

## 23. “I made you, Jason!”: A New Historicist Reading of Voice and Power in Liz Lochhead’s *Medea*<sup>1</sup>

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**APA:** Gölcük-Mirza, P. (2025). “I made you, Jason!”: A New Historicist Reading of Voice and Power in Liz Lochhead’s *Medea*. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (47), 374-389. **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16902645>

### Abstract

Framed within the intersections between new historicism and feminism, this paper seeks to explore how *Liz Lochhead’s Medea* dramatizes *mansplaining as a reproduction mechanism of historical female silencing*. Central to this analysis is the concept of mansplaining, which is regarded not simply as a male domination in explanation but as part of a longstanding patriarchal tradition of narrative control. Jason’s parts in the play exemplify a masculinist gaze that reframes Medea’s sacrifices as irrational or irrelevant by stripping her of narrative authority while positioning himself as the reasonable voice of history and politics. By re-addressing the classical myth through late twentieth-century feminist sensibilities, Lochhead’s *Medea* highlights how gendered explanations still operate as a form of ideological containment that restricts women’s credibility. The play reveals these dynamics not only through character conflict but also through its structural appropriation, which can be particularly observed in her reimagining of the Chorus as a collective of female witnesses who come from different time zones and places. *By so doing, she invites a wider reflection on how literary texts can reclaim repressed voices and destabilize dominant historical narratives*. This article, hence, aims to explore how Liz Lochhead’s *Medea*, from a new historicist approach, reveals and further disrupts male-oriented discursive practices that silence and delegitimize women’s voices.

**Keywords:** Liz Lochhead, *Medea*, New Historicism, Feminism, Mansplaining

<sup>1</sup> **Statement (Thesis / Paper):** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography. This article has been produced within the scope of the doctoral thesis entitled “Herstories of Scotland: An Analysis of Liz Lochhead’s Selected Plays from a New Historicist Approach.”

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest is declared.

**Funding:** No external funding was used to support this research.

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**Source:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

**Similarity Report:** Received – Turnitin / Rate: %20

**Ethics Complaint:** [editor@rumelide.com](mailto:editor@rumelide.com)

**Article Type:** Research article, **Article Registration Date:** 06.07.2025-**Acceptance Date:** 19.08.2025-**Publication Date:** 20.08.2025; **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16902645>

**Peer Review:** Two External Referees / Double Blind

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## “Seni ben Jason yaptım!”: Liz Lochhead’in Medea’sında Ses ve Güç Üzerine Yeni Tarihselci Bir Okuma<sup>3</sup>

### Öz

Yeni tarihselcilik ve feminizm arasındaki kesişme noktalarında çerçevelenen bu makale, Liz Lochhead’in *Medea*’sında vurgulanan erilbilmişlik kavramının tarihsel kadın susturmanın yeniden üretilme mekanizması olarak nasıl dramatize ettiğini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu analizin merkezinde, sadece konuşmadaki erkek egemenliği olarak değil, uzun süredir devam eden ataerkil anlatı kontrolü geleneğinin bir parçası olarak görülen erilbilmişlik kavramı yer almaktadır. Jason’ın oyundaki rolleri, kendisini tarihin ve siyasetin makul sesi olarak konumlandırırken, Medea’nın fedakarlıklarını anlatı otoritesinden sıyrarak mantıksız veya alakasız olarak yeniden çerçeveleyen eril bir bakışı örneklemektedir. Lochhead, klasik mit Medea’yı geç yirminci yüzyıl feminist duyarlılıklarıyla yeniden ele alarak, cinsiyetçi açıklamaların kadınların inandırıcılığını kısıtlayan bir ideolojik sınırlama biçimi olarak nasıl hâlâ işlediğini vurguluyor. Oyun, bu dinamikleri yalnızca karakter çatışması yoluyla değil, aynı zamanda yapısal uyarlamalar yoluyla da ortaya koymaktadır. Bu özellikle Koro’yu farklı zaman dilimlerinden ve yerlerden gelen kadın tanıklardan oluşan bir kolektif bir kız kardeşlik yapısında da gözlemlenebilir. Kadın seslerinin duyulmasını sağlayarak, oyun edebi metinlerin bastırılmış sesleri nasıl geri alabileceği ve baskın tarihsel anlatıları nasıl istikrarsızlaştırabileceği üzerine daha geniş bir düşünceyi teşvik etmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu makale, Liz Lochhead’in *Medea*’sının, yeni tarihselci bir yaklaşımla, kadınların seslerini susturan ve gayrimeşrulaştıran erkek odaklı söylemsel pratikleri nasıl ortaya çıkardığını ve dahası bozduğunu keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Liz Lochhead, *Medea*, Yeni Tarihselcilik, Feminizm, Erilbilmişlik.

<sup>3</sup> **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur. Bu makale “Kadın Bakış Açısıyla İskoçya Hikayeleri: Liz Lochhead’in Seçili Oyunlarının Yeni Tarihselci Yaklaşımla İncelenmesi.” isimli doktora tezi çalışması kapsamında üretilmiştir.

**Finansman:** Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

**Telif Hakkı & Lisans:** Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmalarını CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.

