally vulnerable. This interiorization is articulated directly through Medea's utterances, which foreground solitude, remorse, and emotional exhaustion rather than calculated revenge.

Medea explicitly associates isolation with psychological survival, declaring:

"To be alone is vital to the mind; / As water is to the body. Let me drink; / I have not tasted solitude for weeks" (Moore, 1920, p. 12).

Solitude here is not a punishment imposed from without, but a necessity demanded by the fractured self. The metaphor of thirst underscores the intensity of Medea's inner deprivation and situates psychological suffering at the core of the tragic experience.

Moore further emphasizes Medea's emotional devastation through her retrospective account of betrayal:

"When I came back heart-wrecked from Jason's house, / The mother murdered in me" (Moore, 1920, p. 17).

The metaphorical murder of motherhood precedes the literal infanticide, suggesting that the act of violence emerges from an earlier psychic annihilation. Medea's maternal identity is thus represented as already destroyed by emotional abandonment before the physical deaths of the children.

This internal conflict is intensified when Medea compares her former love for Jason with her present longing for her children:

"Temptation grips me now more savagely / Than when I followed Jason" (Moore, 1920, p. 17).

By equating maternal desire with erotic temptation, Moore destabilizes conventional moral categories and presents Medea's psyche as governed by competing, irreconcilable impulses.

The invisibility of the children plays a crucial symbolic role in this psychological portrait. Although their voices can be heard, Medea cannot touch them, nor can they physically interact with her. This separation intensifies the tragic dimension of the play by transforming maternal affection into an unattainable desire. The children's playful language, drawn from the lexical field of games and laughter, stands in painful contrast to the knowledge of their deaths, heightening the emotional impact of the drama.

Language, Lyrical Tone, and Symbolism

Moore's *Medea* is characterized by a highly lyrical and symbolic use of language. Archaisms and elevated diction situate the play within a mythic register, while exclamations, apostrophes, and hyperbolic expressions convey the intensity of Medea's emotional state. The forest setting, abstract and minimally defined, functions as a symbolic

landscape rather than a realistic location, reflecting the protagonist's psychological isolation.

The lyrical quality of the language allows Moore to foreground emotional nuance over narrative progression. Medea's utterances frequently blur the boundaries between confession, justification, and lament, reinforcing the modernist tendency to dissolve traditional dramatic forms. Violence, in this context, is not sensationalized but internalized, presented as the tragic outcome of conflicting impulses rather than as an act of calculated revenge.

Moore's Medea in the Context of Twentieth-Century Receptions of the Myth

Marina Pappa's comprehensive study *Le mythe de Médée dans la littérature européenne du XXe siècle* (2014) provides a crucial theoretical framework for situating Moore's *Medea* within the broader landscape of modern myth reception (Brunel, 1988; 1992).

Pappa argues that twentieth-century rewritings of Medea are characterized by a decisive shift away from myth as collective, ritualized narrative toward myth as an instrument of psychological, ethical, and ideological exploration. In these modern versions, Medea is no longer primarily defined by her function within a cosmic or divine order but emerges as a figure through whom modern authors interrogate subjectivity, responsibility, and marginality.

According to Pappa, one of the defining features of modern Medea adaptations is the internalization of conflict. Whereas ancient tragedy externalizes suffering through action and confrontation, twentieth-century literature increasingly relocates tragedy within the psyche of the protagonist. Moore's *Medea* exemplifies this tendency with exceptional clarity.

Pappa further observes that modern Medeas are frequently stripped of divine legitimation. In Euripides, Medea's escape by the chariot of Helios confers a disturbing form of transcendence upon her crime. By contrast, modern reinterpretations deny such metaphysical resolution, forcing Medea to confront the ethical weight of her actions without recourse to supernatural justification. Moore's Medea adheres closely to this pattern. The play offers no divine intervention, no cathartic closure, and no moral absolution. Medea remains alone with her guilt, her longing, and her memories, embodying what Pappa describes as the modern tragic subject: isolated, self-reflective, and ethically exposed.

Another aspect is the reconfiguration of Medea's maternal identity in twentieth-century literature. Moore's portrayal resonates strongly with this interpretation. Medea repeatedly asserts her maternal identity even after the death of her children, insisting that her actions were motivated by a distorted logic of protection rather than cruelty. This insistence aligns Moore's work with the broader modern tendency, identified by Pappa, to humanize Medea without exonerating her.

