

S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

7:1 2021

Virtual Theatre

Edited by Sidia Fiorato

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

Founded by Guido Avezù, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

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Published in June 2021

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ISSN 2421-4353

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SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
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ROBERTA ZANONI*

Unmotherly Love: the Medea Model in Mary Sidney's *Antonius*

Abstract

Mary Sidney's *Antonius*, the English translation of Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine*, offers the first example of a closet drama in early modern English that not only used classical resources but was also written by a woman. It is worth exploring the possibility that Euripides's and Seneca's versions have coloured Sidney's reception and re-elaboration of Garnier's play. Although neither has yet been connected with Garnier's and Sidney's plays, Sidney's version effectively shows significant similarities in her construction of the female protagonist with particular reference to the dramatisation of unmotherly love. Through an in-depth investigation of these parallels, I will attempt to illustrate Mary Sidney's approach to the Medea model and her own intervention, which include the influence of Studley's translation of Seneca's *Medea*; I will also explore how this intertextuality leads to the construction of Cleopatra as a stronger female ruler who abandons her children for her lover Antonius, and for her resolution to die after he has died. This article highlights how reading these aspects of Mary Sidney's play in the early modern context may involve the identification of parallels with the situation in England linked to the Elizabethan succession.

KEYWORDS: Mary Sidney, *Antonius*, Robert Garnier, Euripides, Seneca, Studley, translation, Elizabethan succession

1. Introduction

Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (1592) is often regarded as a "line-by-line translation" of Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578) (Hannay 1990, 140), a play considered "instrumental in introducing Continental neo-classical tragedy into Renaissance England" (Cadman 2011, 1). As Belle and Cottagnies have recently argued, Garnier's sources can be found in the Greek dramatic tradition, "especially in the choruses, in which various echoes of Sophocles and Euripides can be heard" (2017, 3),¹ but also in "the Senecan tragic model" (2) insofar as it addresses the relation between passion and rule as well as "complex moral and political issues from a variety of standpoints" (17). The impact of

¹ See also 134n11, 171n10; Terneaux 2010 161.

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Seneca's tragedies on drama in England is well known;² it is also well known that Mary Sidney's brother praised the "well-constructed rhetoric and . . . a properly worked-out moral" (Dunworth 2010, 61) as functional to the unfolding of drama. It is no surprise that Mary Sidney was attracted to the Senecan allure of Garnier's play, as Belle and Cottagnies remark (2). It might be more surprising, instead, if she had been drawn to it by the recognition of echoes of Greek origin in Garnier's play: in fact, there are a few aspects that may suggest research in that direction, and that might hint at her contribution to conveying Garnier's classical model into the English context, thus possibly also influencing the authors who took inspiration from her work.

Garnier's indebtedness to Euripides has mainly been observed with regard to his *Hippolyte*, *La Troade* and *Antigone* (see, for instance, Fournial 2019). In *Marc Antoine*, Belle and Cottagnies have detected hints of Euripides's *Troades* (2017, 134). However, another Euripidean play that has not been examined yet in this context may be relevant: *Medea*. I will argue that by looking at the Medea model as primarily derived from Euripides, with occasional suggestions from Seneca, we can infer that Mary Sidney may have been attracted to the Medea model mediated by Garnier, and that she not only reproduced this model in her translation, but that she also fashioned her own approach through her additions, also by resorting to yet another Medea model, the one of John Studley's translation of Seneca. Mary Sidney's recognition of the Medea influence on Garnier will be observed in the way her own innovations enhance the effect of some elements already present in Garnier's play, and in her choice of an English Medea as her own source. Sidney's literary choices and interpretations of certain parts of the play also demonstrate her independence as a translator and writer. Indeed, her translation of Garnier's text accentuates the importance of Cleopatra's children and depicts Cleopatra as a stronger female character. On the one hand, she delineates a strong ruler who, like Garnier's, is prey to passion and love and seems to put the matter of the state aside for her own feelings. On the other hand, the comparison of Medea's treatment of her children to that of Cleopatra's, as well as their legitimisation as heirs of Cleopatra and Antonius in Mary Sidney's play, contributes to the delineation of Cleopatra's unmotherly figure and her abandonment of her children as a sort of political sacrifice. The new construction of the play in English, derived by Sidney from Garnier's example, might have been read by Mary Sidney's contemporaries as hinting at the uncertainty of the situation in England at the end of the sixteenth century when Queen Elizabeth, who had been constructed by propaganda as the mother of her people, refused to choose an heir, putting

² Literature on this topic is vast; see for instance Cunliffe 1893; Braden 1984 and 1985; Perry 2020, Winston 2016 and 2006; and Gray 2016.

the country in jeopardy and possibly at the mercy of foreign invasions.