**Kaynak:** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

**Benzerlik Raporu:** Alındı – Turnitin / Oran: %20

**Etik Şikayeti:** [editor@rumelide.com](mailto:editor@rumelide.com)

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 06.07.2025-**Kabul Tarihi:** 19.08.2025-**Yayın Tarihi:** 20.08.2025; **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16902645>

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

## Introduction

Medea as a fictional character, originates from the myth of “The Quest for the Golden Fleece” where she appears as a helper-maiden in a supporting role (Hamilton, 1942, p.160). Therefore, her role is to elevate the hero, Jason, and promote his heroic deeds through her supernatural powers. In the fifth century, Euripides gave a particular focus to Medea instead of Jason’s valorism by re-focalizing her as the central figure of the story. However, Euripides constructed a powerful female archetype, a sorceress or outcast, who is vilified and ultimately doomed for her cunning intellect, emotional intensity, and refusal to conform to any norms. The tragic end of Medea, thus, offers readers/audiences an opportunity to impart lessons from her story and guides them on how women should not behave, react, or feel in male-oriented societies. However, Medea’s defiance against the discriminatory praxis of patriarchal and xenophobic societies has been the source of interest for centuries, and she has inspired various writers, playwrights and filmmakers. Given this, her story has been retold, adapted, and appropriated across various mediums. On stage, her story has been repetitively enacted with cross-cultural techniques within a theatrical vibrancy since Medea’s experience enables a medium for playwrights to make profound social commentaries on gender and national politics, institutionalized oppression, and power dynamics. Within this theatrical dynamism, universal themes like love and betrayal are deeply explored, and they forge a connection with modern audiences through the play’s relevance to today’s societal landscape.

Liz Lochhead’s *Medea*, first staged by Theatre Babel in 2000, is a retelling of Euripides’ ancient Greek tragedy through Lochhead’s Scottish female gaze. While Euripides’ version is faithful to the most well-known Senecan tragedy of the vengeful Colchian sorceress who murders her children after Jason’s betrayal, Lochhead’s version is distinctive in its own terms. Described as the author “after Euripides”, Lochhead reconfigures the play as more relevant to the contemporary audience and linguistically more culturally specific, reflecting English and Scottish socio-political conflict. However, she remains faithful in dealing with the source text’s main themes, such as exile, betrayal, and revenge. Staged initially in Glasgow, then at the Edinburgh Fringe, and later on a national tour, *Medea* resonates not only as a personal tragedy but also as a broader meditation on questions of national identity, belonging, and political rupture, particularly relevant in the wake of the Scottish independence referendum and Brexit. The play’s relevance was also highlighted by its revival by the National Theatre of Scotland during the 2022 Edinburgh International Festival, with Adura Onashile in the leading role under the direction of Michael Boyd.

In acknowledging the modernization of an ancient tragedy, Lochhead accepts that she has not exerted much effort to make the play relevant to the contemporary audience and she postulates:

There is no time in history when they didn’t seem both prescient and contemporary. Recently especially, it has been a Greek time — a time of revenge at an almost primitive level. But you can’t translate an audience. So I took out the supernatural elements and the things that didn’t play to today. (Lochhead, in Scott, 2003, para. 10)

Such a remark explicitly attaches the play to today and puts the emphasis on the themes of the play, which can be relatable to contemporary audiences. The themes of rage, revenge, and social exclusion that the play evokes are the enduring and universal concepts that humankind, but particularly women, view as a source of pain and agony. By revisiting an ancient tragedy, Lochhead’s adaptation re-vocalizes Medea and strengthens her defiant resistance against betrayal and oppression with the solidarity of other women from diverse backgrounds in a chorus. In doing so, she both gives voice to muted women and generates profound questions about what it means to be a woman, particularly a marginalized

woman.

Through her complex portrayal of these subject matters and within the play’s political commitment, Lochhead compels the reader/audience to reconsider long-held assumptions and to adopt a more skeptical stance on these fundamental aspects of power relations between men and women. In her appropriation strategy, Lochhead undertakes a significant twist in the reconfiguration of Medea’s character by setting her free from the confines of mythical portrayal as a demi-goddess or sorceress. Lochhead’s Medea, in this regard, goes beyond supernatural representations in mythology. Instead, Lochhead presents her as a relatable and down-to-earth female figure. This transformation allows Lochhead to explore the complex layers of womanhood within a societal framework characterized by pervasive social injustices. Medea appears not as an otherworldly figure, but as a human being who is capable of grasping the realities of her existence within an unjust social order and is brave enough to face the consequences of her actions. Lochhead, therefore, offers a more humanized protagonist than the source text. Medea becomes a woman betrayed by the man she has sacrificed everything for. She stands for every woman who has been silenced, talked over, or made to feel irrational or excessive for reacting to injustice. Her story is no longer one of mythological vengeance but a bold renunciation of emotional and subjugation of women.

When considering the play’s commitment to making women’s experiences visible and empowering their voices, new historicism becomes a useful approach for reading this play since it views stories not just as fictional production, but also as a record of culture, power, and social norms. It especially helps us understand how stories often reflect the values and struggles of the time they were written or rewritten. New historicist critics such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, and Dominic La Capra question the credibility of historical writings or grand narratives and pay attention to whose voices are heard and whose are left out. This has strong links to feminist thinking, which also focuses on how the female gaze and experiences have been ignored, controlled, or misunderstood in history and storytelling. Lochhead’s reconfiguration of *Medea* makes blatant this enduring tradition that subjugates women’s voices and she rewrites the ancient myth to give voice to a woman who has been wronged and silenced by a male-centered society. Within this context, the particular focus of this article will be given to the analysis of how Liz Lochhead’s play highlights mansplaining as a mechanism of silencing women. Using a new historicist and feminist approach, the main aim of this paper is to explore how Lochhead’s *Medea* reveals and further disrupts male-oriented discursive practices that silence and delegitimize women’s voices.