Finally, modern Medea adaptations within specific historical contexts tend to generate versions of the myth that emphasize ethical ambiguity and psychological fragmentation. Moore's *Medea*, written in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, reflects this historical sensitivity. The play's atmosphere of exhaustion, disillusionment, and moral uncertainty mirrors a broader cultural experience of loss and destabilization. In this sense, Moore's work confirms the argument that modern receptions of Medea function as mirrors of their time, translating ancient myth into a language capable of articulating contemporary anxieties (Backès, 2010).

Comparative: Moore, Christa Wolf, and Heiner Müller

A brief comparative perspective further clarifies Moore's position within twentieth-century reconfigurations of the Medea myth. As Marina Pappa demonstrates, modern rewritings of Medea frequently oscillate between two dominant tendencies: the political dimension of the myth and its psychological dimension (Pappa, 2014).

Christa Wolf's *Medea: Stimmen* (1996) represents a paradigmatic example of the politicized Medea. Wolf dismantles the traditional narrative by presenting Medea through multiple voices, exposing the mechanisms of exclusion, patriarchal power, and ideological violence that construct Medea as a scapegoat. Infanticide, in Wolf's version, is explicitly denied, and the myth is reinterpreted as a story of political persecution and historical falsification.

By contrast, Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial* (Müller, 1982) exemplifies a radically deconstructed and historically charged Medea. Müller fragments the myth into dense poetic blocks, transforming Medea into a figure that embodies the violence of history itself.

Positioned between these two extremes, Moore's *Medea* occupies a distinctively introspective middle ground. Moore preserves Medea as a morally accountable individual whose suffering is rooted in personal loss, emotional betrayal, and maternal conflict. His focus remains firmly on the inner life of the protagonist.

The analysis approaches Medea within a distinctly modernist framework, examining Moore's transformation of myth as part of early twentieth-century poetic dramaturgy. Rather than adopting a historical comparison, Moore's dramatic poem is placed within the modernist reconfiguration of subjectivity, language, and theatrical form. In this context, the contrast between Euripides' and Moore's heroines should not be understood as a simple opposition between "rhetorical" and "psychological" models, but as a historically conditioned transformation of rhetorical approach.

In Euripides, rhetoric functions as the primary vehicle through which internal conflict becomes visible within the public sphere. Medea's utterances articulate competing ethical claims, maternal identity, conjugal betrayal, justice, and revenge, within a framework of polemic discourse. Her rhetorical mastery is inseparable from her capacity to intervene in civic and moral structures. By contrast, Moore's Medea does not abandon rhetoric; rather, rhetoric is internalized and presented through a careful aesthetic approach. Persuasion gives way to lyrical self-address, and public confrontation is replaced by introspective fragmentation. What appears as "psychological" expression is in fact a modernist reconfiguration of dramatic speech, where subjectivity is staged as divided, unstable, and temporally suspended.

This transformation is evident in the structural dynamics of Moore's verse. Medea's utterances frequently shift between apostrophe, confession, and lament without clear rhetorical closure. The syntax often loosens into paratactic sequences and exclamatory constructions, producing an impression of emotional oscillation rather than argumentative progression. Such shifts blur the distinction between self-justification and self-accusation, creating a dramatic voice that is in fact an internal dialogue. The fragmentation of address, moving from invocation of absent figures to inward reflection, signals a displacement of the classical struggle into the interior space of consciousness.

The characterization of Moore's language as lyrical and symbolic may be substantiated through its stylistic and scenic features. The diction frequently incorporates elevated, archaizing tonalities and metaphorical density that situate the

drama within a mythic register rather than a mimetic one. Exclamations and intensified imagery do not merely convey heightened emotion; they restructure dramatic instances. The verse tends toward rhythmic, slowing narrative progression in favor of affective resonance.

Moreover, the forest setting operates less as a concrete spatial environment and more as a symbolic topography. The minimal scenic specification and recurrent atmospheric references construct a landscape aligned with Medea's psychic isolation. The absence of detailed realism and the emphasis on elemental imagery, having elements like darkness, silence, enclosure, render space reflective rather than representational. In this sense, the forest becomes a projection of interior dislocation, consistent with modernist dramaturgy's preference for symbolic environments over classical space.