In the following pages, I will first discuss the relevance of the Medea model in Garnier's play as one of the mythological influences that interweave in the fabrics of the text, and Mary Sidney's translation of it. Then I will focus on the particular issues which seem topical to the historical circumstances of the 1590s, issues of queenship and of royal descent, which are connected to Sidney's own version of the play. I will single out a few textual examples of how she seems to have foregrounded a Medea-like inflection of Cleopatra in order to underscore her female power and her relationship with her children as a reference to queenly power and to succession respectively.³

2. Cleopatra and the Medea Intertext

There is no direct reference to the story of Medea in Garnier's and Mary Sidney's plays; however, as will be seen, some structural and linguistic occurrences from the Euripidean and Senecan plays can be detected in the French and English plays. Although indirectly, Garnier suffuses his play with Medean imagery, which is reproduced by Mary Sidney and which is part of a "creative interweaving" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) with other mythological and literary references which form the "mythological cluster" (Peyré 2017) of the play. Garnier and Sidney "make the most of classical mythology" by exploiting, each in their own way, "its inherent capacity to invite shifting interpretations" (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017). For instance, both writers utilise the signifying potential of the story and are influenced by the way in which it has evolved through time.⁴ Multiple interpretations are collated and juxtaposed onto the story and figure of Medea in the early modern period when myths became repositories of themes and passages to

³ As I will be moving between texts in a multilingual comparison, for clarity's sake I will use the following abbreviations: *Gar.* (Garnier), *M.S.* (Mary Sidney), *Eur.* (Euripides), *Sen.* (Seneca) and *Stu.* (Studley). All modern translations of Euripides and Seneca are from Kovacs 1994 and Fitch 2002. When references are only to Sidney's play, the discussion assumes its substantial coincidence with Garnier's, which will be mentioned only when relevant differences emerge.

⁴ Producing various effects also in Mary Sidney's contemporaries: Abraham Fraunce, Mary Sidney's protégé, provided a catalogue of mythological figures among which Medea was defined as the embodiment of "counsel and advice, . . . knowledge or understanding" (Fraunce 1592, 47). In his *Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney contrasted the positive: "wisdom and temperance in *Vlisses* and *Diomedes*, valure in *Achilles*, friendship in *Nisus* and *Eurialus*" to the negative "remorse of conscience in *Oedipus*; the soone repenting pride in *Agamemnon*; the selfe deuouring crueltie in his father *Atreus*; the violence of ambition in the two *Theban* brothers; the sower sweetness of reuenge in *Medea*" (Maslen and Shepherd 2002, 91).

be adapted for the most varied occasions. Myths do not appear in isolation in early modern works, but they emerge as “a subtle layering of meanings – an intertextual *feuilletage*, to use Roland Barthes’s term – that reverberates through the text and beyond” (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) an intertwining of references which depend on the author’s knowledge and can be variously received by the audience. For instance, in Garnier’s and Mary Sidney’s plays, a similar structural and dramatic pattern associates Medea’s and Cleopatra’s attitudes towards their children, and this is underlined by the reference to the mythological figure of Niobe who, as will be seen, is employed by both authors in unusual ways in relation to motherhood. The mythological reference to Niobe constitutes one of the “countless interstices and alveoli” around which the texts branch off (Peyré 2017), and its peculiar handling also suggests a mimetic parallel between Medea and Cleopatra.

Garnier’s play

is in itself an instance of interwoven influences: while the overall rhetoric is Senecan, the amplification of Cleopatra’s lamentation recalls Virgil’s Dido mourning Aeneas’s departure. Antony (II.502-13) and the chorus (II.862-5) establish parallels between Egypt and Troy while recalling other tragic tales, mostly from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Sidney translates faithfully, introducing subtle inflections by referring directly back to source material, essentially Plutarch. (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017)

The texts by Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and others were not considered in the early modern period as “independent, individual, autonomous creations un their own right”, but they were thought to belong to “a collective textual labyrinth: . . . an open, expanding structure, where all the pleasure consists in endlessly exploring back and forth, prospectively and retrospectively” (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017). Texts or significant passages were often taken out of their original context and used by writers to suit particular occasions in new texts: images blended “so that Ovid and Seneca, Seneca and the Bible, suddenly fuse[d], Athamas, Hercules and Medea merge[d]. This process of coalescence [was] often accompanied by a process of expansion, creating complex reverberations” (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 153). All these quotations intertwine in the early modern “general ambience of the Graeco-Roman heritage” (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 2) in which classical sources were not considered as a canon but as texts which enabled writers “to explore such crucial areas of human experience as love, politics, ethics, and history” (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 2). Martindale’s claim about Shakespeare’s introjection of the classics to the “effect of ultimately making the[m] . . . almost invisible in his work” (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 18) can be applied to the work of other Renaissance and early modern authors, including Garnier and Sidney, who showed the humanist tendency of a “prag-

matic use of earlier literature” (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 18).