### **The Gender of Explanation: Mansplaining at the Intersection of Feminist and New Historicist Theories**

New historicism as a literary theory emerged in the 1980s and became a popular movement with the studies of Stephen Greenblatt. It can be broadly viewed as a reaction to new criticism, which prioritizes the text over context in an effort to capture objectivity and literary autonomy (Dollimore, 1990; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). Casting a doubt on the credibility of this hierarchy, new historicism no longer privileges the literary/aesthetic aspect of the text. Instead, it proposes a parallel reading of literary and historical discourses. As Brannigan (1998) postulates, new historicists tend to explore “the linguistic, cultural, social and political fabric of the past in greater detail”; thus, they situate literature in “an unprivileged exchange” with the historical forces active at the time of its production (p. 12). Within this framework, literature is not necessarily seen as a self-contained artwork, but rather a realm of discursive overtones of linguistics, philosophy, cultural materialism, feminism, and postcolonialism.

It is indeed that new historicism was influenced by various intellectual and political developments, including the New Left movements of the 1960s and 70s (Gallagher, 1989; Hohendahl, 1992; Lewis, 1991; Newton, 2013). These decades were marked by increasing resistance to authoritarian structures and rising demands for civil rights, including women's liberation and queer activism. As Stephen Greenblatt (2001) clarifies in *Practicing New Historicism*, the movement was not a “coherent, close-knit school” but rather a mode of critical practice shaped by a plurality of influences. Louis Montrose, cited in Veenser (1994), similarly highlights this heterogeneity by noting that new historicists engage with Lacanian, Foucauldian, Freudian, and deconstructivist thought. This plurality of intellectual currents accentuates new historicism’s resistance to rigid methodological boundaries which allows it to adapt and respond to diverse critical and socio-political contexts.

As with its distinctiveness, new historicism departs from earlier methodologies by focusing on representation as a significant meaning maker in analyzing a text. It refuses to regard historical accounts as ideologically neutral or superior to literary ones. Instead, it opens up a space for a broader interrogation of whose voices are heard, and whose are omitted or suppressed. This framework enables a re-evaluation of texts and traditions, including those produced by and about historically marginalized groups such as women, racial minorities, and queer communities. From this vantage point, it can be argued that new historicism takes its fundamental premise from the silenced or excluded voices, which makes it particularly receptive to feminist interventions. As a matter of fact, feminist scholars have long pointed out the gendered operations of canon formation and historical memory. As Ellen Pollak (1988) notes, literary and historical canons are often maintained through “the entire process of exclusion by which canons are defined and then sustained” (p. 283). New historicism’s methodological flexibility, with its rejection of singular truth claims, allowed feminist critics to bring the herstory of women into focus by emphasizing personal accounts, diaries, letters, and other forms of *minor* (emphasis mine) textual production that had traditionally been excluded from scholarly attention.

Judith Newton (1989), in her essay “History as Usual,” acknowledges the influence of feminist historiography and the poststructuralist approach on new historicism. However, she also draws attention to the field for neglecting its feminist roots. She notes that it often treats feminist ideas as if “their assumptions and practices have been produced by men” (p. 153). She insists that the break from objectivity, universality, and neutrality so central to new historicist criticism was first enacted by second-wave feminists, who had already begun rethinking how women’s voices, experiences, and cultural power were represented in both fiction and history. In this way, new historicism is indebted to feminist critique not only for its tools, but also for its very epistemological foundations. Newton identifies Robin Morgan’s anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970) as an early forerunner of new historicist practice, as it employs a “cross-cultural technique” of juxtaposing historical documents, literary texts, and anecdotal narratives in order to expose the ideological operations of androcentric discourse. Catherine Gallagher, Jonathan Dollimore, and other feminist new historicists similarly argue that historical representation must account for symbolic power and social relations. In particular, Dollimore’s *Sexual Dissidence* (1991) calls for a reconfiguration of history through acts of resistance, writing that “it is also necessary that we use the history recovered to read, question, and modify theory itself” (p. 25). Her call emphasizes that excavating history to foster women’s experiences is not sufficient unless those histories are used to rethink the theoretical foundations of knowledge production.

At this certain point, mansplaining, a contemporary term used to identify patronizing male explanations, can be positioned in the intersection of feminist and new historicist discourse, particularly in relation to the construction and circulation of knowledge. The Oxford English Dictionary defines

mansplaining as an explanation “[o]f a man: to explain (something) needlessly, overbearingly, or condescendingly, esp. (typically when addressing a woman) in a manner thought to reveal a patronizing or chauvinistic attitude” (OED, 2008). It is indeed that the term has become a focus of political debate in the feminist discussion in the aftermath of Rebecca Solnit’s inspirational essay collection, *Men Explain Things to Me*. In her collection, she hesitates to associate herself with the emergence of this concept. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that such awareness, whether influenced by her or not, is meaningful, especially when considering that the leaders of political parties at the time. She clarifies her point as follows:

Alas, this was because it dovetailed pretty well with the times. Tom Dispatch reposted ‘Men Explain Things’ in August 2012, and fortuitously, more or less simultaneously, Representative Todd Akin (R-Missouri) made his infamous statement that we don’t need abortion for women who are raped, because ‘if it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down.’ That electoral season was peppered by the crazy pro-rape, anti-fact statements of male conservatives. (2014, “postscript” para.7)

These patronizing and unreliable statements about rape, abortion, and female body made by men reveal a deeper issue that men frequently position themselves as authoritative voices on women’s experiences. Although she is careful not to generalize or condemn all men, she emphasizes that the act of speaking for oneself, as a woman, is a fundamental right. This insistence echoes a core feminist principle, as articulated in Solnit’s claim that “having the right to show up and speak are basic to survival, to dignity, and to liberty” (2014, “postscript”, para.10). By asserting this right, she challenges the entrenched gendered hierarchies that shape assumptions about who holds experience, authority, and expertise. Mansplaining, in this context, is not merely an interpersonal irritation but functions as a discursive strategy that operates both at the micro-level of daily interactions and the macro-level of cultural and historical narratives. In this way, it transcends individual behavior and becomes an ideological tool used to preserve patriarchal interpretive authority. It performs a regulatory role within epistemological structures, determining whose knowledge is validated, who has the right to speak, and whose interpretations are deemed legitimate.

