

2015

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Samuel Glaser-Nolan

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**A (Post) Structural Analysis of Jason and Medeia:
An Interlocking Pair—Sisyphus Embodied**

Senior Thesis in

Greek and Roman Studies

Vassar College, Spring 2015

By Samuel Glaser-Nolan

“The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

-Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Introduction

This project is concerned with the study of the myth of Jason and Medeia. Its specific aim is to analyze the myths of both protagonists in unison, as an interlocking pair, each component essential to understanding the other. Reading Jason and Medeia together reveals that they are characters perpetually struggling with the balance between the obligations of family and those of being a hero. They are structurally engaged with the tension between these two notions and can best be understood by allusion to other myths that provide precedents and parallels for their actions.

The goal is to not only study both characters together but to do so across many accounts of the myth and view the myth in its totality, further unifying the separate analyses of the two characters. Structuralism as a method of analyzing and interpreting resolves the apparent conundrum of which myths are valid to study and reveals the power of analyzing all renditions of a myth, not just one account or one author. It not only says it is permissible, but necessary, to treat all versions equally and include all of them. All versions and renditions of a particular myth are equally valid and express the myth’s core human truths and solutions to similar paradoxes. Therefore, structuralism requires the inclusion of all accounts of a story and all versions of the myth of Jason and Medeia are treated as equally important and valid no matter the time, language, or style they were written in.

The differences between versions of a myth are not important, the same deep structures, columns, paradoxes, mediations, and post-structural twists are applicable between versions no matter how seemingly disparate in regards to time, language, style, etc. Levi-Strauss (1955, 435) wrote this about the myth of Oedipus:

A striking example is offered by the fact that our interpretation may take into account, and is certainly applicable to, the Freudian use of the Oedipus myth. Although the Freudian problem has ceased to be that of autochthony *versus* bisexual reproduction, it is still the same problem of understanding how *one* can be born from *two*... Therefore, not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on a par with earlier or seemingly more “authentic” versions.

By extension, the argument that Ovid or Valerius Flaccus is not ancient Greek and therefore is irrelevant for my study of the myth is discredited. I aim to treat a plethora of sources equally, disregarding language, time of composition, etc. and include accounts from Pindar to Valerius Flaccus to Camus so as to gain perspective on the myth of Jason and Medeia in its totality.

When all versions and analyses are looked at in tandem many important and previously unseen characteristics are revealed. Previous scholarship surrounding Jason, Medeia and the quest for the Golden Fleece has been produced focusing on either Jason or Medeia alone¹ and/or analyses have focused on one author’s account or another. Further, analyses are often focused on one theme or another such as the inversion of traditional societal values and gender roles² or archaeological evidence with mythical implications³.

¹ Bremmer in Clauss, James Joseph, and Sarah Iles Johnston (1997) or Mori (2005)

² Hopman (2008) or McClure (1999)

There have been a few studies, which either attempt to treat the myth in a more holistic way⁴ or analyze many versions of the myth⁵, but none have done so in such a complete and totalizing way on both fronts. By bringing all accounts and both key characters into conversation with one another key aspects of the myth, which were previously unseen, are revealed.

The myth of Jason and Medeia is a long one and some enumeration is necessary before going on so as to understand the rest of this paper. The myth begins with Helle and Phrixus riding the golden ram from Thessaly to Kolchis. Once they arrive there Aietes the king of Kolchis claims the fleece for himself. Later on Pelias receives a prophecy to be wary of a man with one sandal for this man will end his reign as king. When Jason arrives with one sandal only he is sent on an impossible suicide mission to Kolchis to go retrieve the Golden Fleece from Aietes. Jason then acquires a crew of heroes, has the ship the Argo built, is elected leader of the crew and ship, and sets sail for Kolchis from Iolcus his homeland.

En route to Kolchis the Argo and its crew land on the island of Lemnos. On Lemnos disgruntled wives who had been previously cast aside by their husbands for smelling bad have recently murdered all of the men there. When Jason and his crew land they are welcomed with open arms by the women of the island and the men sleep with the women there as part of a plot hatched by the local women to repopulate the island. Jason sleeps with their leader Hypsipyle so as to impregnate her. After the party ends Jason and the Argonauts depart the island.

³ Johnston in Clauss, James Joseph, and Sarah Iles Johnston (1997) or Marshall (2000)

⁴ Bulloch (2006) or Segal (1996)

⁵ Graf in Clauss, James Joseph, and Sarah Iles Johnston (1997)

After a series of trials and tribulations Jason and the Argonauts arrive in Kolchis and meet with Aietes who says that he will only give Jason the Golden Fleece after he has completed a series of challenges: yoke the fire breathing bulls, plow the field with them, plant the chthonic dragon teeth, destroy the chthonic men that are spawned by this action and then retrieve the fleece from under the nose of the dragon that guards it and never sleeps. While in Aietes court listening to these requirements Medeia sees Jason and falls in love with him. Jason and Medeia then meet in secret and Jason secures her help so as to be able to complete the challenges laid out by her father.

Medeia gives Jason a potion that makes him immune to fire, gives him crucial advice on how to defeat the chthonic men, and puts the dragon to sleep so Jason can take the Golden Fleece. After committing these deeds, betraying her father, Jason and the Argonauts flee Kolchis taking Medeia along with them. During their flight Aietes attempts to hinder their escape and Medeia and Jason murder Medeia's younger brother Aspyrtos. Jason and Medeia then return to Iolcos, Jason's homeland, where Medeia murders the king Pelias for which they are both sent into exile.

In exile they flee to Corinth where the King Kreon accepts them. While there Jason leaves Medeia in order to marry the princess of Corinth and become royalty once more. In her resultant vindictive rage Medeia murders King Kreon, his princess daughter, and the two children she had with Jason. Medeia leaves Jason destitute and flees to Athens where King Aegeus takes her in. Eventually Medeia attempts to kill Theseus upon his return to Athens while reclaiming the throne and she is sent into exile for the final time. Both Jason and Medeia eventually die in anonymity.

Structural Components of the Myth of Jason and Medeia

Over and Undervaluation of Familial Bonds

The Myth of Jason and Medeia is centered on key pairs of opposites. These pairs and the tension between their components illuminate the inner workings of the myth and characters. The first pair of structural columns, and the most central in the myth of Jason and Medeia is the under and overrating of family relationships. This pair of columns is near identical to the columns Levi-Strauss created in his inaugural structural analysis “The Structural Study of Myth,” the over and underrating of blood relations in the myth of Oedipus. As Levi-Strauss did, here is a chart of the key instances of the over and undervaluation of family which constitute the columns:

<p>1. Overvaluation of blood family ties</p>	<p>2. Undervaluation of blood family ties</p>	<p>3. Overvaluation of marital family</p>	<p>4. Undervaluation of marital family ties</p>
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Jason impregnates Hypsipyle

Jason leaves Hypsipyle forever

Jason manipulates Medeia into marrying him

Medeia helps Jason and abandons her family

Medeia murders Apsyrtos

Medeia causes Pelias' daughters to murder him

Jason pursues the princess of Corinth

Jason leaves Medeia

Medeia murders Kreon and his daughter

Medeia murders her and Jason's children in revenge

Jason and Medea under and over value family relations in a similar way to characters in the myth of Oedipus do with only blood family relations.

The structural presence of over and underrating family in the myth of Jason and Medea unites Jason and Medea as an interlocking pair that are inherently linked. Both have improper relations with the valuation of family of both kinds simultaneously but these relationships are inverted between them. Jason overrates his blood family and family line while simultaneously underrating his marital family whereas Medea overrates her marital family while underrating her blood family. They are similar yet opposite and function as a pair. And their unification is only visible when all versions of the myth are analyzed to reveal the patterns and structural components of their patterns of behavior. These columns reveal the myth's interrogation of the oppositions inherent in blood family and marital family and the navigation of the tension between those two.

The notion of Medea practicing improper familial relations has been discussed amply in the literature surrounding the various iterations of the myth, albeit not in a structural, totalizing way that discusses all accounts. For example, Johnston (1997) ties Medea and her infanticide to the folkloric paradigm of the reproductive demon, which Euripides, author of the tragedy *Medeia*, the most famous extant example of her filicide, inherited. She argues that this paradigm was associated with the cult of Hera Akraia where Medea buries her children at its temple. The article demonstrates the ancient cultural grappling with the paradox and problem of appropriate family relations and the presence of that struggle in the myth of Medea.

Seth Schein (1990) interrogates a similar concept, the notion of *philia* and family and their inversions and subversions in Euripides' tragedy *Medeia* in order to rethink traditional institutions and values. He performs a similar project as this one and reveals the prevalence

and importance of concepts of family in the myth, which provides useful conclusions and justification for this project. However he analyses only Euripides' tragedy and therefore his analysis is not broad enough in scope to reveal the deep structure of familial misvaluation within the myth as a whole. And he does not make the distinction between two key types of family, blood and marital which is necessary to understanding the nature of Medeia's, and Jason's character.

Medeia perpetually overrates her marital ties, underrates her blood family ties, and is defined by her propensity to do so. Her entrance into the myth of Jason and the Argonauts is defined by it, for she enters when she chooses to betray her father, Aietes, and help Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece so as to marry him. From Pindar to Euripides to Apollonios Rhodios to Valerius Flaccus, all versions include this betrayal as the key turning point in Medeia's life. This moment is described or referenced in almost every work about Jason, the Argonauts, and Medeia. Medeia undervalues her natal, blood family and chooses a foreigner and stranger over her father who wants to deny Jason the fleece. She values who should be the most important man in her life less than a man who arrived on her shores a few days prior. Medeia is aware that she will be an exile and be forced to escape as soon as she helps abscond with the fleece and thus she knowingly leaves behind her sister, brother, father, and mother in this single act for. In this single act she simultaneously overvalues Jason and the family she intends to create with him and undervalues her entire blood family by betraying them.

Medeia in all versions murders her brother so as to stay with Jason. Depending on the version Medeia's brother Aspyrtos is either a small child (Ovid, Pherecydes, Apollodorus, etc.) when Jason comes to retrieve the Golden Fleece or a young man just beginning to attain his martial prowess (Apollonius Rhodius, Valerius Flaccus, etc.). But no

matter his age Medeia, shortly after helping Jason take the fleece, murders him during her escape from Aietes and Kolchis. She either: kidnaps Aspyrtos as a child and chops him into little pieces in order to dump the chunks into the sea so as to slow down Aietes who is in hot pursuit of them or she and Jason conspire to murder him in a plethora of ways involving deception and ambush or open battle. Either way, Medeia murders her next of kin for a potential husband, a clear undervaluation of her natal family and overvaluation of her betrothed one. Bremmer (1997) argues with cultural analysis of ancient Greek sibling relations, using sociological as well as literary sources, that the brother sister relationship was the most precious and sacred family relationship. Therefore, the most heinous act Medeia could perform is the murder of her brother and by doing so she severs her blood familial relations in the most total and complete way possible. This analysis succinctly demonstrates the magnitude of Medeia's undervaluation of her natal family and over valuation of Jason's family to commit such an act for Jason's sake. The different accounts of Aspyrtos age reveal the structural importance of Medeia's improper familial valuation, for no matter the version and how it has been changed Medeia performs the horrendous act of fratricide. They are different ways to reveal the same truth about Medeia.

Medeia not only undervalues her own blood relationships for her marital family but undervalues others' blood family ties as well. For example, She brings about the murder of king Pelias after Jason urges her to because of the wrongs he committed against Jason. Medeia once again overvalues her marital family with Jason and commits murder using Pelias' children. Medeia does not poison Pelias or cast a magic spell on him but instead tricks his daughters into cutting him up into little pieces for her, evoking the pieces she cuts Aspyrtos into. The murder seems to be a structural echo of her agency. Medeia's default *modus operandi* appears to be the underrating of blood family, so much so that she causes

another royal family to severely undervalue their own kin and commit the same improper actions as she does. The sisters undervalue their family, albeit accidentally, and Medeia's infamous familial values spread.