The Medea model here postulated intertwines with all of the aforementioned mythical and literary references to form layers of meanings which enrich the interpretation of the play. Sidney's input does not only consist of her contribution to introducing “the dramatic potential of the Antony and Cleopatra story” to the English cultural scene and to heightening “interest in Senecan tragedy”. Sidney also furthers the “delineation of passions through mythological references” (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017) among which the Medea one is mostly linked to, with the reversal of traditional femininity and her relation to her children. Mary Sidney's treatment of the Medea model can show “how a myth is continually reshaped through combinations of sources and adaptation to new concerns” in a context in which “politically inflected classical tragedies could become a medium through which it was possible to comment on the contemporary scene from a safer historical and generic distance” (Valls-Russell, Lafont and Coffin 2017).

Although they have never been highlighted in relation to Garnier's and Mary Sidney's plays, the similarities between Medea and Cleopatra are palpable. Both Medea and Cleopatra are “transgressive classical women” (Heavey 2015, 1);⁵ Medea is the “barbarian Colchian” (3) and a charmer; Cleopatra is the Queen of foreign people⁶ and a seductress of men, famously captivating first Julius Caesar, and then, later on, Marcus Antonius.⁷ Both Medea and Cleopatra boast a “royal lineage” (Tyminsky 2014, 33) and a divine ascendance, Cleopatra identifying herself “with the divine figure of the Egyptian goddess Isis”, and Medea claiming “descent from Helios, the sun god” (33-4). Both Medea and Cleopatra have children from a man married to another woman;⁸ both experience a totalising love which downplays any other affection, including motherly love; and both experience loss of power: Medea abandons her country for Jason, and he eventually repudiates her for Creon's daughter; Cleopatra is vanquished by Caesar Octavianus and is eventually doomed to become an exile and a prisoner. Both react with acts of blood: Medea kills her children out of revenge, Cleopatra kills herself for love of Antony and to escape from shame and the Roman yoke; as will be seen, both sacrifice their children, although in different ways.

⁵ Like Tamora in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in Heavey's view, Medea is “a threat to patriarchal security” (106); likewise, Cleopatra is a “dangerous foreign queen” capable of destroying Rome's greatness (Tyminsky 2014, 32).

⁶ *Gar* 4.1783: “Roine des peuples estrangers”; *M.S.* 4.439: “Queene of forraine lands”.

⁷ *Gar* 1.112: “enuenime ton coeur”; *M.S.* 1.111-2: “infect[ed]” Antonius' “tainted hart”.

⁸ It may be recalled that even though Cleopatra was not repudiated, unlike Medea, Antonius “never married her; instead, when his wife Fulvia died, he married Octavian's half-sister Octavia for political reasons. About the same time, Cleopatra gave birth to their twins” (Tyminsky 2014, 34).

Before coming to a closer discussion of the question of queenly motherhood in Mary Sidney's translation, and the possible interference of other ancient models besides Plutarch,⁹ it is worth making a few comments on the texts that Sidney may have been familiar with and the degree of their relevance. The question evidently concerns her knowledge of Euripides, as Seneca circulated widely in both Latin and English. John Studley's translation had first been published separately in a quarto edition in 1566 before being added to Thomas Newton's 1581 collection *Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies*. Euripides is a more complicated matter since we have no anglicised version, as we do for Seneca, and no edition of his works was printed in England except for *Troades*, which was published in the original Greek in octavo by the printer John Day in 1575.¹⁰ But that was an absolutely unique venture which was not to be repeated until more than a century later when his complete works were published by Joshua Barnes in 1694. However, editions were printed on the continent and by the end of the sixteenth century his plays circulated widely and could be accessed by those who knew Latin, if not Greek.¹¹

Warkentin, Black, and Bowen's 2013 inventory of the Library of the Sidneys at Penshurst Place testifies to the existence of copies of Euripides's plays.¹² Although it is unclear whether Mary Sidney knew Greek, Skretkovicz remarks that

⁹ *The Life of Antonius* in Plutarch's *Lives* is the source both Garnier and Sidney acknowledge in the play's Argument, however, as Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan claim, Mary Sidney also read Amyot's French translation of the *Lives*, which was also used by Garnier (Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 1998, 148), and she was also familiar North's translation of Amyot (*Ibid.*).