With regard to legitimizing male voice, Miranda Fricker, in her work entitled *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007), seeks to offer a feminist understanding of the ethical and political implications in the production and circulation of knowledge. She introduces the concept of testimonial injustice, which comes out when a speaker’s credibility is unjustly deflated due to identity prejudice. This is mainly because gender is based on power relations. According to her,

Gender is one arena of identity power, and, like social power more generally, identity power can be exercised actively or passively. An exercise of gender identity power is active when, for instance, a man makes (possibly unintended) use of his identity as a man to influence a woman’s actions—for example, to make her defer to his word. He might, for instance, patronize her and get away with it in virtue of the fact that he is a man and she is a woman: ‘Marge, there’s female intuition, and then there are facts’—as Greenleaf says to Marge in *The Talented Mr Ripley*.<sup>9</sup> He silences her suspicions of the murderous Ripley by exercising identity power, the identity power he inevitably has as a man over her as a woman. (Fricker, 2007, p.14)

Fricker’s remark helps us to notice the constructed dichotomy between the female intuitions and male facts. Thus, she displays how men, sometimes unconsciously, discredit women’s epistemic authority and enact testimonial injustice by default. As Fricker argues, these are not simply breaches of etiquette, but instances of epistemic violence acts that undermine the capacity of marginalized groups to contribute to shared knowledge practices.

When considering the arguments of Fricker and Solnit, mansplaining, from a new historicist standpoint, may be seen as a circulating discursive habit, a socially encoded form of speech that sustains hegemonic power structures by continually marginalizing subaltern voices. It echoes Herold Veese’s (1989) assertion that “every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes” (p. xi). As such, mansplaining exemplifies how discourse can simultaneously challenge and reproduce authority, illustrating one of the core tensions within new historicist methodology. As observed in feminist readings, it foregrounds the gendered asymmetries of voice, credibility, and discursive space. Besides, as seen in the principles of new historicism, it contests the illusion of objective or neutral knowledge and emphasizes the historicity and ideological entanglements of every expressive act. Therefore, mansplaining should not be reduced a casual sexism; rather, it constitutes a structured and historically persistent discursive regime, one that governs interpretive authority across disciplines, periods, and contexts.

Such a perspective affirms the necessity of an integrated theoretical framework that includes mansplaining as a critical approach. It not only enhances our understanding of contemporary power-laden speech practices but also expands the critical horizon through which we might approach reimaginings of classical narratives. Mansplaining, as a mode of asserting *epistemic authority* that delegitimizes women’s voices, becomes especially relevant in this context, since reinterpretations of classical texts often reproduce or challenge precisely these dynamics of who has the right to speak and interpret. The authority to narrate and to reinterpret has historically been monopolized by male voices, and Lochhead’s feminist reworking of *Medea* directly intervenes in this tradition. By foregrounding how patriarchal custodianship of cultural memory mirrors the structures of epistemic authority, her play subverts the weight of male-dominated interpretive traditions. It demonstrates how reclaiming authorship is itself a political act that destabilizes inherited hierarchies of knowledge. Thus, her rewriting challenges the very boundaries of who is entitled to interpret and transmit classical narratives, insisting that women’s perspectives must be recognized as legitimate and authoritative within cultural memory. Therefore, in order to fully grasp the political and discursive implications of Lochhead’s feminist rewriting of *Medea*, a theoretical foundation that draws from new historicism, feminism, and the dynamics of mansplaining can offer significant insight into how authority, voice, and historical memory are constructed, challenged, and redistributed.

### From Humiliation to Assertion: Reclaiming Female Voice

In Lochhead’s *Medea*, the protagonist is doubly marginalized both as a woman and as a cultural outsider. From the very beginning, Lochhead establishes a sharp contrast between the oppressor and the oppressed by revealing the power dynamics between men and women, and between the so-called civilized Greek city of Corinth and Medea’s foreign homeland, Colchis, which is depicted as primitive and barbaric. This binary opposition, observed in both gendered and cultural domains, shapes whose voice is considered reliable or worthy of being heard in the retelling of the myth. While the original myth celebrates Jason’s heroic deeds and vilifies Medea as a monstrous woman who betrays her family and her children, Lochhead’s adaptation gives a voice to this woman to express herself. She shifts the focus away from Jason’s triumphs and instead focuses on Medea’s pain and sacrifices. Although Lochhead does not excuse Medea’s actions at the end, she creates a realm in which a silenced female voice can finally be heard. The play hence invites audiences to reconsider the story from a female perspective, which is rooted in the experience of a woman who gives everything for Jason’s sake and is cast aside.