Medeia's final and most horrific act is the murder of her own children. Not insignificantly, this murder is a direct consequence of her last violent deed, murdering Pelias, because she and Jason fled into exile after the murder and subsequently had to take refuge in Corinth. This is where, in both Euripides' and Seneca's *Medea*, a dispossessed Jason meets his new wife, the daughter of king Kreon, which is what drives Medeia to the brink. Medeia overvalues respect and the honoring of marriage oaths so much so that she commits atrocities in order to carry out, what she thinks is justice for slights of much smaller caliber. Medeia overvalued and committed atrocities for Jason at every stage of the myth and so when he abandons her it leads her to undervalue and murder their children. This is her last and most extreme act of blood tie underrating for it destroys a mother's most cherished connection and sacred bond. Both marital and blood families are a part of one's family, yet Medeia clearly swings from the two antithetical poles of overrating marital family and underrating blood family bonds, so much so as to commit the ultimate atrocity of filicide. Medeia has structurally improper relationships with her family in both directions and the nature of these familial relations is present throughout the myth. Medeia is defined by her overvaluation of marriage, which causes her undervaluation of blood family.

Jason is similarly defined by improper valuation of family except he overvalues his blood family while undervaluing his marital family. The most prominent feature of Jason's improper relations with marital family is his systematic abandonment of the women whom he is romantically involved with. A key component of the myth is Jason's quest to secure a royal and august name for himself as well as a similarly honored bloodline. In order to

achieve these goals he repeatedly uses and manipulates women who serve his purposes and goals only to then abandon them as soon as they are no longer of use to him. He forms a family with them so as to have children, continuing his bloodline, and then gets rid of them undervaluing them for their contribution to his quest and life. For example, with Hypsipyle he sleeps with her so as to have a child with her and guarantee his bloodline is continued but as soon as he does so he promptly leaves and gives her no second thought.

Jason marries Medeia out of necessity so he can acquire the Golden Fleece, for he is incapable of doing so without her, thereby completing his quest and increasing his reputation and improving his name. She is also a princess who ensures his lines royalty status and he of course has children with her. But once they are all expelled from Jason's homeland and become exiles in Corinth Jason jumps at the possibility of becoming royalty once again. Jason quickly abandons Medeia, for she no longer furthers his purposes, either with magic to attain his goals such as murdering Pelias or acquiring the fleece nor through royal status to lend him and his children a good name and standing. Kreon's daughter however has the ability to restore his status as a prince and eventually king so Jason moves to use her as well. Jason undervalues his oaths to his families and takes them freely, whenever they serve his aims, and breaks them just as freely, whenever they no longer serve his goals. Throughout these episodes Jason overvalues his status as well as the status of his bloodline, future blood family, so much so as to commit injustices abandoning women to atrocities such as murdering Pelias so as to potentially take the throne. He invariably then undervalues the marital families he has created for the prospective ones that have the potential to better further his aims. In a quest to secure the best possible bloodline and family Jason undervalues the women he is involved with in the pursuit of potential bloodline he overvalues.

Jason not only undervalues the women he has relations with but undervalues all aspects of his marital family and in doing so overvaluing his blood family. In “Ritual mutilation in Apollonios Rhodios’ *Argonautika*” Reinhart Ceulemans engages in the debate over why Jason murdered Aspyrtos and concludes it was to avert the vengeance of the victim’s ghost. Cleumans reveals one potential motive for Jason’s undervaluation of his soon to be family-in-law but more importantly provides a basis for analysis of Jason’s motivations explaining why he undervalues his family-in-law. It is plausible that Jason undervalues his in-laws because he overvalues his bloodline.

For example, in the *Argonautika* Jason plots and murders grown Aspyrtos, his brother-in-law to be, in an act of undervaluation because he needs to escape with and marry Medeia, so as to have kids with her, an overvaluation of his bloodline. In the versions where Aspyrtos is a child and Medeia cuts him into pieces Jason is at least complicit with the atrocity if not responsible for the planning and impetus because of his drive to marry her and vice versa, which causes Medeia to commit the deed. Jason commits many acts of over and undervaluation of various iterations of his family and certainly reaffirms the essential component of improper familial relations with the myth.

Jason forms the counterpart to Medeia in his actions for he similarly suffers from improper familial relations, only in reverse. That is, Jason overvalues his blood family and undervalues his marital family while Medeia undervalues her blood family and overvalues her marital family. The centrality of improper familial relationships reveals its fundamental structural nature in the myth. Jason and Medeia form an inverted pair, each over and undervaluing the opposite of the other, which ties Jason and Medeia together and draws structural parallels between them. Jason and Medeia interlock to form an improper whole; each acts improperly on two related, yet in tension, aspects of the same issue in opposite

ways. They embody all four improper ways to interact with family and form one cohesive whole.

Not only do the two main characters of the myth structurally under and overvalue family relations the whole myth is built from these axes of improper valuation. Examples of all the kinds of familial over and undervaluation can be found throughout the myth, as seen in the following chart, Jason and Medeia are simply the most pertinent examples of the structural importance of family relations. For example, in both the *Argonautikas* by Valerius Flaccus and Apollonios Rhodios the tale of the Lemnian women is told. The Lemnian women neglected Aphrodite causing her to make the women smell repugnant to their husbands. The husbands subsequently took concubines from Thrace and stopped sleeping with their wives, a clear undervaluation of their marital family. This enraged the Lemnian women who then murdered their husbands, an overvaluation of marital family inasmuch as they committed murder due to wounded egos. The Lemnian women valued their marital family so much they killed for it. Further, this episode led Hypsipyle to need a husband for all the men on the island had been killed, which caused her to seduce Jason. And Jason promptly undervalued the family he had with her, a promise of marriage and his unborn child, abandoned her and quickly married Medeia.

A pertinent example in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautika* is that Pelias and Aison are brothers. Pelias in all accounts intentionally sends Jason to fetch the Golden Fleece so that he will die, but in this account Jason is Pelias nephew and therefore the sending of Jason is a severe undervaluation of blood family. And as soon as Jason has left for Kolchis Pelias murders his Aison because Jason took Pelias' son with him on the quest in retribution for being sent on a suicide mission. Both of these acts are examples of the undervaluation of

blood family, one of a brother killing a brother and a cousin kidnapping or convincing by manipulating a cousin. Further Pelias' men hack to death Aison's younger son.

The under and overvaluation of blood and marital family ties is present and persistent throughout the myth of Jason and Medeia. This structural presence of improper familial relations binds together Jason and Medeia and reveals their structural similarities and differences as an interlocking pair. Further, these notions epitomized by Jason and Medeia unify the whole myth. The myth interrogates the notion of family and how to navigate the tension between two equally important facets of family, marital and blood. One action is often simultaneously both the underrating of one type of family and the overrating of the other. In their attempts to secure one kind of family the character is self-defeating and the improper balance undermines the character's actions.

Traditional Heroic Values or Lack Thereof

There is no clear traditional epic hero, as in the Homeric epics, in the myth of Jason, Medeia, and the Argonauts. Traditional Greek heroes are, as Bongie (1977, 30) puts it, "men and the system of heroic values evolved as a male ethic based on the idealization of the successful warrior whose bravery and physical prowess in battle and athletics and whose persuasive powers in debate enabled him to impose his will on lesser men." A hero is a *man* who is courageous and brave and neither Medeia nor Jason, the two candidates for hero in the myth fit that description. Even though Medeia often performs the heroic deeds of the myth she cannot be a Greek hero by default because she is a woman. And further she performs the deeds of the myth by means of magic or trickery not physical prowess. Jason cannot be the traditional hero either, for he is often cowardly, deceptive, and manipulative and therefore lacks courage and honorable character. He often shrinks from challenges,

gives up hope of completing his quest, requires the aid of a woman to complete heroic tasks, and breaks sacred oaths. At the start of the *Argonautika* the crew of the Argo selects Herakles as leader, which prompts Green (2007, 206) to remark: “Jason cannot compete with this great mass of heroic brawn [Herakles] (and indeed is only made leader at Herakles’ behest).” From the start of the poem it is clear that Jason is far outclassed and is not a traditional manly hero.

Traditional heroic values and their lack thereof form another pair of structural columns, as demonstrated by the following chart. In regards to traditional heroics Jason and Medeia once again interlock to form a pair of similar opposite. Jason is a man and ostensibly the hero of the myth yet he fails his heroic role and is persistently non-heroic. Whereas Medeia is a woman and should not be the hero of the myth yet often performs the role of a hero, albeit in a non-heroic way. In the myth of Jason and Medeia there is a significant questioning of traditional heroic values as well as a lack of a clear hero. The non-heroic values present in the myth unite Jason and Medeia in a similar way as improper familial valuation does for they are structurally entrenched on opposite ends of an issue once again, this time navigating heroics.

Despite this lack of a hero in the myth Bongie (1997, 29) argues, in regards to Medeia from Euripides’ *Medeia*, “Medea feels keenly any threats to her status... Medea’s character the key to which is not rejected love and jealousy, but a sense of slighted honour and a fear of loss of respect and status. Such a character is not, of course, an unusual type in Greek literature: the whole of the *Iliad* revolves around the reaction of Achilles to an insult to his honour.” Medeia is quite similar to the greatest hero of all time in Greek mythology, living dedicated to a code of honor to the nth degree. She similarly detests people who do not honor their word and attacks Jason for not doing so in Euripides’ *Medeia*. Medeia therefore

remarks to her nurse: “To my mind, the plausible speaker who is a scoundrel incurs the greatest punishment. For since he is confident that he can cleverly cloak injustice with his words, his boldness stops at no knavery” (Eur. *Medea*: 580-585). Achilles espouses a similar sentiment in the *Iliad*: “I hate that man like the very Gates of Death/who says one thing but hides another in his heart” (Hom. *Iliad* 9:378-379) He despises those who say what they do not mean and derides them as non-heroic. Medeia is simultaneously not a hero and shares major attributes with the most famous Greek hero.

Medeia does perform many of the ‘heroic’ actions of the myth. Women in ancient epic poetry were often far from the heroic figures that persevered and overcame challenges and many scholars have written about this disparity. Many of these criticisms have centered on the role that gender plays in traditional heroics, such as Hopman (2008) who argues that Medeia’s revenge in Euripides’ *Medeia* ends the misogynist heroic tradition in epic poetry of male protagonists. She argues Medeia’s actions metaphorically and symbolically revise and undermine the Argo saga, a famous androcentric Greek myth and epic tale.

Further, McClure (1999) argues that Medeia’s use of blame speech: verbal attacking, accusing, reproaching, etc. as well as rhetorical discourse, a traditionally male activity, lends her heroic credibility. This is especially the case in classical Athens where speech and rhetorical prowess were equated with power. Medeia in the *Medeia* challenges notions of maleness and combines her masculine discursive skills with feminine appeals of supplication to form a new discourse and in the process of doing so inverts traditional gender roles. This inversion of traditional, male oriented, values and her embodiment of those values bring her a step closer to being a traditional male hero.

Yet Medeia is clearly not a heroic figure in the canon. She does not fully accomplish the goal of subversion of male domination and the creation of a gynocentric epic as McClure

and Hopman contemplate, for she in a certain sense, is disqualified before she begins, because she is a woman. This is manifested in so far as Medeia performs her heroic deeds in often wicked, dishonest, and magical ways. Medeia must resort to these methods due to her lack of traditional heroic qualities such as physical strength to fight in open combat. For example, Medeia murders her and Jason's children in order to get revenge upon Jason for leaving her, a far cry from a heroic duel or battle. Medeia is split between "the outward Medea who is at that moment reacting to rejection by her husband ostensibly in the conventional passive or "female" manner and the other Medea of the Nurse's own experience who is *δεινή* and who does not suffer defeat easily" (Bongie, 1997, 32) She is split between being a mother and a hero and must pick between the two. As Foley (1989, 62-63) puts it, "the masculine heroic self requires the killing of the children and the maternal self defends them. The masculine self wins." Medeia gives up her femininity and her family so as to become a hero yet falls short due to the nature of her actions and the maleness of the heroic.

Even though Medeia chooses the pursuit of the heroic the way in which she does so is deeply unsettling and non-heroic. Segal (1996) contends that Jason's punishment, no matter how deserved, makes the audience uncomfortable. It does so because of Medeia's power, ambiguous status as heroic and the reversal of gender roles such as who is the heroic mover of the action, the woman, or who mourns the dead children, the man. Medeia performs these "heroic" deeds in such a way that push her farther away from the notion of the traditional hero who is straightforward and honest, who overcomes his foes with heroic, manly, courageous deeds. Medeia therefore fails to completely overthrow the "misogynistic and androcentric" myth and become a heroic figure.