Such scenic abstraction contrasts sharply with Euripides' setting, where spatial organization reinforces political and ethical confrontation. Moore's removal of Medea from a civic framework into a symbolic landscape corresponds therefore to the broader modernist retreat from public discourse toward interiorized approach. The claim that violence in Moore's text is internalized can also be grounded in structural and lexical features. Instead of building toward confrontation through argumentative escalation, the dramatic tension unfolds through recursive reflection and emotional intensification. Instead of calculated revenge, there is exhaustion, solitude, and inward struggle. Self-reflective tones contribute to the impression that the act of violence emerges from unresolved psychic conflict rather than strategic revenge.

Accordingly, Moore's *Medea* primarily as a modernist rewriting of myth that presents lyrical interiority and relocates tragic conflict from the public sphere to symbolic space. The analysis approaches *Medea* within a distinctly modernist framework, examining Moore's transformation of myth as part of early twentieth-century poetic dramaturgy. Rather than adopting a historical comparison, we situate Moore's dramatic poem within the modernist reconfiguration of subjectivity, language, and theatrical form. In this context, the contrast between Euripides' and Moore's heroines should not be understood as a simple opposition between "rhetorical" and "psychological" approach, but as a transformation in historically conditioned framework. Moore's text is internalized since instead of confrontation through argumentative escalation, the dramatic tension unfolds through recurred reflections and emotional intensification.

Discussion and conclusions

Moore's *Medea* exemplifies a modernist reconfiguration of classical tragedy in which ethical responsibility replaces divine intervention as the central organizing principle. In Euripides, Medea's actions are framed within a cosmological order. By contrast, Moore strips the myth of supernatural validation and situates Medea's crime entirely within the realm of human psychology and moral choice.

This shift reflects broader modernist concerns with subjectivity, guilt, and the fragility of ethical frameworks in the aftermath of large-scale violence in the First World War. Moore's *Medea* emerges not as a monstrous aberration or a triumphant avenger, but as a tragic subject forced to confront the irreversible consequences of her own actions.

Ultimately, Moore's *Medea* demonstrates how classical myth can be transformed into a vehicle for modern reflection without losing its tragic power. By internalizing conflict and foregrounding psychological suffering, Moore creates a version of Medea that speaks directly to modern anxieties about responsibility, loss, and moral isolation.

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МОДЕРНІСТСЬКА ІНТЕРІОРИЗАЦІЯ У "МЕДЕЇ" Т. СТЕРДЖА МУРА

Вступ. У статті розглядається драматична поема Т. Стерджа Мура "Медея" (1920) через аналітичну призму сучасного сприйняття класичного міфу (Chevrel, 2006). Замість того, щоб розглядати текст Мура як пряму переробку трагедії Евріпіда, дослідження підходить до нього як до частини ширшого модерністського залучення античності, в якому міф переосмислюється у відповідь на мінливі естетичні, філософські та культурні умови.

Методи. Спираючись на теорію сприйняття, модерністську поетику та гендерні дослідження, стаття стверджує, що "Медея" Мура представляє собою психологічну та символічну реконфігурацію античного міфу, а не пряму адаптацію трагедії Евріпіда (del Árbol Fernández, & Vázquez Marruecos, 2002). Аналіз розміщує твір Мура в інтелектуальному кліматі модернізму початку XX ст., підкреслюючи його зосередженість на внутрішньому світі, етичній неоднозначності та високосимволічній мові. Особливу увагу приділено трансформації драматичної структури та характеристики персонажів, а також зміні уявлення про відповідальність.

Результати. На відміну від класичної трагедії, яка висуває на перший план зовнішні дії, публічні конфлікти та божественне втручання, п'єса Мура інтерналізує конфлікт і представляє насильство як результат невирішеної психологічної боротьби та моральної ізоляції. Дослідження підкреслює значення структури п'єси після вбивства дітей, стійкого ліричного тону діалогів та складного зображення Медеї як скорботної матері та самосвідомої моральної особи. Ця реінтерпретація замінює видовищність на інтроспекцію.

Висновки. Аналіз показує, що "Медея" Мура перетворює міф на сучасну медитацію про відповідальність, втрату, суб'єктивність та етичну самосвідомість, відображаючи ширші культурні та моральні проблеми періоду після Першої світової війни.

Ключові слова: Медея, модерністська драма, рецепція міфу, психологічна трагедія, Т. Стердж Мур.

Автор заявляє про відсутність конфлікту інтересів. Спонсори не брали участі в розробленні дослідження; у зборі, аналізі чи інтерпретації даних; у написанні рукопису; в рішенні про публікацію результатів.

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