Lochhead opens up new horizons by drawing attention to the oppressive systems that mute and ignore

the voices of the other. The otherized perception of Medea is first given through language in Lochhead’s play since it marks cultural inferiority or superiority of an individual. The Nurse, in the opening scene, speaks in vernacular Scots, a dialect associated with Corinthian identity and cultural authority, and describes Medea with both pity and awe. In doing so, she sets the stage for Medea’s eventual exclusion:

...  
 why crewed wi heroes fit to filch the Golden Fleece?  
 Adventurers!  
 my lady Medea would never then have sailed wi Jason  
 daft for him doted!  
 would no have for his sake  
 swicked Pelias’s dochters into killing their faither  
 for Jason’s sake she fled here to Corinth  
 wi Jason and their bairns ingratiatin hersel  
 sookin in a fawning exile a foreigner  
 For his sake! (Lochhead, 2000, pp.3-4)

Her monologue echoes Medea’s sacrifice and the socio-cultural context of Corinth that highlights her vulnerability. Thus, it shows how cultural estrangement and gendered sacrifice intersect in Medea’s characterization. The repetition of “for his sake!” puts the emphasis on the theme of female self-abandonment in service to patriarchal loyalty (Lochhead, 2000, p.3). The Nurse outlists Medea’s misdeeds for Jason before Jason’s betrayal, including deceiving Pelias’s daughters, fleeing her homeland, and assimilating into a foreign culture. However, this time, within the Nurse’s account of the past from her own female gaze, Medea’s sacrifices are not buried over Jason’s heroic adventures but appear as evidence of the emotional subjugation of a female.

Besides, the line, “sookin in, a fawning exile, a foreigner” reinforces Medea’s marginalization and attempts to gain the acceptance of the Corinthian society, which actually ends up with failure (Lochhead, 2000, p.4). Bringing up this linguistic confrontation, Lochhead satirizes the colonial dynamics between center and periphery, where the foreign woman must beg for acceptance, even as her past sacrifices are forgotten or reinterpreted through a patriarchal gaze. The dialect not only stands for cultural belonging but also conveys who has the narrative authority to frame the events. The play thus gives particular attention to the hierarchical contrast between the Scots-speaking superior Corinthian characters, including Jason, King Kreon and his daughter, Glauke and the standard-English-speaking Colchian heroine, Medea. Medea is well aware of her own position and articulates her painful exclusion and silencing system in Corinth as follows:

MEDEA  
 I know you've thought me strange 'standoffish' 'a snob'  
 you've said of me not understanding my shyness  
 my coolness merely masked my terror of being snubbed  
 no one loves a foreigner.  
 everyone despises anyone the least bit different  
 'see how she ties her scarf' 'that hair outlandish'  
 you walked by my house with eyes averted



turned your nose up at my household's cooking smells  
 'why can't she be a bit more like us? (Lochhead, 2000, p.9)

As observed in her sarcastic address to the audience, Medea demonstrates her awareness. However, she is not portrayed as someone who passively accepts her condition but rather as a questioning and skeptical figure. Besides, she transforms the pain of her exclusion into a platform for regaining her voice. As a foreign woman in Corinth, she exposes the mechanisms of her marginalization by naming the xenophobic and sexist prejudices that make her socially invisible and emotionally isolated. The aggressions she encounters from people, from her headscarf to the smell of food, lays bare the constant surveillance and mockery directed at women who are different.

Moreover, in the play, Medea is culturally otherized by the Greeks and is forced to exile by King Kreon, since the authority to define and defend cultural superiority must be voiced by a male, specifically a king. In this way, even nationalist assertions of the *best version* of a society are articulated through a male voice, which positions itself as the guardian of cultural authenticity (emphasis mine). However, Medea turns this criticism back on its owners with the following remark: "say you Greeks / who bitch about other Greeks / for not being Greeks from Corinth" (Lochhead, 2000, p.9). She thereby turns the internalized shame into resistance. Besides, by reversing the hierarchical position between English and Scots in the political landscape of Britain, Lochhead subverts conventional hierarchies and foregrounds the postcolonial overtones embedded in language and speech patterns of the play since this linguistic difference denies her access to the shared linguistic codes that grant credibility and authority within the play's cultural logic (Connel, 2003). It therefore illustrates how language itself becomes a tool of subjugation that functions to discredit voices deemed foreign, unfamiliar, or threatening. Accent, dialect, and idiomatic expression are therefore not neutral features of speech but are revealed here as cultural markers of legitimacy which are entangled with systems of class, gender, and colonial ideology. In this way, Lochhead's play invites us to consider how cultural and linguistic norms are mobilized to regulate who may speak, who will be heard, and who is dismissed.

Nevertheless, the most radical form of exclusion Lochhead deals with is the gendered one. Her adaptation of Euripides' tragedy highlights the pervasive structures of male dominance and the erasure of women's suffering, labor, and voice. Unlike traditional adaptations that either preserve or embellish the mythic and divine attributes of Medea, Lochhead opts for a stark humanization of Medea. She deliberately removes references to gods, oracles, and magical powers by stripping her of all the supernatural layers that have historically distanced Medea from ordinary female experience. This dramaturgical decision not only desacralizes the myth but also makes Medea's pain accessible and relatable to everyone. In other words, she conveys her tragedy in the most recognizable suffering form, which is valid for many women abandoned by their partners, families, or social systems. This is reinforced in Medea's rhetorical questions in her monologue: "Are we women not the most miserable/ And mocked of all God's creatures?" (Lochhead, 2000, p.10). Thus, the playwright reimagines the ancient figure not as a mythic monster but as a deeply human woman whose suffering is intimately tied to the gendered violence seen in patriarchal systems. She further reveals the social contract that women are forced into through marriage:

To buy the man he sells us to  
 And then for better or worse richer or poorer  
 in sickness or health -your sickness his health-  
 this man lords it over us

our lives at the mercy of how his lordship feels  
 ...  
 oh yes wartime  
 and they’ll die for us!  
 well I’d three times sooner fight a war  
 than suffer childbirth once (Lochhead, 2000, p.10)