Jason may be the male protagonist of the story but he does not possess the heroic attributes of a traditional hero. He lacks courage and conviction and is non-hero frequently throughout the myth. Jason is incapable of acquiring the Golden Fleece by himself every step of the way. He cannot tame the fire breathing bulls without the potion Medeia gives him nor would Jason have been unable to defeat the chthonic men without Medeia's advice on the strategy to employ of throwing rocks to confuse and turn them on each other nor could he have defeated the ever-vigilant serpent guarding the fleece without Medeia's magic. He similarly requires help from a woman, Medeia, to kill both Apsyrtos and Pelias. Jason is dependent on woman to reach his heroic goals and is clearly not a traditional hero who is successful because of his personal martial prowess.

Nor is Jason straightforward and honest either, for he cannot engage in open and honest debate to establish his dominance as Bongie defines as necessary for being a hero. Jason manipulates Medeia in order to receive her help because he is non-heroic and needs a woman's assistance. In Apollonios Rhodios' *Argonautika* he invokes Ariadne and Theseus to enlist Medeia's aid while conveniently leaving out the unfavorable details about how Theseus abandoned Ariadne, in a similar way to which he will abandon Medeia later on. Jason falls short of the definition of a hero on all fronts, physical and honest verbal prowess, and is the non-heroic hero of the myth.

A significant manifestation of the lack of a traditional hero in the myth is Herakles, typically seen as the most traditional and heroic of the ancient Greek heroes. When Jason has assembled the Argonauts to embark on their journey the task of leader selection is given to the crew of the ship who elect Herakles as their leader for he possesses many, if not all, traditional manly and heroic qualities. However, Herakles declines the offer and recommends Jason for the job. This episode demonstrates the tension between old and new

values and the lack of a clear hero or leader at all. The men of the Argo clearly believe in traditional values and Herakles but the very man who possesses them sees the wisdom in yielding to another who is more skilled in other areas such as rhetoric and planning or more sinister manipulation and scheming. Herakles' deference to Jason, who lacks heroic traditional heroic qualities, questions the validity of those traditional values, which exclude both Jason and Medeia from being a hero.

Once the journey is underway Herakles is left behind by his crewmates on an island in the middle of the ocean in almost every version of the myth. Herakles' manly attributes of divine strength and endless courage are what lead to his downfall and being left behind. Green (2007, 228) remarks after Herakles breaks his oar in the *Argonautika* while rowing like a mad man or animal, "it is ironic that the uncontrolled violence that breaks his oar should lead, step by step, to his [Herakles'] loss of Hylas and his severance from the expedition." Herakles went to look for wood for a new oar and while doing so was enraged like a beast in the woods and left behind. Herakles being left behind reveals the myth of Jason and Medeia's propensity to abandon traditional heroes and heroic structures. Herakles and the traditional hero are out of place in the myth and are incongruous with the myth's structural content and must be metaphorically left behind.

In Valerius Flaccus' much more traditionally heroic oriented Silver Age Latin epic the *Argonautika*, where Jason is painted in a much more traditionally heroic light than in most other versions inasmuch as he is less manipulative, more honorable, straightforward, and performs manly tasks such as fighting, Hercules is still left behind on a remote island. Traditional manly heroic values are coveted in the poem and Hercules is seen as a paragon of martial prowess. He is described and thought of by the narrator and characters to be an exemplar of proper conduct and values. Hercules performs an amazing heroic triumph over

a monster on the island he normally is left behind on, is promised a great reward and carries on with the crew of the Argo—a direct harkening back to traditional heroic values. Further when Hercules does eventually get left behind it is because Hera tricks the Argonauts into leaving him, not because he is consumed with animalistic rage. Even after Hercules has been abandoned he goes on to perform heroic and noble feats, such as rescuing Prometheus from the perpetual torture of having his liver ripped out every day. When called upon to perform a great deed, similar to one of Hercules', Jason meets the challenge even though he is “lesser than Hercules,” which reinforces the value placed on traditional heroics and Jason not embodying them. Despite this idealization of traditional heroics the structures of the myth of Jason, the Argonauts, and Medeia are too deeply ingrained with heroic value problematizing, subversion, and questioning and so Hercules is nonetheless left behind. The desired traditional hero is left behind, literally, in the myth.

Despite Jason's apparent shift in character to the more traditionally heroic, in the last scene of the *Argonautika* Jason is convinced by his previously honorable crew to abandon Medeia because her brother Aspyrtos is closing in on them with a fleet of enemies. Jason, despite Medeia's essential help in acquiring the fleece, which she abandoned her family for, agrees and plans to abandon her on the island right before the poem abruptly ends. Valerius Flaccus demonstrates his clear sympathies and preferences for Hercules, what he stands for, and a more “heroic” Jason yet his attempt to affirm traditional heroic values and undermine the work of questioning heroic values defeats itself. Valerius Flaccus must leave Hercules behind to stay within the canon, plot, and structure. Jason must always betray Medeia or at least contemplate it. The myths of Jason and Medeia are defined by the leaving behind of traditional heroic values.

In a certain sense, to understand the myth of Jason and Medeia one must understand the values and ideals or lack thereof in the myth. Further, traditional structures are undermined but new clear-cut and readily intelligible new structures are not necessarily revealed to replace them. The question of what heroic values are is raised but not quite answered. Segal (1996) demonstrates the outcome of these structures and this notion extends beyond heroic values to familial relations, sacred oaths, etc. and reveals the core of the myth. The myth of Jason and the Argonauts can be understood as improper relations to many, if not all, aspects of life (marital and blood family, heroic values, etc.) and the uncertainty of heroic values provides an example of the questioning that the myth prompts and performs. The lack of an answer to the question of traditional values provides an impetus for reflection and therefore the lack of a clear answer to what a hero should be, is not an accident but necessary.

The persistent lack of a hero and the questioning of what a hero is reveal key components, structures, issues, and ideas dealt with in the myth of Jason and Medea that constitute its fabric. Jason and Medeia are an interlocking pair once more in that they are both not heroes in the traditional sense yet act as the myth's protagonists and share characteristics with heroes. They are disqualified for different reasons but are functionally the same. They both strive to be a hero by their own means and in the process question what a hero truly is.

Mythical Underpinnings of the Myth of Jason and Medeia

Approach to Mythical Allusion in Reference to Jason and Medeia

The myth of Oedipus is constituted of numerous versions and accounts, which are key to understanding the myth, and Levi-Strauss incorporated these many versions and

variations of the myth of Oedipus in his inaugural structural analysis. He included characters such as Labdakos, Oedipus' grandfather, in his structural columns chart who does not appear anywhere in Sophocles' tragedies which he uses as the base for his analysis. Similarly, an essential structural element of the myth of Jason and Medeia is that of mythical allusion and interconnection. Mythical allusion constitutes the fabric of the myth of Jason and Medeia and these allusions allow for interpretation, analysis, and understanding of the core aspects of the myth. Although a similar process in constructing structural columns and components of the myth of Jason and Medeia from the various sources as Levi-Strauss did for the myth of Oedipus, this analysis goes further in that columns are not only built but tensions between these components are introduced as well.

My method will follow Bulloch (2006) who analyzes many aspects of the myth of Jason and Medeia, specifically in the *Argonautika* by Apollonios Rhodios, by focusing on mythical allusion in the cloak presented to Jason by Hypsipyle. Bulloch treats the myth as a whole as presented in the epic. Bulloch analyzes the different ways direct allusions to other myths are incorporated into the myth of Jason and Medeia and goes on to discuss the problems underlying traditional readings of the *Argonautika*. He suggests his own new interpretation that these allusions are refractions of surface appearances and often contain contradictions within themselves. Bulloch attempts to treat the whole myth in a total way and understand it through its often-confusing mythical interconnections by focusing on one source and using one symbol.

Bulloch (2006, 48) also introduces the deconstructive nature of these allusions. He begins his analysis by stating that the cloak is not merely allusive with its various mythological scenes but the scenes are "a refraction between surface appearances and underlying signification, and sometimes open contradiction." This connects allusion to other

myths to its structural underpinnings and the simultaneous undermining inherent within the myths, revealing the hidden implications and subversive elements within the allusions.

Bulloch creates a valuable precedent as well as relevant specific observations to expand by using many authors and renditions. Studying all of the versions of the myth of Jason and Medeia and viewing them collectively unites Jason and Medeia for they both employ mythical allusions in ways that are self-undermining and contradictory. The mythical allusions themselves provide invaluable information about the characters and events in the myth but how they are used by the characters provides equally as much information about the characters.

Allusions in the Myth of Jason and Medeia

Theseus and Ariadne

Frequent allusions to Theseus, the hero of Athens, and Ariadne, the princess of Crete, are made throughout the various renditions of the myth of Jason and Medeia and Theseus and Ariadne form an informative parallel and reveal the deeper structures of Jason, Medeia and their relationship. These allusions serve as a foreboding parallel for Jason and Medeia with varying implications color the relationship between Jason and Medeia by comparing them to the infamously dishonest and selfish Theseus and the abandoned, betrayed, and naïve Ariadne. A sense of foreboding and negative foreshadowing is added to Jason and Medeia's relationship by these allusions. This negative coloring reveals the ominous implications of many of the events of the myth given knowledge of Theseus and Ariadne's relationship, which helps to reveal the core nature of Jason and Medeia's relationship and myth.

As mentioned above, Bulloch analyzes many aspects of the myth and *Argonautika* by focusing on mythical allusion in the cloak Hypsipyle gives to Jason. Within the cloak are veiled references to Ariadne and Theseus and Bulloch (2006) argues that not only does the cloak reference Ariadne but also that Ariadne dominates the moral landscape of Jason's world. He goes on to argue that Ariadne and Theseus' abandonment of her establish a paradigm for understanding the betrayal and moral ambiguities within the *Argonautika*. Expanding upon his notion, this paradigm defines the myth of Jason and Medeia as a whole, not only in the *Argonautika*, because of the allusions to Theseus and his abandonment throughout many renditions of the myth.

Bulloch further sees the cloak as a kind of window into the hidden world of mythical allusion to help understand the moral ambiguity and familial betrayal present in the myth. Expanding this notion reveals Jason for who and what he is as, selfish and in pursuit of personal gain through renown and bloodline. It also shows the actions he will undertake such as abandoning his many marital families or being cowardly and non-heroic. In addition, this window reveals what will befall Medeia, who she will become and the familial betrayal she will commit. From these similarities and allusions Bulloch (2006, 68) draws connections to other myths, "Hypsipyle always was likely to resemble Ariadne, and Jason always was likely to behave towards Medea the way that he did to Hypsipyle, and the way that Odysseus did to Calypso, Circe, and Nausicaa." This notion rings true and extends further to the entire myth of Jason and Medeia. The key to understanding the myth of Jason and Medeia is to understand it through its parallels and allusions to other myths. The myth draws many connections to other myths, which are illustrative of the deeper content as well critical of it. The allusions to Ariadne and Theseus predict the outcome and events of Jason and Medeia's

relationship as well as articulate how Jason is disingenuous and self-defeating by employing the allusion between him and Theseus himself.

Most basically Ariadne and Theseus are a clear parallel for Jason and Medeia in the arc of their stories. In both cases the hero of the myth, Theseus or Jason, needs help accomplishing his heroic quest, defeating the Minotaur or retrieving the Golden Fleece, due to the impossibility of his task but also their lack of traditional heroic skills such as courage and strength. The hero subsequently receives help from the princess of the land, Ariadne providing Theseus with string to navigate the Labyrinth or Medeia making Jason fireproof, giving him advice about the chthonic men, and putting the dragon to sleep. This is the female protagonist acting improperly heroic by performing the tasks of the hero for them. After the heroic feat has been accomplished the hero then abandons the princess when it is expedient for him to do so, Theseus leaving Ariadne on Naxos or Jason leaving Medeia to marry the princess of Corinth. In other words, when the hero undervalues the marital family he has formed and casts it aside.

Given the unmistakable similarities and readily apparent parallels embedded in the two myths, myth tellers choose and are able to create ample allusions between them. An illustrative example is when Jason compares himself to Theseus and Medeia to Ariadne in the *Argonautika* (3: 997-1008), by Apollonios Rhodios. Jason voices this comparison upon his first meeting with Medeia in an attempt to convince her to help him acquire the Golden Fleece. Aietes has presented Jason with the seemingly impossible task of sowing the field with dragon's teeth using the fire breathing bulls and begs Medeia for assistance, for "without you [Medeia], I'll never come out on top in this grievous contest" (Ap. Rhod. *Argonautika* 3:988-989). In order to persuade her he promises to make a return for her and speak her good name as Theseus did with Ariadne. He explains that Ariadne nobly saved

Theseus from a wretched circumstance and that Ariadne is favored by the immortals because of the wisdom she displayed by helping him against her father's will and fleeing. Jason conveniently, for himself, leaves out that after Ariadne and Theseus escape Crete Theseus abandons her on the remote island of Naxos.