¹⁰ For a discussion of this edition, see Duranti 2021.

¹¹ The first edition of Euripides appeared in Florence in 1495. Based on the Venice 1503 edition of the *Tragodiai heptakaideka* various other editions followed, but only in 1551 the entire corpus of nineteen plays (but naming only "eighteen" of them in the title) was published in Basel by Herwagen and then they appeared again in 1558 in Frankfurt, by Peter Brubach; in 1562 they were published by Caspar Stiblin in Greek and in Latin translation; in 1571 in Antwerp by Willem Canter. (For a discussion of the editions of Greek plays published in Europe from 1495 to 1596 see for instance Pollard 2017, a list is provided on 232-41).

Another Latin translation of Euripides' plays by Melanchthon was published in 1562. A Latinised *Medea* had already appeared in the 1544 edition by Michel de Vasconan of *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Medea* featuring Erasmus and George Buchanan's translations. In 1568 *Alcestis* and *Medea* appeared in Basel, again in George Buchanan's translation, whose *Medea* was also published in 1576 (Pollard 2017 also engages with the editions of Greek plays translated into Latin and published in Europe from 1501 to 1599. A full list can be found on 242-59).

¹² Under letter E of the inventory the following can be found: two references to Euripides' *Tragoediae*, one in Greek and Latin and one unspecified, and a reference to an edition of Euripides in octavo, with no other indication.

so widespread had education of women in languages become by 1548 that Nicholas Udall observed, "It is nowe no newes in Englande to see young damysels in nobles houses and in the Courtes of princes . . . familiarlye both to reade or reason" about their religious readings "in Greke, Latine, Frenche, or Italian, as in Englishe". (1999, 15)

While her brothers went to university, Mary and her sister studied at home with tutors; their education followed "the standard humanist curriculum of the classics, the Church Fathers, and Latin, French, and Italian language and literature; they may also have studied the other learned languages of Greek and Hebrew, although the evidence is inconclusive" (Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 1998, 2). Abraham Fraunce offers some lines of Greek in the dedication of *The Arcadian Rhetorike* to Mary Sidney suggesting that she may have known the language at least at a basic level (ibid.).

The knowledge of Greek, however, was not requisite for Mary Sidney to read Euripides's *Medea* as she very likely encountered at least George Buchanan's Latin "almost . . . word-for-word translation" (Charlton 1946, xlix). As James Phillips argues, Buchanan exchanged letters with members of the Sidney Circle with which he shared poetical and political inclinations concerning "the ultimate sovereignty of the people, the delegated authority of the king, the obligation of the king to govern under the law, and the right of the people to depose a tyrant" (Phillips 1948, 45). Philip Sidney, Mary Sidney's brother, in turn, wrote a letter to Buchanan praising his work and political ideas, and he expressed his desire to meet Buchanan and James VI, Buchanan's own pupil whom Sidney described in his letter as "the young king, in quhome mony have layd their hopes" (*The Warrener Papers*, I, 146). Buchanan's relation with the Sidney circle, although not directly with Mary Sidney, might have favoured her access to his works.¹³ Similarly, Garnier may have also used Buchanan's works as a source since Buchanan covered important academic positions in France for many years; Buchanan's translation of *Medea* was even used by his "student, Jean Bastier de La Péruse", for the composition of his own *Medée* staged in a French theatre in 1553 (Wygant 2007, 34).¹⁴

This is to say that Buchanan's translation may have played a role in Mary

¹³ Mary Sidney surely consulted Buchanan's paraphrases for her translation of the Psalms: "Mary Herbert's psalm paraphrases are based on extensive scholarship . . . She consulted many additional sources, including the commentaries of Victorinus Strigelius, Franciscus Vatablus, George Buchanan, and Immanuel Tremellius", *ODNB*.

¹⁴ "La Péruse had available to him the *Medea* of Euripides in Buchanan's Latin translation, and Seneca's *Medea*, and we know as well that he was familiar with the first tragedy written in French, Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive*, because La Péruse took part in its performances in 1553" (Wygant 2007, 50). In addition, Garnier took Jodelle's play as a reference point for the subject of his play (Ternaux 2010, 20).