As made crystal clear in her speech, Medea denounces the thingification process of women in the misogynist and male-oriented systems where fathers and husbands are granted ultimate authority over women. Therefore, she desacralizes the glorified institution of family because they, as delineated by Lochhead, are just domestic spaces of female exploitation. To highlight this female subjugation, she juxtaposes the ritualistic language of romantic devotion with the harsh reality of gendered power imbalance. She unmasks how women’s physical and emotional labor is made invisible under men’s tyranny. Also, childbirth, stereotypically regarded as the cornerstone of feminine virtue, is reframed here as a site of trauma or a battlefield more painful than war but idealized far less. Through this appropriation, the witch of the original story becomes a woman; the monster becomes a mother; the other becomes painfully familiar. Lochhead thus constructs a Medea who is not merely responding to personal betrayal but confronting the machinery of patriarchal order. Her humiliation is presented not as a singular emotional rupture but as a systemic consequence of living within a society that dismisses female loyalty, sacrifice, and intelligence as expendable.

As a matter of fact, Lochhead elaborates the concept of womanhood by resisting the conventional roles of wife and mother. She defines womanhood as something that imposes pressure on women to conform to a specific societal mold. This mold is shaped and enforced by patriarchal norms, which dictate to women how they should act, think, and live their lives. It does not allow for diversity or individuality but seeks to erase the differences to standardize each woman into a passive, docile, domestic, and self-sacrificing role that does not fit into Medea’s passionate, aggressive, freedom-seeking, and justice-minded personality. As a result, womanhood is metaphorically depicted in the play as a sudden and traumatic blow to Medea’s sense of self. When she discovers that the man to whom she has long been devoted, for whom she betrayed her nation and her family, has betrayed her by being unfaithful, she recognizes that she is now faced with the harsh reality of womanhood.

MEDEA.  
 I was never a woman at all until I met my man!  
 Maiden Medea my father’s daughter was a creature  
 Who did not know she was born she knew such  
 Sweet freedom! (9-10)  
 If it is a struggle in a bed or behind a bush engenders us  
 then it’s when we fall in love that genders us  
 Jason I am a woman now!  
 Right out of the blue  
 Humiliation! (Lochhead, 2000, p.10)

As grimly outspoken by Medea, Lochhead connects womanhood and a tangible sense of vulnerability, which is often characterized by pathos. Within her portrayal, male oppression and violence are depicted

as central factors that both shape and endanger the lives of women. This portrayal evokes an association of womanhood with a pervasive sense of humiliation, as women navigate a world where their autonomy is continually threatened by patriarchal structures. Lochhead's exploration of these themes refers to the systemic challenges faced by women by underpinning the enduring impact of gender-based violence and oppression on their lived experiences. Through her play, Lochhead brings to light often overlooked realities of women's lives by manifesting the profound effects of patriarchal power dynamics on their sense of self-worth and dignity.

Furthermore, the source text and Lochhead's rewriting of *Medea* may have similarities in terms of delineating the women's unprivileged position and misogyny in society. Nonetheless, in contrast to the Euripidean counterpart, Lochhead's *Medea* is distinctive in its departure from exaggerated acts of vengeance. Instead, she presents *Medea* as assertive, self-assured, cunning, and intelligent. She is defined as "a stone" and "capable of anything" by the Nurse (Lochhead, 2000, p.4). Her language is full of imperatives, and she is aware of her intelligence. When Kreon wants to exile her because of her reputation, she responds as such: I'm oppressed by my reputation / the evil one the witch the clever woman/ don't educate your daughters Kreon!" since a clever woman, in her own terms, is a "fie it is to fly in the face of nature/ an abomination" (Lochhead, 2000, p.12). Her appropriation hence veers from the tragic plot to the underlying ideas and power dynamics, particularly evident in dialogues between *Medea* and male characters such as Jason and King Kreon. In this regard, the concept of revenge in Lochhead's play operates on the discursive level by reclaiming the muted voice instead of evoking a sense of affect from the way she takes action. To that end, Lochhead redirects attention from the tragic end of the play and the vengeful actions of *Medea* as a sorceress to the betrayal experience of her as an ordinary woman.

In empowering women's voices in the face of male oppression, Lochhead also invokes a female chorus by incorporating the voices of various women who must wrestle with betrayal, oppression, subjugation, and domestic violence. Such a dramaturgical employment of the Chorus is also seen in the source text. Nevertheless, Lochhead's chorus diverges from the chorus of Corinthian women found in the source text at one point. Instead of using a homogeneous female group with shared cultural and ideological backgrounds, Lochhead's chorus is made up of women "of all times, all ages, classes, and professions" (Lochhead, 2000, p.8). This intentional choice crosses temporal and spatial boundaries as it establishes a connection with *Medea* and other women with the experiences of female oppression across diverse contexts. The aim of this broad inclusivity is to empower and multiply the female voices by enabling them to empathize with *Medea*'s suffering and to seek collective revenge. Unlike the conformist and fatalistic depiction of Corinthian women who ask her to forget and accept all in the source text, Lochhead's women in the chorus embody female resilience and feminist solidarity.