This episode reveals several things about Jason, chiefly his untrustworthiness. As Bulloch (2006) has argued, Jason's reference to Ariadne and his subsequent shiftiness exhibit his manipulative and calculating nature. Apollonios knew his audience would be familiar with the common myth of Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne and therefore knew that it would be immediately evident that Jason was being dishonest by omission, suppression even, of unfavorable details. Not only does this episode explicitly show Jason to be a liar but it also draws a parallel between the two figures, which Jason may not like to be known. Jason suppresses the middle of the myth where Theseus is selfish and manipulative and in doing so reveals himself to be as selfish and manipulative as Theseus, thereby informing our understanding of Jason's personal character. By leaving out the middle of the myth he defeats himself because he's afraid of the comparison. Jason knows that he is being disingenuous and yet his suppression of unflattering details reveals a key aspect of the allusion, Jason is perhaps unwittingly revealing himself to be more like Theseus than he would like. The self-undermining nature of his allusion is key; Jason employs the allusion to ostensibly demonstrate his trustworthy nature and by doing so demonstrates the opposite to be true. His allusion is self-defeating and understanding this aspect of the allusion predicts and contextualizes the failure and events that will befall Jason and Medeia's relationship.

This episode also reveals Medeia's initial innocent nature, which will change drastically as the events of the later parts of the myth unfold. The allusion provides pessimistic foreshadowing and a sense of inevitable doom, for the reader knows that

abandonment is impending. They are familiar with the end of the relationship between Jason and Medeia untold in the *Argonautika*, which results in double filicide. By employing an allusion between Ariadne and Medeia the violence and betrayal that will come to symbolize their relationship is hinted at insidiously.

Jason will inevitably abandon Medeia but she is less helpless than Ariadne and strikes back with everything she has, murdering her and Jason's children. Perhaps Jason wishes Medeia to be more like Ariadne so that she will give up hopelessly upon abandonment as opposed to exact the highest form of revenge. This allusion defines and reveals the nature of Jason and Medeia's manipulative, dishonest, and soon to be violent relationship. Jason attempts to impose a mythical allusion on Medeia to serve his own purposes for it would be nicely self-serving for Jason if Medeia turned out like Ariadne and quietly submitted. And so this instance of allusion can be seen as a disingenuous attempt by Jason to impose a mythical connection upon Medeia and manipulate her into becoming Ariadne-like, so she gives up and does not murder the king, princess, and their children. The myth of Jason and Medeia is to be understood through mythical allusion but with the understanding that those allusions are oft employed in a self-interested way that is self-undermining and contradictory.

A distinct but equally revealing connection between the two myths occurs when Valerius Flaccus compares Pelias' rage, which is a result of Jason's timely sea escape from Pelias attempting to murder Jason for kidnapping his son, to king Minos' rage. Valerius Flaccus in his *Argonautika* writes that Pelias felt the rage that Minos did when Daedalus and Icarus flew away without any chance of being brought down due to Daedalus' ingenious engineering. This comparison draws another connection with the story of Ariadne and Theseus by comparing the rages' of unjust kings and further reveals Jason's cunning. Jason's character and abilities are attested to in a less negative sense and the link between the two

myths is strengthened, one king's rage helps understand another's. However the insidious implications of the previous allusions are also present here inasmuch as a comparison to Daedalus escaping Crete is inherently double-edged. Daedalus does indeed escape because of his ingenuity but he is doomed to suffer a life of sorrow and loss because of the death of his hubristic son Icarus. This allusion certainly attests to Jason's cunning but it strengthens his fate as doomed as well.

The connection between these two myths is more complex than mere allusion though. Medeia is intimately connected to Theseus for, after killing Kreon's daughter and her own children in Corinth, she is luckily given safe haven by Aegeus, the king of Athens. Medeia does not accept defeat or her fate and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, upon the arrival of Theseus to Athens to claim his right to the throne she immediately "[wishes] to destroy him" (7:578). Medeia cannot cut her familial losses and perpetually attempts to improve her situation, in this case make her son king instead of Theseus, by means of misguided heroics. Medeia is unsuccessful in her attempt on Theseus' life and is exiled once more. This attempted murder ties into the previous structural columns discussed for Medeia overvalues her family while undervaluing another and demonstrates her non-heroic qualities. Her choice of questionable heroics instead of self-preservation causes her to suffer further. The myth of Theseus and Ariadne not only provides a parallel for Jason and Medeia but also reveals Medeia's nature and patterns of behavior.

There is a genealogical connection between the myth of Jason and Medeia and Theseus and Ariadne, which strengthens the foreboding coloring of Jason, Medeia, and their relationship. Hypsipyle is the granddaughter of Dionysius and Ariadne and thus the myth of Ariadne provides a precedent that predicts the parallel that is followed by later descendants. Jason abandons Hypsipyle like Theseus did Ariadne and then Jason does the same to

Medeia. As Hunter (1989, 208) argues “Hypsipyle-Jason, Medea-Jason, Ariadne-Theseus, and Ariadne-Dionysus are all seen to be of the same pattern and thus mutually illustrative” and thus as Green (2007, 279) elaborates, “there is a whole family history here of unfortunate erotic relationships.” This genealogical connection ties the actions of Jason and Medeia to an older paradigm, revealing the deep-seated nature of improper familial relations in their myth. There is a generational tradition of improper martial family valuation.

However, the two timelines of the myth are far from congruous. In one timeline Theseus is old enough to be Hypsipyle’s grandfather and Hypsipyle has relations with Jason before he meets Medeia. In the other timeline Medeia eventually goes on to try and kill a young Theseus after her entire relationship with Jason has run its course. Although irregular and removed from linear time Ariadne and Theseus are the beginning and end of the myth of Jason and Medeia. Theseus and Ariadne start off the myth with Theseus abandoning Ariadne, which leads to her giving birth to Hypsipyle’s father and by extension Hypsipyle, one of Jason’s earliest “challenges”. And they end the myth for Theseus is the final act in Medeia’s mythic life. Even if these two timelines could not take place in the same mythological world, they both belong to the canon of Jason and Medeia and illuminate and inform different aspects of the myth. This forms a structural component to the myth for Theseus and Ariadne are the beginning and the end of the myth simultaneously. This structural sandwiching demonstrates the interconnectedness of the two stories and the essential nature of Theseus and Ariadne to understanding the myth of Jason and Medeia.

A final connection between Theseus and Ariadne and Jason and Medeia is a real world archaeological argument for the perceived connections between the two myths. Marshall (1997) argues that in classical Athens there was a symbolic trip to Delos of the boat of “Theseus,” which was also reminiscent of Jason’s Argo and drew real world connections

for the ancient Greeks between the two heroes. Marshall (1997, 357) bases her argument on Euripides' *Medeia*, in which Medea predicts Jason's death from the rotting mast of the Argo falling on him. She contends that "because of the annual mission to Delos, the nautically minded and ritually aware audience of Euripides will have had some familiarity with the concept of a rotting ship... members of the audience in 431 will on some level have made associations between the rotting Argo and the ship said to have been sailed by Theseus." Therefore, while watching Euripides' tragedy the Argo the juxtaposition between the two ships would connect the myth of Theseus with that of Jason and draw parallels and comparisons between the two heroes. And this connection would especially call to mind their similarities, chiefly that both heroes are dependent on the assistance of a princess whom they abandon once said princess is no longer useful.

The thread of connection between the myths is present throughout many versions of Jason and the Argonauts but only after revealing its individual presence in all of the accounts does the power and relevance of the allusion become clear. Investigating and studying the mythical allusions present in all accounts, across all accounts, of Jason and Medea allows for much more profound and comprehensive analysis of the myth as a whole, as opposed to analysis of one work or author. The totalizing analysis reveals the omnipresence of Theseus and Ariadne and unites Jason and Medea as a pair for they both tie into the common allusion. The allusion adds to the understanding of both of them individually as well as in relation to each. This analysis as a whole, by using other myths has not been preformed before and understanding these allusions is the key to understanding the myth and is the work of this project going forward.

The House of Laius

The structure of family relations in the myth of Oedipus is relevantly and masterfully demonstrated in Levi-Strauss' (1955) seminal mythological structural analysis in which he argues for the structural investigation of mythology by revealing the columns of familial under and overvaluation in the myth of Oedipus. Oedipus and his relations, as argued by Levi-Strauss, are the most well known example of a myth that is centered upon the under and overvaluation of family. In the House of Laius the improper familial relations range from Oedipus murdering his father and marrying his mother to Polynices and Eteocles killing each other to Antigone burying Polynices in defiance to Kreon burying Antigone alive. Improper family relations, albeit with several nuances and caveats, are a central structural component of the myth of Jason and Medeia. Both over and undervaluation of family are structurally present and persistent throughout both myths and given these structural similarities implicit allusions to the House of Laius can be identified and used analytically to examine the structure of the myth of Jason and Medeia.

Ariadne and Theseus provide an explicit parallel for Jason and Medeia through allusion and invocation but the House of Laius: Oedipus, Antigone, Kreon, etc. forms an implicit yet equally informative mythical parallel and series of allusions in the myth of Jason and Medeia. Understanding the implicit allusions adds significantly to the understanding of Jason and Medeia's actions and their myth as a whole, provide a similar foreboding aspect to the myth of Jason and Medeia as Theseus and Ariadne did, and reveal similar things about the nature of the characters. Further, the allusions between the two myths reveal that just as Jason does with Theseus and Ariadne, Medeia uses allusions for her own benefit and in the process suppresses critical information about the allusion. This suppression reveals that disingenuous allusion is a structural component of the myth and that Jason and Medeia once

again form an interlocked pair of similar opposites. In both cases, the allusion has some merit and is true on a direct level but there is a deeper contradiction or mismatch hidden within.

There is an undeniable connection between the canonical myth of Oedipus and its characters and that of Jason and Medeia. The allusions and connections serve to enrich the myth of Jason and Medeia and deepen understanding of the actions, justifications, and implications of the myth as a whole. Understanding the House of Laius is in a certain sense necessary to understand Medeia, Jason and their actions, especially those in Corinth. Jason and Medeia are once again brought together by their structural similarities by examining the allusions made within the myth of Jason and Medeia across various accounts (Pindar's Odes, Euripides *Medeia*, Seneca's *Medeia*, Apollonios Rhodios' *Argonautika*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautika*, etc.) and piecing them all together uncovers a pattern of allusion. Across the seemingly disparate accounts are persistent allusions, which gain significant importance when viewed in tandem with all other similar allusions. Jason and Medeia form a cohesive whole within a mythical world containing persistent structural components, which studies that do not focus on both characters miss. Viewing Jason and Medeia in this totalizing and all-encompassing way is of paramount importance to understanding both Jason and Medeia.

Pindar understood the critical and explanatory nature of the House of Laius to Jason and Medeia and created a connection between the two. In *Pythian IV* Pindar attempts to convince king Arkesilas IV, the ruler of the colony Kyrene in Ancient Greek Libya, through praise, to forgive an exile. He does this by recounting the story of Jason and the Argonauts because Arkesilas was fabled to be a descendant of the Argonaut Euphamos. Throughout the ode Medeia is praised frequently for her courage and wisdom for this ode is an attempt to persuade the king by praising Medeia and his ancestor simultaneously, drawing parallels

between the two. Pindar recounts the tale of Jason, the Argonauts, and Medeia and then he implores Arkesilas to “know now the wisdom of Oedipus” (Pin. *Pythian* 4: 468) in order to solve the riddle of the exile’s pardon. Thus by praising Oedipus’ cunning and wisdom he tacitly compares and conflates Medeia and Oedipus. Oedipus is a useful and productive mythical allusion for Medeia due to the similarity between the myths of Oedipus and Medeia; Oedipus is another way of understanding Medeia.

This allusion between Oedipus and Medeia is particularly interesting for Oedipus “knew the famous riddle and was a mighty man” (Soph. *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1525) but he was also infamous for sleeping with his mother and killing his father. And, Oedipus’ transgressions lead to a plague, his mother’s suicide and blinding himself, which were all results of solving the riddle. The urge to use Oedipus’ wisdom is both positive and negative at the same time. When Oedipus solved the riddle he saved Thebes from a vicious monster yet set into motion his own demise through improper familial relations. This comparison to Oedipus can only be seen as being double edged. Therefore the allusion gives Medeia that same logic. She can be said to have self-destructive, sinister logic and cunning that is similar to that of Oedipus. Oedipus, his wisdom and ill-fated life are a parallel and guide for understanding Medeia. Due to their structural similarities Medeia is doomed to suffer from her cunning and guile like Oedipus did.

An inherent connection between the House of Laius and the myth of Jason and Medeia is that the king of Corinth, where Jason and Medeia are exiles, is named Kreon. While exiles Jason leaves Media in order to marry the king’s daughter and Kreon then moves to remove Medeia from his kingdom. Although this King Kreon is ostensibly a different character than the tyrant of Thebes, as seen in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the name Kreon inherently invokes that tyrant and bring up images of the power hungry tyrant. Therefore the

name Kreon fundamentally functions as an allusion to Kreon of Thebes. The name Kreon was chosen for a reason: to represent the king's tyranny and this connection colors the character of Kreon of Corinth.

King Kreon of Corinth plays an especially large role in both Euripides' and Seneca's *Medeia* and lends himself well to comparative analysis and conflation with Kreon of Thebes beyond etymology. Kreon in the *Medeia* is a ruler concerned with his own power and rule and is therefore harsh and violent. For example, he "planned to expunge this foul infection [Medeia] swiftly with steel; my son-in-law's [Jason's] prayers prevailed" (Sen. *Medea*, 183-184). If Jason, a far from heroic or honorable figure believes a character's intentions or actions too extreme or harsh, it is clear they are brutish and in this case tyrannical. Further, Medeia exclaims, "[Kreon's] unbridled power breaks marriages, drags mother from sons, severs strict pledges and closely knit trust" (Sen. *Medea*, 145). She blames Kreon for the destruction of her marriage, not Jason. She blames his power for luring or forcing Jason to abandon her for Kreon's daughter. This Kreon is violent, villainous and ends royal marriages and therefore the connection between him and his values and the Kreon in *Antigone* who murdered his own niece and broke off her marriage to his son Haimon is readily apparent.

During their exchange Medeia she begs Kreon to postpone her exile for one day in order to supposedly say goodbye to her children but in actuality to plot her revenge. In this debate, responding to Medeia, Kreon says, "you must bear a king's rule just and unjust" (Sen. *Medea*, 195). To which Medeia responds, "unjust kingships never last" (Sen. *Medea*, 196). This exchange bears striking similarity to when Antigone and Kreon debate the justness of his laws in Sophocles' tragedy. Kreon asserts his law is dominant and will not change his mind and Antigone or Medeia counters by stating that his rule will collapse because of it. Medeia seems to be perversely auguring the action of the play where she ends

the king's, supposedly unjust, reign by killing him and his daughter with fire. While simultaneously providing justification for her lethal actions by espousing Kreon's tyrannical nature and misplaced values, which are revealed by the allusion between him and Kreon of Thebes.

Kreon replies to Medeia's pleading by saying "you waste your words. You will never win me over" (Eur. *Medeia*, 325). Kreon clearly states his unchanging, tyrannical nature and the absolute control it has. Medeia remarks to the obstinate Kreon, "How hard it is to turn a mind from anger... and how kingly it appears to the man with proud hands on the scepter never to reverse" (Sen. *Medeia*, 203-206). Kreon is painted to be an unyielding and inflexible tyrant. He is angry and thinks himself right, moreover even if he sees folly in his ways he will not change out of his pride and respect for his power. This is an indirect yet powerful allusion to Kreon of Thebes, who suffers from the same intransigent tyrannical nature until too late and his niece, son, and wife all kill themselves, reveals Kreon of Corinth's tyrannical nature.

The connection between the two Kreontes is both tangible and informative and the myth of Oedipus and his family is structurally present in Jason and Medeia's myth. Kreon's obstinacy and tyrannical rule as well as Medeia's allusions to them add tragic weight and a sense of foreboding to the actions of the myth of Jason and Medeia. The connection between the Kreontes helps understand the tyranny of Kreon of Corinth and strengthens the ties between the two myths. It further reveals the injustice of the proposed marriage Kreon supports between Jason and his daughter as it is endorsed and sponsored by a tyrant. The dark inflection from the comparison with Kreon and by extension Antigone, similarly foreshadow the doom of Jason's proposed marriage to Kreon's daughter, similar in a sense

to Haimon and Antigone. The ever-present doom and betrayal that surrounds the House of Laius is seen to surround Jason and Medeia through these connections.

Given the similarities of the two kings name Kreon the allusion between the Kreontes is much more complicated than drawing a line between and equating two tyrannical kings from mythical Greece. The connection between the two is undeniably present in aspects of Kreon's intentions, actions, and even name yet, despite this, there are in fact two Kreontes that are distinct. Corinthian Kreon appears more reasonable and presents good points in defense of his decision to banish Medeia immediately. He asks her, "Did you hear Pelias before he was punished? Yet speak. Let us make space for your great case" (Sen. *Medeia*, 201-202). Kreon points out how Medeia has committed villainous deeds, far worse than his exile, yet is so reasonable that he will still listen to her undeserving side. In the end all Kreon wants is a safe homeland, free from the murderous and unstable sorceress. He tells her to "In another land—harass the gods" (Sen. *Medeia*, 271). Kreon of Corinth is a concerned father and king who only wants the best for his land, people, and family.

Unlike Sophocles' Kreon, Corinthian Kreon who initially planned to kill Medeia does in fact change his mind and allows Medeia to live in exile. He also allows her to remain in Corinth an extra day after her pleading, for which he is ultimately undone. When Kreon's supposed inalterable resolve to exile Medeia immediately fades he admits, "My nature is not at all a tyrant's and by showing consideration I have often suffered loss. And now, though I see that I am making a serious mistake, nonetheless, woman, you shall you're your request" (Eur. *Medeia*, 325). Kreon expounds he is not a tyrant, so much so he has be significantly negatively affected by his menial nature and even still changes his mind so as to be lenient. Medeia stands to gain from drawing the connection between the king of Corinth and the infamous king of Thebes.

Medeia, Kreon and their relationship transcend the allusion and problematize the connection. This Kreon is more lenient and punishes with exile instead of death after the convincing of his son-in-law, something Kreon of Thebes is infamous for not doing. Yet the connection is undeniably there in aspects of his intentions, actions, and even name. Given the similarities, allusions and parallels between the House of Laius and Jason and Medeia the differences are just as revealing. The discrepancies provide a nuanced view of Kreon and Medeia, Kreon is a tyrant and this informs his actions and character, but he is also more compassionate than Kreon of Thebes. Medeia suppressing Kreon's more genial nature reveals Medeia's character as manipulatively non-heroic as well as under and overvaluing. The problematic allusion sheds new light on the characters of the myth.

The exchange between Kreon and Medeia and her depictions of him reveal Medeia and Jason to be parallel characters once more. Medeia imposes the allusion in order to appear wronged so as to provide justification for her murderous and non-heroic deeds of overvaluing her martial family, Jason, and undervaluing her blood family, her children. Medeia's actions parallel Jason and his use of Ariadne and Theseus in order to non-heroically coerce Medeia, undervaluing her for he will shortly abandon her, so she will help him in pursuit of his elusive over-valued bloodline. The discrepancies in the Kreon episode reveal Jason and Medeia's similar structural natures for Medeia suppresses the sympathetic and kindly aspects of Kreon of Corinth's nature, just as Jason suppressed the negative aspects of Theseus in his allusion so as to maintain his credibility. This disingenuous connection imposition reveals Jason and Medeia once again form an interlocking pair, this time in regards to allusion use, for they perform the same actions but do so in opposite ways.

Mythical allusion is omnipresent in Jason and Medeia and is a key way to understand their myth. Mythical parallels color characters, reveal hidden intentions, and explain events;

they are a means to understand the structure of the myth. These allusions and their structural presence combined with the structural columns of family valuation and heroic values, which are in tension with each other, leads to the last chapter of this work. Mythical allusion and structural columns come together to define the myth, Jason and Medeia in the form of Sisyphus and perpetual ineffectual struggle.

Sisyphus and his presence in the myth of Jason and Medeia

Introduction of Sisyphus

Chapter two demonstrates the importance and effects of mythical allusions within the myth of Jason and Medeia and this chapter is about the one specific allusion: Sisyphus. A Sisyphian aspect defines the myth of Jason and Medeia for Sisyphus is explicitly present in many aspects of their myth and is implicitly present throughout the myth in its entirety. In her chastisement of Corinthian royalty for being Sisyphian, Medeia once again imposes an unfavorable allusion and parallel to serve her own purposes. Similar to her speech about Kreon or Jason about Theseus, Medeia foists a mythical allusion that is self-serving. This forced connection brings further unity to Jason and Medeia as well as revealing the omnipresence of Sisyphus. This allusion is accurate and provides a foreboding parallel which rings true inasmuch as the royal house of Sisyphus is in fact doomed and is destroyed utterly. And, Sisyphus and his struggle, defined by futility and perpetual struggle, are a parallel for both Jason and Medeia's journeys throughout their myth. In their journeys they strive for their respective kinds of family, blood and marital, to only be thwarted again and again by their non-heroic actions as demonstrated in chapter one.

A Sisyphian Genealogy

Holland (2003) leads us to the notion that Sisyphus is relevant to Jason and Medea but this work goes further in seeing his omnipresent connection to their myth. She argues the mythography of the Aeolus, the grandson of Deucalion, and his house “suggest that it was afflicted by an ancestral or inherited curse much like the better known curses of the Houses of Atreus and Labdacus, and that this curse underlies Euripides' *Medea*.” (256) She continues that Sisyphus and his eternal punishment best epitomize this curse and thus are fundamental to understanding the myth of Jason and Medea as a whole. Further, Medea is tied into the cursed family by marriage and begins her cycles of violence and atrocity only upon entry to the cursed line. Medea becomes Sisyphian and afflicted by the curse of Sisyphus because of Jason and then turns her into a violent, vengeful, and vindictive sorceress.

Holland (2003, 256) continues that as a result of recognizing and understanding the curse on the House of Sisyphus and Corinth, Medea's oath-invoked curse calling for the eradication of Jason's bloodline, when he leaves her for the Princess of Corinth and she murders their children, is over-determined. The family history of Jason “provided a better antecedent for Medea's nefarious actions in Corinth than did her personal history.” In other words it was more Jason's fault than Medea's. Jason is inextricably linked to the violence if not the responsible actor. This notion supports subsequent analysis of Jason's overzealous Sisyphian struggle to secure a royal family bloodline, which is perpetually undermined by his own selfish, non-heroic actions. These actions can be readily conceptualized as part of this hereditary curse and therefore coherent reference to the House of Aeolus and Sisyphus is central to the play's mythological imagery and structures. Yet Sisyphus is more connected to Jason and Medea than Holland argues, for he is present throughout many renditions of the

myth, not only Euripides' tragedy and he symbolizes more than a curse that Medeia marries into.

Sisyphus is a ubiquitous component of the structure of the myth's genealogy. The vast majority of significant characters of the myth of Jason and Medeia, including Jason and Medeia, are in some way descendant from Aeolus⁶ and the same cursed Sisyphian house. Those few characters that are not directly linked to Sisyphus by blood relation, Aietes and Medeia, are tied to Sisyphus through marriage, Aietes by Iphossa to Phrixus and Medeia to Jason. A list of Sisyphus' relatives is: his brother Athamas was the father of both Phrixus and Helle who rode the golden haired ram to Colchis and began the whole myth, for without a Golden Fleece Jason has no quest to go on and no need of Medeia's help. Another brother, Salmoneus, is the grandfather of Neleus and Pelias, whom Medeia kills with magic at the behest of Jason for usurping his father's throne and sending him on the seemingly impossible suicidal quest for the Golden Fleece. Cretheus, the last brother, is the father of Aeson and grandfather of Jason, the hero and instigator of the myth.

Lastly, the royal family of Corinth, Kreon and his daughter, is probably descendent from Sisyphus himself. Sisyphus was the fabled first king of Corinth and it follows that Kreon and his daughter are descendants of his original royal line, albeit never explicitly stated in the mythology. And thus Sisyphus is the great-great-grandfather of Kreon and the great-great-great-grandfather of his daughter, whom Jason attempts to marry. Sisyphus as the original king of Corinth, regardless of explicit descent, influences the royal family, land, and Jason by marriage extension. The cursed House of Sisyphus is connected to all of the major actors of the myth and therefore colors the actions of all of them. Sisyphus, his suffering, and cursed nature is inherently tied to these characters and their interconnectedness reveals

⁶ See genealogy appendix 1

their similarities and adds a sinister aspect to their actions. Because of this genealogical presence we are justified in asking whether and how the entire myth of Jason and Medeia is Sisyphean.