Lochhead's chorus has the ability to understand *Medea*'s experience and emotions since they still share a similar suffering and endure patriarchal ideologies that persist despite technological advancements and the passage of time. Therefore, they equate *Medea*'s cry with that of "the woman/ opening the door to the telegraph boy in wartime/ or the cry out from/ the unquiet wife/ opening the door/ to the chequered hats of two policemen." (Lochhead, 2000, p. 7) or that of "a mother in the hospital corridor" (Lochhead, 2000, p.7) or "the cry from our sisters mothers from ourselves/ that cry/ we did not know we knew how to cry out/could not help but cry." (Lochhead, 2000, p.7) These instances reveal how misogyny and male oppression exceed spatial and linear borders. Thus, through the chorus, Lochhead offers a panoramic and pathetic glimpse of women's struggles. The rebellious spirit they voice in the play forges connections among women in a bond of solidarity who are yearning for rage. This aggressive and

assertive tone is yet in sharp contrast to the Corinthian women’s chorus. Lochhead’s women demonstrate a rebellious spirit to confront injustice and urge Medea to seek collective vengeance by convening her with the words, “punish Jason for all of us, Medea!” (Lochhead, 2000, p.8). They perceive themselves as warriors in this battle and are united in their cause:

CHORUS.

we were not born yesterday  
we are all survivors of the sex war  
married women widows divorced  
mistresses wives no virgins here  
marriage over? Shame that’s the end of it  
so get on with it (Lochhead, 2000, p.8)

Chorus’ call and support for Medea captures the sense of sisterhood which boldly resists patriarchal expectations and societal silencing. Declaring “we were not born yesterday” (Lochhead, 2000, p. 8), the chorus asserts their wisdom and lived experience that directly contradicts any assumption of female naivety or submissiveness. By spanning time, space, and social positions, the chorus embodies the continuity of women’s struggles. In this regard, the new version of the chorus is not a mere narrative appropriation of Lochhead but should be construed as a symbolic bridge linking Medea’s personal plight to a broader, ongoing struggles faced by women across time and space.

Besides, the given reminder of the chorus vis-à-vis a gendered war is open to both literal and metaphorical readings. While it may allude to real surviving within historical gender-based conflicts, it can also signify women’s enduring struggle for autonomy, visibility, and the right to speak. Whether married, widowed, divorced, or in non-traditional relationships, the women of the chorus reject the notion that their value is tied to their marital status. Rebecca Solnit (2014) articulates a similar idea in her essay “Women Fighting on Two Fronts,” where she contends that women often battle simultaneously for their cause and for the right to participate in the conversation around it. Referencing “the Women Strike for Peace” movement, Solnit observes that women were pushed to the periphery, allowed to make the coffee or take the notes, but denied a voice in the antinuclear activism of the 1950s. As she postulates, “Most women fight wars on two fronts: one for whatever the putative topic is and one simply for the right to speak, to have ideas, to be acknowledged to be in possession of facts and truths, to have value, to be a human being” (Solnit, 2014, para 5). From a feminist standpoint that advocates for women’s equal right to voice their own experiences in addition to other fundamental feminist rights, Lochhead’s chorus can also be perceived as an attempt to reclaim this basic right to speak on their own behalf. Thus, what the chorus refers to as the sex war can be interpreted as a collective embodiment of this dual struggle. Despite being disillusioned and weathered by experience, they remain determined to assert their space and speak their truths.

While the chorus embodies the historical continuity of women’s struggles, Medea’s personal experience exemplifies how these structural pressures are enacted at the individual level, particularly in the regulation of gendered emotional expression. In this regard, Lochhead’s *Medea* reclaims the female voice by empowering Medea’s verbal expression of resentment, an emotion traditionally coded as masculine within the patriarchal emotional order. In this system, emotions are not only a simple way of expression but socially gendered. With regards to this, Ute Frevert (2011) argues that “those gender differences are institutionalized in expectations, standards of behavior, and ‘display rules.’” Thus, women

who give free rein to their rage tend to feel ‘uncomfortable’ because they have violated a social norm” (p. 97). Her remark reveals that emotional expressions are regulated according to the gender of an individual. To exemplify, men are discouraged from shedding tears, while women are banished from expressing anger. As Frevert explains, “while men invoked rage that had led them to retaliate against a violent wife, women preferred to speak about anguish and desperation. Women who openly express anger may face offence for violating social norms” (2011, p. 88). As understood from her standpoint, it is evident that the entire system functions to pacify and silence women. Within this light, Lochhead’s *Medea* becomes a radical counter-narrative that confronts the emotional double standards imposed by patriarchal society, in which, as Frevert (2011) states, “women are expected to have a submissive acceptance of social expectations regarding marriage and conflicts in marital life” (2011). *Medea*’s characterization in Lochhead’s play elucidates one of the best examples that clearly demonstrates the validity of Frevert’s analysis at this point, since she embodies the disobedience of gender norms by not only voicing her rage but also by taking bold, decisive actions driven by her intense anger. Rather than being silenced or dismissed, she vocalizes her fury with clarity and purpose by resisting the passive, suffering female archetype. Lochhead’s chorus, along with *Medea*, also transcend this emotional rage taboo that are attributed to them, such as passive crying and acceptance and submission, by being aggressive, angry and determined. While it reflects, it also conveys a sense of rejection or defiance with their screams, “Punish Jason for all of us, *Medea*!” (Lochhead, 2000, p.22). Nonetheless, their rage is not portrayed as irrational hysteria but as a legitimate, politically charged reaction to betrayal and injustice. In this way, Lochhead’s *Medea* exemplifies Frevert’s argument by embodying the disobedience of gendered emotional expectations and asserting a woman’s right not only to speak but to speak in anger.