In a Sisyphean Setting

Not only are Jason, Medeia, and the entire genealogy of the myth Sisyphean in nature, Corinth, where a significant portion of the action takes place, is Sisyphean in and of itself. When Jason confronts Medeia at the end of the *Medeia* by Euripides after Kreon and his daughter are dead he asks to hold and bury his dead sons and she replies:

“Certainly not. I shall bury them with my own hand, taking them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia, so that none of my enemies may outrage them by tearing up their graves. And I shall enjoin on this land of Sisyphus a solemn festival and holy rites for all time to come in payment for this unholy murder.” (Eur. *Medea* 1378-1382)

The very land the action of the play takes place on is Sisyphean. Corinth is the land of trickery, betrayal, and ingenious guile and in order to honor her children Medeia buries them there and explicitly mentions the dark allusion. Medeia recognizes and acknowledges the Sisyphean struggle, which she and Jason are locked in, and is honoring her children, by acknowledging that they were a painful yet necessary part of that struggle. Medeia is making it known that there is no escape for her and lays out why her children are dead as a result in order to exonerate them.⁷

⁷ It is germane that Medeia buries her children, the collateral damage of her Sisyphean struggle defined by her improper familial relations at the sanctuary of Hera Akraia. For Hera Akraia is the namesake of which for the precedent of the reproductive demon, which Medeia embodies, comes from. It reveals the integral nature of the structural column of improper familial relations to Medeia’s Sisyphean struggle defined later.

Not only is the physical land Sisyphean but because it is everything on it is as well. In Ovid's *Heroides* 12 Medeia denounces Jason for being vain and after monetary gains from his new dowry from Kreon. Medeia goes on to enumerate that her "dowry is you [Jason], safe and uninjured; my dowry is the Grecian youths! Now go compare this, traitor, with the wealth of Sisyphus!" (203-204) Medeia is referring to the wealth of Corinth, which Jason stands to gain through his marriage, further tying the physical location of the myth to Sisyphus and strengthening his connection to it. Medeia reveals that everything the land touches is Sisyphean in nature, the royal family's wealth is Sisyphean simply for its presence in Corinth. The land the tragedy takes place on is inherently Sisyphean and this aspect pervades the actions of the characters on the land. The land and genealogy, the fabric, of the myth are deeply connected to Sisyphus demonstrating his omnipresence throughout and saturation of the myth.

Sisyphus—a Parallel for Jason and Medeia

Sisyphus is fabled to have been the wisest, cunning, and wily man to have ever existed, he was infamous for his intelligence and the unscrupulous ways he employed it (Camus 1955, *Myth of Sisyphus*), for example he was said to have fooled death itself. For his irreverent and sinister cunning he was punished to eternally push a boulder up a hill in Hades. The moment Sisyphus was about to reach the crest of the hilltop the boulder would magically roll back down to the bottom of the hill so he would have to start over again and futilely attempt to push the boulder to the top of the hill once more (Alc. Fr. 38a. 5ff; Theog. 1.701-12; Schol. *Od.* 11. 593; Apollod. 1. 9. 3; Paus. 2. 5. 1; Schol. *Pind. Ol.* 1. 91).

Not only is the framework for the whole myth is Sisyphean but the main characters are as well. Both Jason and Medeia on a broad, yet significant, level are similar in character

and nature to Sisyphus the infamous trickster. Pindar makes a direct allusion between Sisyphus and Medeia in *Olympian* 13. Pindar is honoring Xenophon of Corinth and writes, “singing of the wisdom and the battles of ancient men in their heroic excellence, I shall not falsify the story of Corinth; I shall tell of Sisyphus, who, like a god, was very shrewd in his devising, and of Medeia, who resolved on her own marriage against her father's will, and thus saved the ship Argo and its seamen” (Pin. *Ol.* 13.50-54). In order to flatter his patron, Pindar has chosen to sing about two paragons of intelligence, ingenuity, and independence: Sisyphus and Medeia.⁸

Sisyphus was incredibly shrewd and so was Medeia. Pindar argues by affiliation that in rebelling against her father and devising her schemes to help Jason and save the Argonauts Medeia is equally wise and shrewd as Sisyphus. Sisyphus “was the wisest and most prudent of mortals” (Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* 119) and thus Medeia can be seen as the most cunning and guileful woman of Greek mythology. Sisyphus however, is simultaneously the man most doomed to suffer and thus this comparison foreshadows Medeia’s own doom, unhappiness, and struggle with her particular set of problems: improper familial relations and heroics. Medeia and her story can be interpreted as Sisyphean in character: wise and doomed to suffer, and understanding this in part explains and reveals her nature in addition to clarifying her often-violent non-heroic actions in regards to her family.

Boedeker (1997) argues Medeia reaches a semi-divine status due to how extraordinarily malicious and vindictive she is. Through her unspeakable actions she becomes a force of destruction and a goddess of vengeance. And, this status as violently destructive is established by similes and metaphors. The crystallization of her semi-divine

⁸ It is pertinent that the real king of Corinth is meaningfully affected by the mythological connection between him and Sisyphus, yet another testament to Sisyphus’ deep connection to Corinth and by extension Jason and Medeia.

status further links Medeia to Sisyphus in a sense. Medeia further becomes an extraordinary mythical figure, not a mere mortal woman, by means of her Sisyphian actions similar to how Sisyphus, a mortal king, was immortalized by his unscrupulous actions.

Jason, in addition to being related to him, is broadly similar to Sisyphus and shares many similar characteristics with him. As previously demonstrated Jason is a deceitful, manipulative, and scheming trickster. He frequently hatches complicated and guileful plots for personal gain such as his plan to marry the princess of Corinth or the manipulation of Medeia by alluding to Theseus and Ariadne. Jason is guileful and underhanded just like Sisyphus who for example entrapped death and deceived the gods for personal benefit. Both main characters that vie for power, importance, and heroic status in the myth are strikingly similar to Sisyphus in regards to personal characteristics.

However, what is most fruitful and stems from their connections to Sisyphus is the Sisyphian aspect of the actions of the myth. Jason and Medeia are perpetually stuck in cycles of violence with no hope of escape. They both engage in futile and perpetual pursuits towards an unachievable goal just as Sisyphus does in Hades pushing a boulder up a hill every day to no end. Sisyphus provides a parallel for both Jason and Medeia in that they engage in the same pursuits.

Sisyphus and his struggle are a parallel for Medeia in that she attempts to achieve a successful marital family only to be knocked down again and again by yet another horrendous event. The *Medeia* by Euripides opens with Medeia's nurse in anguish, wishing "that the Argo had never winged its way to the land of Colchis... For then my lady Medeia would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus" (Eur. *Medeia* 1-7). Medeia suffered and sacrificed an enormous amount in order to be with Jason for her Sisyphian struggle is to find familial fulfillment, with Jason specifically, and she is perpetually defeated in its pursuit.

Attempting to secure her marriage to Jason Medeia repeatedly undervalues her blood family (murdering her brother, abandoning her father, etc.) as a result of her dedication or overvaluation of marital family. She suffers set back after set back for Jason and then Jason leaves her nonetheless, a non-heroic action on his part.

Medeia is trapped in a Sisyphean struggle between being a wife versus being a hero. Her being a hero is in tension with her being a mother to her children and wife to her husband for women are not supposed to be capable of performing heroic actions and thus her status as such is jeopardized in her doing so. She attempts to be heroic in order to secure her relationship with Jason by betraying her blood family but ultimately this is self-undermining and in the end, once her chance at being a wife to Jason is finished, she then definitively chooses the heroic option and murders her children so as to defend her *heroic* honor.

Jason and Sisyphean Structurally Similar Seduction

Jason is locked in an inescapable Sisyphean cycle centered around the overvaluation of his hereditary bloodline, an overvaluation of blood family, and the undervaluation of the women he uses to achieve this end, an undervaluation of marital family. Jason pursues an ever-elusive royal bloodline and constantly strives to achieve a better and more august name and line only to be perpetually set back. This pursuit causes him to use and abuse women in an attempt to achieve a more renowned bloodline and in the process he performs many cowardly and manipulative deeds, which reveal his ambiguous heroic status. Jason is torn between ambition in regards to his personal renown, which he will pass on to his offspring, and being a responsible father and husband to the family he has.

Jason's Sisyphean struggle is revealed in Ovid's *Heroides* by the repeatability and non-specificity of his courtship, manipulation, and use of women. This repetitive series of pursuits demonstrates how the wrongs he commits towards his lovers are in pursuit of the same goal: self-advantage in regards to procuring a royal and honorable family, name and bloodline. In *Heroides* 6 Hypsipyle writes a letter attacking Medeia and Jason because she feels that "a barbarian poisoner... allowed a share of the marriage bed that was promised to me [Hypsipyle]" (Ov. *Hero.* 6:19-20). Hypsipyle claims that Jason promised her marriage when he left Lemnos and instead married Medeia while abroad, and in doing so broke his commitment to her. She further argues that Jason did so in order to benefit himself. He impregnated Hypsipyle so as to secure a bloodline by assuredly having children, but then he married Medeia in order for her to preform his heroic work for him and help himself acquire the Golden Fleece. Jason acquired Medeia and dropped Hypsipyle because Medeia had a use for him and Hypsipyle's had run out.

Hypsipyle claims that Medeia performing Jason's heroic work for him was so noticeable that people said, "Not the son of Aeson, but the daughter of Aeites, the Phasian, Took away the Golden Fleece of Phrixus' ram" (Ov. *Hero.* 6:104-105) This story of Jason abandoning the woman from whom he has already received what he wanted, in order to further advance himself is an eerily similar one to that of Euripides' (or Seneca's or any other account) *Medeia* when he left Medeia for Kreon's daughter in order to rejoin a royal family. Jason's seduction and use of women is his Sisyphean struggle, demonstrated by the similarity of his futile struggles and lack of satisfaction. These episodes seen as part of Jason's innate structural character, to use women to perform his deeds for him, further reveals Jason's tenuous status as a traditional epic hero for he does not perform his heroic tasks for himself.

Hypsipyle's letter is prophetic and reveals what Jason is truly after and attempting to acquire through his structural use of women. Hypsipyle first appeals to what Jason is looking for in a woman and therefore proclaims her royal family status. "Behold, I am known as the daughter of Minoan Thoas! Bacchus was my grandfather" (*Ov. Hero.* 6:115-116). Hypsipyle knows what Jason is after; a renowned bloodline and a royal name to go with it, and attempts to lure him back by proclaiming hers. Further, Hypsipyle has had twins by Jason. She has what Jason chases from woman to woman but her offer of a royal lineage comes too late because Jason has already moved on to Medeia. Medeia helped him acquire the Golden Fleece, which allowed Jason to further his renown and fame as a hero, something he values, for his royal and august name. And so, Jason decides to stay with Medeia and her chance of offering him a family instead of Hypsipyle. He is in essence greedy, he wants a certain set of things: family, royal name, fame, but he wants the best he can get and selfishly uses and discards women in an attempt to get a bigger and better set of what he wants.

Hypsipyle's attacks on Medeia also reveal Jason's interests in a marriage for self gain. Hypsipyle calls Medeia "a barbarian poisoner," (*Ov. Hero.* 6:20) a non-Greek woman not worthy of Jason. She goes on to claim that Jason's family disapproves of his marriage and are disappointed and embarrassed. She says, "Your mother, Alcimede, does not approve... Nor your father, whose daughter-in-law comes from the frozen north." (*Ov. Hero.* 6:105-106) Hypsipyle has outlined a key reason why Jason will eventually leave Medeia for Kreon's daughter. Jason is on a quest for the best family name and therefore cannot have it tarnished by being married to a barbarian and embarrassing the family. Jason must have known that Medeia was a barbarian for he marries her in her Asian homeland. Yet for the entirety of their relationship he does not mind, he only discards her when he can move up, with the princess of Corinth. Hypsipyle's comments reveal his goals for each relationship with a

woman as the same and that he always decides to leave the one he has when he can acquire a better self-serving relationship.

The task Jason has set for himself and enacts through his relations with women are Sisyphean insofar they are the same, for every boulder push is identical, and equally futile. Their similarity shows the fruitlessness of his attempts at reaching the top of his hill. Medeia in her letter to Jason, Ovid's *Heroides* 12, conflates Kreon's daughter with herself. "There [Kolchis] Medeia was what the new bride is here [Corinth]: As wealthy as her father is, so was mine, Hers holds Corinth of the two seas; mine holds all the country that lies on the left bank of Pontus, up to snowy Scythia" (Ov. *Hero.* 12:25-28). Medeia sees how they are similar objects in Jason's life. That when Jason met Medeia he wanted to gain the same things he does now from Kreon's daughter. She sees that the only differences between the two women are that Kreon's daughter is Greek, whereas Medeia is not, and that now Medeia, like Jason, is an exile without land and a royal name. Jason wants to improve his status and marry the young Greek princess and has no concern for his old wife. He is heading down the same road he has before. Each new wife is another identical attempt to push his boulder up the hill. Hypsipyle writes a letter about Medeia and then Medeia writes a similar letter about Jason's new wife, the cyclical events are repeating. Each woman seems better than the last and to be a chance to achieve what Jason wants, but in the end he is never satisfied, never reaches his goal and then rolls back down to start over again.

Not only are Jason's perspectives and aims the same for each marriage, the attitudes of the women themselves are near indistinguishable. Both Hypsipyle and Medeia compare the wedding taking place to a funeral, both with a play on the double significance of torches at both occasions, a clear metaphor for Jason's new life beginning and their lives ending, as well as Jason's ambitions simultaneously dying and being reborn. Medeia writes, "Torches

gleamed with blazing fire, and the flute poured out a wedding song for you, But for me a tune more tearful than the funeral trumpet” (Ov. *Hero.* 12:25-28). She feels that the wedding of Jason to Kreon’s daughter is the death of her. And similarly, Hypsipyle feels the same way saying, “Where are the marriage rights, and the torch that would be more fitting to put beneath my blazing funeral pyre?” (Ov. *Hero.* 6:41-42). Jason leaves these women broken in near identical fashion; his method is ruthless and eerily regular. Both women even want to give Jason their children but fear the wrath of the new stepmother, Hypsipyle, rightfully, of Medeia and Medeia Kreon’s daughter. This unity is so structurally significant that Bloch (2000) argues that *Heroides* 6 and 12 have so many similarities and parallel structures that they function as a pair, they derive meaning from and have an internal dialogue with each other.

Bloch argues that *Heroides* 6 offers a fresh and unique perspective on the same set of events that are much more commonly viewed from either the perspective of Jason or Medeia. This new take reveals other integral parts of the myth and is refreshing and necessary for the myth. Bloch (2000, 209) goes on to analyze Medeia’s *querimonia* and concludes it is “coherent and cogent as is it in her intertextual life, and makes Hypsipyle, via her curses, necessary to the Medeia tragedies.” The analysis reinforces how Hypsipyle is inextricably linked to the myth and also supports the above argument that the letters between the two are near identical and reveal Jason’s structural manipulation, abuse, and abandonment of women.

Given this intertextuality, Michalopoulos (2004) examines Hypsipyle’s initial attack on Medeia in which she criticizes Medeia’s use of magic in hopes that Jason would leave her for Hypsipyle to the eventual curse Hypsipyle utters at the end, completing her transformation from peaceful queen to vindictive magic woman. The productive extrapolation is that Hypsipyle’s transformation is most significant because she becomes like

Medeia, and they become more indistinguishable. Hypsipyle now shares a key connection with her enemy. Both Medeia and Hypsipyle attempt to exact revenge, with magic, once Jason abandons them, further reinforcing the structural similarities between their lives, struggles, and abandonment by Jason.

Jason engages in a Sisyphean struggle that is centered around his improper valuation of blood and marital family. He overvalues his blood family with each of the women he has children with in an attempt to gain renown, a royal name and august bloodline. In each attempt he aims to reach the same goals and never reaches them to his satisfaction so he abandons them, undervaluing marital family, and rolls back down the hill to try again with a new woman. Jason is never satisfied and always attempts to climb to the top of his proverbial hill only to knock himself down perpetually by his own greed. And in the end, Jason loses everything because this innate greed and overvaluation of his bloodline leads him to abandon Medeia for Kreon's daughter, which leads Medeia to slaughter his new wife and his children which ends his cycle in failure forever. His cycle is so repeatable that the women he makes a part of it start to become the same. He cannot escape his perpetual struggle that hurts the people he uses while engaged in it and in doing so reveals his questionable status as a hero. He is selfish and unchanging and thus suffers without ceasing towards a futile goal—a striking parallel with Sisyphus.

A Sisyphean Marriage

The omnipresence of Sisyphus is demonstrated throughout many versions and interpretations by direct allusions to Sisyphus himself, a prime example of which is Jason's proposed new marriage to the princess of Corinth. This marriage is Sisyphean in nature and the final act of both Jason and Medeia's Sisyphean struggles. The scene is fully represented

as Sisyphean in the *Medeia* by Euripides and when Medeia's nurse is consoling her about Jason leaving she tells Medeia "You must not suffer mockery from this Sisyphean marriage" (Eur. *Medeia* 404-405). On the most basic level it appears that Jason and his actions are simply being compared to that of Sisyphus the famously dishonest trickster as Kovac (1994) observes. Jason is Sisyphean insofar as he is the deviser of the new self-interested and ill-fated marriage but the parallels between Sisyphus and Jason in this episode go much further.

Jason was exiled to Corinth after murdering Pelias, who reneged upon their agreement, in another futile attempt at a royal life by becoming king of Iolcos. As an outcast Jason could no longer be the patriarch of a ruling family and so he ventured to marry Kreon's daughter so as to end his exile and once again secure his royal status. This also proves futile for Medeia prevents his objective permanently, by murdering his bride-to-be and his only remaining bloodline, their children. Jason's proposed marriage to Kreon's daughter is Sisyphean inasmuch it is his latest, ultimately useless, and final attempt to end his Sisyphean struggle to create and secure a royal bloodline. This act ultimately proves futile and further, destroys his hopes of ever achieving his goals. He attempts to make his children and line royal but then ends with nothing, no children or royal marriage.

The marriage between Jason and Kreon's daughter simultaneously demonstrates Medeia's Sisyphean struggle. The proposed marriage is the most recent roll of Medeia's boulder back down the hill. Ever since Medeia met Jason she attempted to solidify her relationship with him. To win him over she performed many heroic deeds: she imbued him with immunity to fire to conquer the bulls, provided essential information about how to defeat the chthonic men, and to retrieve the fleece from the now sleeping dragon. She betrayed and abandoned her blood family for him, went on to murder her brother to stay

with him, murdered king Pelias for him; the list of things she sacrificed in order to win him and their marital family goes on.

Medeia's boulder is marriage and each horrible pseudo-heroic action she performed for Jason is an attempt to push the metaphorical boulder up the hill. She wants to reach happiness and fulfillment and she attempts to reach that goal by her marriage to Jason, which forces her to perpetually commit questionably heroic atrocities and pushes her back down the hill. Jason's abandonment of her is simply the most recent fall back down the hill and therefore Jason's new marriage being called Sisyphean takes on a whole new meaning in the context of Medeia's struggle. It is her final Sisyphean setback. Medeia goes on to kill her children in a vain effort to gain satisfaction and vindication, which defeats her permanently in her quest for family just as much as it does to Jason. She not only rolls Jason all the way back down but in doing so defeats herself as well. Their children are collateral damage of the unending struggle in which she is engaged.

Medeia makes the Sisyphean connection explicit while she is begging Jason to run away with her in Seneca's *Medea*, and Jason remarks that it will be better for the children to stay with him in Corinth where it will be safe and they will not be exiles. Medeia then remarks, "May those wretches never see the evil day which confounds famed progeny with foul, Heirs of Phoebus with heirs of Sisyphus." (Sen. *Medea* 510-512) Medeia does not want her children to grow up with the cursed and evil offspring of Sisyphus's bloodline. She attacks Kreon's daughter, Kreon and all Corinthians for having and passing down the bloodline of an infamous trickster. The irony being that she was and still wants to be married to a descendent of Sisyphus, shares many characteristics with, is locked in a similar cycle and is often compared to the mythical king. Medeia simultaneously recognizes and chastises the

guile twistedness of Sisyphus while being structurally made up of Sisyphian aspects and parallels.

Medeia makes her actions and their motivations more explicit as well as accidentally self-referential when she draws a further hereditary connection between Jason and Sisyphus and identifies her own actions as Sisyphian. Medeia remarks, “only one be punished more: my husband’s in-law. Let the slipping rock roll Sisyphus back across the crags” (Sen. *Medea* 746-747). As A. J. Boyle points out this is a paradoxical expression because Medeia’s husband’s father-in-law should be her father but in this case she implies Sisyphus on account of Kreon. Medeia, in the midst of the latest iteration of her Sisyphian struggle, still equates Jason to be her husband, yet based on the reality that Jason is not her husband she curses him. The irony in this curse is that if Medeia’s confused attachment to Jason is real to her she is cursing her own family which is apt in unintentional for she and her family are cursed to suffer in a Sisyphian way even if she does not realize it.

Medeia creates a connection between the proposed marriage and the proverbial boulder of Sisyphus and his descendants, especially Jason, rolling back down the hill. Medeia establishes this a direct metaphor comparing the violent, insidious, and guileful actions Jason and Medeia engage in with the boulder Sisyphus futilely pushed up the hill in the Hades. Medeia’s imposition of this metaphor is Camusian in nature for Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus* defines life to be an endless absurd and futile struggle to create meaning and satisfaction in never ending cycles. Medeia makes explicit this Camusian-Sisyphian aspect of the actions in which she and Jason are involved. She highlights how the boulder is the latest and final act of many identical and equally futile acts, which have engulfed both her and Jason’s lives.

The notion of impending doom on account of the rolling boulder demonstrates the Sisyphean nature of the proposed marriage and further reveals that this marriage is Jason's final attempt to push his boulder up the hill and secure a royal name and bloodline, which Medeia in the end causes to roll back down forever. Medeia hopes the marriage is a roll back of Sisyphus' boulder but does not realize the ironic implications for her own demise for Jason ends her Sisyphean cycle for marital familial fulfillment. Jason causes her to murder their kids and in doing so ends Medeia's cycle. The mutual ending of their quest for fulfillment is important structurally in that it reveals that their quests are intertwined and inextricable. The same event is the culmination of their futile pursuits of personal goals, which reveals Jason and Medeia form an interlocking pair once more. They are the same and opposite simultaneously, Jason ends Medeia's hopes of a marital family and Medeia ends Jason's hopes of a bloodline and blood family in the same act.

Sisyphean Land Again

Now that both Jason and Medeia's Sisyphean struggles have been defined and explained it is pertinent to return to the nature of Corinth and how it is inherently Sisyphean. Because the land of the myth is Sisyphean, Medeia calls Kreon and his daughter Sisyphean⁹, which she stands to gain from. Medeia attempts to persuade Jason to not leave her for the princess of Corinth and if the family were fated to suffer and endlessly struggle, Jason would be less likely to marry into the family. This is another instance of revealing allusion which rings true yet is imposed by a partial party. Kreon and his daughter are indeed Sisyphean in a sense but Medeia raises this only to serve herself.

⁹ My "dowry is you [Jason], safe and uninjured; my dowry is the Grecian youths! Now go compare this, traitor, with the wealth of Sisyphus!"

The allusion to Sisyphean wealth is an interesting structural twist inasmuch that it is both positive and ominous. On the most basic level Sisyphus was wealthy and this allusion could simply be an illustrative example of wealth. But more likely this allusion is an attack on Jason's guileful and unscrupulous non-heroic actions, a biting comparison. The wealth he would obtain by this marriage is an embodiment of his propensity to betray and abandon his marital families. The allusion is simultaneously a sinister implication by Medea, which insinuates that accepting this new marriage and wealth will be another blow to Jason in his Sisyphean struggle to secure his bloodline. That by marrying Kreon's daughter so as to finally reach his hilltop this will inadvertently, by Medea's agency, cause him to fall back to square one and have nothing. Medea in essence asks Jason which he desires: the honest help of her Sisyphean struggle or the ill-gotten wealth with sinister implications?