Another notable aspect of Lochhead’s feminist revisioning in *Medea* is her trans-focalization of narrative authority that shifts the center from Jason’s traditional perspective to *Medea*’s lived and gendered experience. While Jason is given longer speeches and a seemingly rational tone, Lochhead subverts this narrative imbalance by imbuing *Medea*’s fewer lines with emotional intensity, verbal precision, and rhetorical power. The given subversion is illustrated in the confrontation scene between *Medea* and Jason, where mansplaining is uncovered and dramatized. Conceptualizing mansplaining not as a casual communicative habit but as a structural form of oppression, Anna Grace Kidd (2017) defines it as such:

a systematic and institutionalized form of oppression that silences women, implicitly disclosing the lesser value of the female voice. This presentation demonstrates that mansplaining is not only as the way in which men make needless explanations to women, usually in a condescending manner, but also as the chronic interruption of women. (p.2)

This form of oppression to suppress women applies to Jason’s attempts to dominate the story after his betrayal of *Medea*. Therefore, Jason’s repeated rationalizations and narrative control can be considered as a dramatized example of mansplaining, illustrating how patriarchal authority seeks to monopolize historical and personal narratives. When Jason abandons her to marry Glauke, the daughter of King Kreon, he rationalizes his actions by claiming they are politically motivated and beneficial for their children. Kreon’s decree of *Medea*’s exile is presented by Jason not as a consequence of his infidelity, but as a matter of her own unreasonable behavior. Thus, he implies she should feel “lucky” that he remains diplomatic (Lochhead, 2000, p.17). Worse still, Jason blames *Medea* for her verbal defiance: “You cannot keep it zipped!” (p.17). Jason’s speech here exemplifies mansplaining not only in content but in tone. He attempts to explain her own emotions to her while invalidating them.

*Medea*, however, refuses to be silenced. Her response calls male arrogance and cruelty to the audience’s

attention. She rebels against being passively kept in silence and underlies Jason’s patriarchal reasoning as follows:

Can't keep it zipped!  
Who what could be worse than you?  
I'd call you coward you piece of vomit man  
who is no man at all except you're man enough to come here  
amazing shamelessness never fails to amaze  
d'you think it brave? how dare you  
shit on those you say you love and then come visiting where in the depths  
of your vile maleness do you get the nerve? (Lochhead, 2000, p.17)

Medea’s humiliations can be regarded as a counter-discourse to mansplaining, as she confronts the hypocrisy in Jason’s version of events. Her fierce diction, such “vile maleness,” “coward,” “shamelessness,” reflects both her rage and her awareness of how Jason’s rhetoric seeks to diminish her agency (Lochhead, 2000, p.17). As a response to this, Jason then pivots to romantic revisionism and suggests that Medea’s sacrifices were merely acts of lust and attributing them to Aphrodite:

First let's not exaggerate your role in my story  
What you did for me Medea you did it  
in the first flush of lust for me lets face it  
Aphrodite ought to get the credit  
I was her darling you were her mere instrument  
A cunning woman passion's puppet” (p.19)

His efforts to diminish Medea’s function in his own path to heroism are open to being read as mansplaining as erasure of female labor, support and contributions. Here, Jason rewrites history and redefines Medea as a passive tool of divine passion. His tone is dismissive and condescending. He reduces her pain and past heroism to irrational, feminine emotion. Yet, Medea does not allow his account to go unchallenged. In one of the most powerful assertions of selfhood in the play, she asserts her influence: “I made you, Jason!” (p.19). This declaration disrupts Jason’s attempt to control the narrative. This assertion is therefore pivotal: it interrupts the male-centered narrative, reclaims authority over her own story, and underscores the central thesis that Lochhead’s Medea functions as a site of feminist reclamation against patriarchal historiography. It re-situates her as the source of his power and legacy by challenging his male authority and historical revisionism. In this moment, Lochhead empowers Medea with a sharp, resistant voice that cuts through Jason’s rhetorical dominance. Jason’s speeches embody the modern impulse to explain away female resistance, justify male betrayal, and monopolize rational discourse. In contrast, Medea’s interventions reveal a long-silenced truth that women are not passive recipients of male action but active agents whose voices have historically been suppressed.

## Conclusion

To recapitulate, this study has scrutinized Lochhead’s *Medea* through a new historicist approach to reveal how the play fosters female experience within oppressive patriarchal structures. New historicism, with its emphasis on the interplay between literature and power, provides a fitting framework for

understanding how Lochhead engages with both the classical source text and the socio-political concerns of her own time such as gender, power, and voice. At the center of the present analysis is Medea’s muted voice, shaped not only by her position as a woman but also as a cultural outsider. Her fragmented and limited speech early in the play reflects the systemic silencing of women, both historically and within patriarchal narratives. However, as the play progresses, this silence is challenged first through the chorus, which acts as symbol of sisterhood that sympathizes with Medea’s plight. Throughout the play, they echo her pain and validate her perspective in a supportive manner. The chorus is thus employed as both witness and amplifier that help restore Medea’s voice and to re-present her story from a woman-centered viewpoint.

This reclamation of voice culminates in Medea’s transformation from silence to verbal defiance, as she confronts Jason’s betrayal. Her emotional assertiveness and sharp rebukes underpin what would today be recognized as mansplaining. Jason’s rationalizations attempt to undermine Medea’s experiences and reduce her role in their shared history. Yet Lochhead arms Medea with language that dismantles these power plays by allowing her to disrupt the narrative he constructs and reclaim authorship over her own story. In this regard, *Medea* becomes more than a tale of revenge but a direct attack against the enduring structures of gendered oppression. To conclude, Lochhead’s *Medea* can be read as a universal call for human rights, compelling readers and audiences to reconsider inherited notions of power, gender, and justice. By exposing how systems such as mansplaining function to uphold patriarchal authority, and how female voices can rise in resistance, the play inspires a more inclusive version of society. The dynamic between Medea and Jason stands as a microcosm of wider socio-cultural tensions, where control over memory and narrative becomes a contested site. In this battlefield, Medea’s voice does not symbolize vengeful madness but rather a meaningful defiant to reclaim voice and power.

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