The Inescapable Cycle

The characters in the myth not only see the Sisyphean aspects of various events, places, and people but also explicitly see the repeatability and cyclical nature of the violence in the myth. For example, in Seneca's *Medea*, Medea espouses that Medea and Jason have been locked in cycles of inescapable violence for the entirety of their life together. "The tale of your divorce must match your marriage. How do you leave your husband? As you followed him. Act now. The house born in crime should be left in crime" (Sen. *Medea* 51-55). This claim comes from Medea's opening monologue and exposes the nature of Jason and Medea's relationship. They formed a house based on murder and non-heroic actions, so she intends to end it with murder too. The entirety of their relationship is violent and she cannot escape it until she ends it in a like manner.

Medeia's character is violently Sisyphean, so much so that Graf (1997) argues that the one (of two) universal characteristic of Medeia is that she is always a foreigner. Medeia always comes from afar, does violence and then departs for another far off land. This assertion is overly broad but a good description of Medeia's Sisyphean struggle nonetheless. She performs a nearly identical brutal routine over and over across many versions of the myth in a perverse attempt to secure a family, just as Jason pursues women for his own benefit with a chillingly totalized repeatability. Bulloch (2006) writes, "history can repeat itself, and his [Apollonios Rhodios'] men and women can be trapped by the limitations of character and circumstance." Jason and Medeia's actions have happened before and will again and their personal limitations necessitate their Sisyphean struggles that plague them in perpetuity.

Medeia is torn between being a hero and being a wife in her Sisyphean struggle. She does not want to be happy or to escape her perpetual torment if that would mean forsaking her goals of being married to Jason and becoming a hero. She never can cut her losses and live a happy life without atrocity for she is pursuing two impossible goals. Medeia could have turned around for home instead of murdering her brother, rejected Jason and not kill Pelias, or gone into exile with her children instead of murdering them but she always choose the violent heroic action performed non-heroically, as a women with magic or deception, in an attempt to secure her relationship with Jason. And once she cannot have Jason and he offers her financial help (Eur. *Medea* 609-613) she flat out rejects him and murders their children. Now that she can no longer have her marital family with Jason she would rather be heroically avenged and miserable than happy and subserviently dependent with her children. Medeia prefers to be hurting others and unhappy herself in the futile pursuit of her goals.

Medeia is aware of her shortcomings and violent nature, yet she chooses to embrace them and suffer the consequences in her quest for the impossible, becoming a hero despite being a woman and Jason's wife despite his structural inability to keep one woman as his wife. Medeia remarks about this: "What crime will the poor things [her children] pay for? Their crime's of their father, Jason; worse: their mother, Medeia" (Sen. *Medea* 932-934). Medeia sees the atrocities they have both committed and in order to fix them intends to murder her children, make them pay for their parents' crimes. Medeia sees she is in this Sisyphean cycle of violence and chooses to remain in it to heroically avenge herself. She needs no vindication; she wants her own twisted justice—hurting Jason as much as possible even if that means the coldblooded murder of her children.

Medeia continues with her violent and deceitful ways to the bitter end. At the end of her myth, after killing Kreon's daughter and her own children she is luckily given safe haven by Aegeus the king of Athens. She never learns to accept the impossibility of her desires, and upon the arrival of Theseus to Athens to claim his right to the throne she immediately "[wishes] to destroy him" (Ov. *Meta.* 7:578). Medeia always attempts to improve her situation by any means necessary. She can never accept her station in life, whether that as a mother or subservient, etc., or cut her losses and always pays for it dearly. She is unsuccessful in her attempt for the throne and is exiled once more. Medeia appears to be engaged in a very similar Sisyphean struggle as Jason as her attempt on Theseus' life clearly demonstrates. She wanted her son to be the heir to the throne, to continue her line as royal and honored, and in order to protect that she attempts murder as opposed to Jason's acquisition of a new wife. Medeia has done this numerous times and apparently cannot stop. The Sisyphean actions of her struggle replicate themselves and lead to their further propagation through her myth. Each attempt is simultaneously her chance for fulfillment and her ruin. Each murder is both

her chance at happiness and the privation of it, each act is self-undermining and causes her to do it all again.

There appears to be key difference between Jason and Medeia in that Jason attempting to marry the princess of Corinth is a manifestation of Jason's desire to escape his Sisyphean cycle and he cannot due to Medeia. By marrying Kreon's daughter Jason prevents Kreon from throwing him out of his kingdom. In Seneca's *Medeia* Kreon appears to have had the intention of removing these politically dangerous and undesirable exiles, Jason and Medeia, from his land. And, when Medeia asks Jason to run away with her and hide from punishment he replies, "And who'll resist the onslaught of two wars, should Kreon and Acastus join forces?" (Sen. *Medea* 525-526). Kreon appears to have been ready to go to war and Jason does not want to run that risk. He acts selfishly in saving himself, but he also claims to be helping their children and in a certain sense Jason appears to be attempting to escape his Sisyphean struggle of pain and suffering he's been locked in with Medeia. That he will not necessarily reach the top of the hill as before, but to cut his loses, escape and finally find peace. But despite his self-aggrandizing rhetoric this new marriage is simply Jason's most recent non-specific abuse and manipulation of a woman, Kreon's daughter, which is cut short by Medeia. He is still very much on the same path he has always been on. In a certain sense Medeia ends that relationship before Jason has a chance to abandon the princess for a better option. It is not certain but his abandonment of Kreon's daughter seems inevitable based on his past pattern and there is not any indication he has structurally changed at all. And therefore Jason and Medeia are both caught in this inescapable Sisyphean cycle and futile quests pursuing the unattainable, they are united in their perpetual futility.

Media's Exception that Proves the Rule

The revelation of this chapter is that every action Medeia takes can in a certain sense be viewed as an attempt to procure her family and become a hero in the process—that is the power of understanding her Sisyphean nature. Given that, Medeia and her Sisyphean and structural struggle are almost always negative, vindictive, and violent. She always commits violent “heroics” so as to secure a family except in the case of Medeia healing Aeson, Jason’s father. The process of un-aging Aeson is Medeia’s only positive push of the boulder up the hill in the myth. For even when Medeia does something ostensibly positive, such as save Jason from the fire breathing bulls, she performs a negative act simultaneously, in this case she betrays her family. Medeia puts out vast effort to accomplish this goal; she flies around the skies for nine days and nights searching for the herbs required for the recipe (Ov. *Meta.* 7:335). Medeia gives this beneficial task her all in yet another futile attempt to solidify her relationship with Jason and achieve fulfillment.

The interesting aspect of the healing of Aeson is that although positive, Medeia is viewed negatively for it. While performing the ritual she is promptly seen as filled with madness, “her hair unbound like one the Bacchantes, Medeia walked...” (Ov. *Meta.* 7:368-369) She is suddenly a mad follower of Dionysius and then a “foreign woman” (Ov. *Meta.* 7:391). During the process of healing the hero’s father Medeia is completely alienated from society and portrayed as an other. She is made out to be an evil giver of life. The process of giving life is seen as foreign, bestial and induced by madness and reveals the duality of Medeia’s magic. It is not only frowned upon by society because it is performed for evil, it is seen as scary and unnatural even when performing positive deeds. This episode epitomizes how Medeia cannot escape her Sisyphean struggle and is doomed to always fail. She can never simply do a good deed.

The healing of Aeson reveals Medeia's rarely utilized ability to perform good deeds with her magic. She is a powerful sorceress who frequently murders and deceives with her magic but she could perform equally astonishing deeds that do not end in atrocity or death. Why does Medeia never utilize this powerful and positive force? Further Medeia promptly uses her at least seemingly newfound magic that heals to murder once again because doing so furthers her towards her goals of securing Jason and being a hero. Upon healing Aeson, Medeia promptly pretends to have a falling out with Jason and runs to Pelias' kingdom as a suppliant (*Ov. Meta.* 7:416-419) so as to murder him. This reveals the dual nature of her healing abilities; Medeia uses a process of life giving to take away life. Her magical healing is both a saving and a destroying force, the union of life and death, opposites becoming one. Medeia is the embodiment of guile and deception, what she claims to dislike Jason for, and uses these abilities for evil. And in the end this episode is self-defeating for Medeia in that by murdering Pelias so as to secure her relationship with Jason she and Jason are forced into exile, which eventually leads them to Corinth where Jason will attempt to marry the princess.

A Promethean Connection

Sisyphus is so deeply imbedded within the myth of Jason and Medeia that even when Hercules is left behind in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautika* he engages with a character locked in perpetual struggle. When Hercules is abandoned he is tasked by Zeus to relieve Prometheus from the eternal perpetual suffering of having his liver eaten every day by a vulture, only to have it regenerate so as to be eaten the following day. Prometheus' punishment is very similar to Sisyphus'; both are repeated forever and both have no prospect of escape without external help. Hercules is left behind from the myth of Jason and Medeia and then goes on to perform the noble quest of freeing Prometheus for Zeus. Hercules saving a perpetually

tortured and struggling individual is particularly interesting because had he not been left behind he could have perhaps done the same for Jason and Medeia and saved them from their perpetual struggles. But, due to the non-heroic nature of the myth he was left behind instead. Sisyphus, or more aptly the struggle he represents, constitutes the fabric of the myth and is present even when a hero is ostensibly removed from the myth. His actions replicate and propagate throughout all aspects of the myth and thus Hercules' adventures still deal with the same themes and ever presence of Sisyphus, furthering his fundamental nature in to Jason and Medeia.

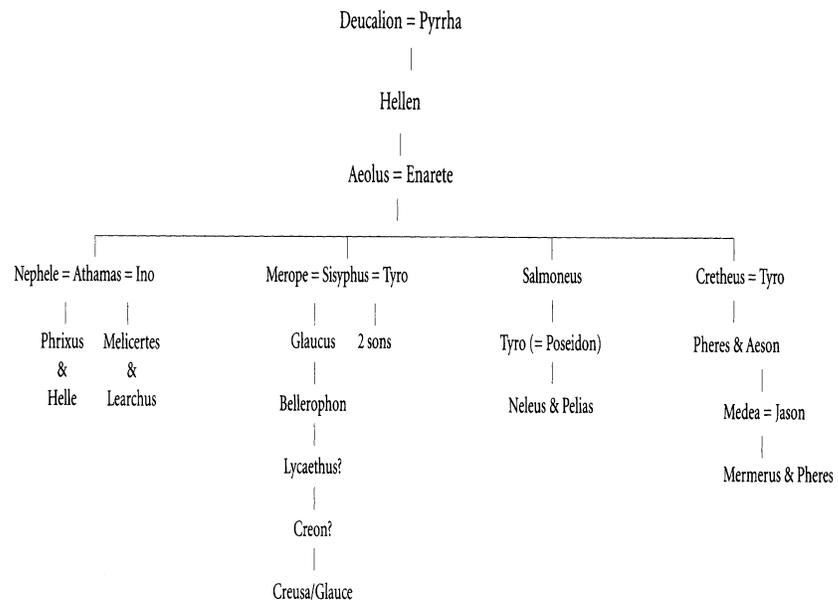
Conclusion

Jason, Medeia, their respective quests, the genealogy and the geography of the myth are all fundamentally Sisyphian. Sisyphus represents the perpetual suffering and struggle which embodies both Jason's and Medeia's actions throughout the myth. Sisyphus is a parallel figure and metaphor for Jason and Medeia, and constitutes the very fabric of the myth. The myth of Jason and Media is centered on improper relationships to family and heroics and is best understood through the rich and compelling mythical allusions it contains within itself. Sisyphus and his struggle are the total manifestation of those structures and mythical allusions that compose the myth.

By treating all of the versions of the myth equally and viewing them in tandem Sisyphus' importance to the myth is revealed. The references to him are seemingly disparate, but when viewed together they add a whole layer of signification and meaning previously missed by only analyzing one version of the myth. Once Sisyphus' presence is established the whole myth can be seen as Sisyphian. And in this discovery, along with others from this totalizing approach, Jason and Medeia are united in a significant way that was previously

unseen. Jason and Medeia form an interlocking pair of similar opposites throughout the myth and function as a unit, which can only be seen with this lens. Jason and Medeia are brought together in a meaningful way which has been missed by the prior scholarship which views them in isolation, typically focusing on Medeia as a feminist hero and Jason as a lackluster one. However, it has been demonstrated that the issue is much more complicated than previous scholarship would indicate, for they are both complex quasi-heroes and are much more interrelated and inextricable than those prior analyses suggest. In the end viewing both Jason and Medeia together, across all renditions, reveals many important structures and ideas that are missed when a less comprehensive analysis is performed.

APPENDIX: THE HOUSE OF AEOLUS (Abbreviated, adapted from Gantz)



Appendix One: Genealogy of Sisyphus

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