Sidney's approach to Euripides's *Medea*.

In a long monologue in Act 1, Antonius calls Cleopatra "fair sorceres" (1.82; *Gar.* "sorciere" 1.82) whom he loves "as one encharm'd" (1.79; *Gar.* "comme vn homme charmé", 1.79). Here, Antonius analogizes Cleopatra's seducing power to that of a poison, making his "fair sorceres" the admin-istrant, and the phrase "poisoned cuppes" is added to the original image, which generically alluded to "les poisons de ta belle sorciere" (1.82). Belle and Cottagnies claim that the detail of the "cups" might be referred to "the enchantress Circe in Book X of the *Odyssey* . . . and perhaps also to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where Acrasia poisons a knight by having him drink from her 'charmed cup' (II. 1. 55)" (2017, 99n 16). However, if Mary Sidney happened to read Buchanan's *Ane Detectiovn of the Duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*¹⁵, she would have found his comparison of Mary Stuart with "Medea" as "a bludy woman and a poysoning witch" who wants to poison the king "quho had alreedy tastit of hir louely cuppe" (1571, 65). One wonders whether Mary Sidney's addition of the detail of the "cups" could be further proof of her familiarity with Buchanan's works, or, in turn, of the potential influence on her by Buchanan's own engagement with Medea. But whichever the case, it remains a peculiar coincidence that one must take into account when considering Sidney's possible knowledge of Euripides.

Her probable knowledge of Euripides, either in Greek or in Latin, can be seen as framing her reception of Garnier, from which she takes the Medea model and which she modifies in order to present her own strong and unmotherly Cleopatra.

On his part, Garnier applies the Medea model as bearer of unmotherly and virile features and, alternatively, as the figure of abandonment and despair for love to both Cleopatra and Antonius, suggesting occasional reversals of traditional gender roles.

In particular, in Act 1, Sidney draws from the French play the depiction of a feminine Antonius as the one betrayed by a Jason-like Cleopatra. Differently, in Plutarch's account, Antonius was abandoned by Cleopatra during the battle, but he immediately followed her and eventually forgave her:

when he saw Cleopatraes shippe vnder saile, he forgot, forsooke, & betrayed them that fought for him, & embarked vpon a galley with fiue bankes of owers, to follow her that had already begon to euerthrow him, & would in the end be his vtter destruction . . . [He] liued three dayes alone, without speaking to any man. But when he arriued at the head of Taenarus, there Cleopatraes women first brought Antonius and Cleopatra to speake together, and afterwards, to suppe and lye together. (Plutarch 1579, 1001-2)

¹⁵ The book can actually be found in the inventory of the Sidney's library at Pen-hurst, see Warkentin, Black, and Bowen, 2013.

Moreover, Plutarch characterised *Antonius* as possessing strong political and warlike capacities, as well as vices¹⁶ traditionally associated to male characters.

Garnier's depiction of *Antoine* as a feminine and voluptuous character has been interpreted as possibly denouncing the excessive and lavish behaviour attributed to King *Henri III*¹⁷ and his court (Garnier 2010, 44). Conversely, in Mary Sidney's translation the reversal of the traditional male role in the depiction of *Antonius*, emphasised by the comparison with *Medea*, contributes to highlighting the tendency of the play to give relevance to the representation of female figures and female passions.

Although he condemns the "wav'ring" (1.145)¹⁸ nature of women, the *Medea*-like *Antonius* of Act 1 is the one who despises *Cleopatra*, first calling her cruel, unkind, a sorceress, and then lamenting that he has "such a goddess left" (1.106),¹⁹ only to denounce her betrayal and hypocrisy once again.²⁰ Euripides's *Medea* and Garnier's *Antonius* follow a path from self-pitying and longing to die to the desire of revenge which is reproduced by Mary Sidney. For instance, similarly to Euripides's protagonist who had abandoned and betrayed her family in order to pursue *Jason*, fleeing her country,²¹ in Act 1, *Antonius* regrets having abandoned his own country, family, and friends for the treacherous *Cleopatra*²² and then he shares in the irrational lust for revenge which characterized *Medea* in Euripides.²³ For *Antonius*, *Cleopatra*

¹⁶ Plutarch also provides "a vivid example of cruelty in Antony . . . his treatment of Cicero and his glee following the latter's demise" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 183). Differently from Garnier and Sidney, who show *Antonius* as a victim of the events, who denounces his own behaviour both on the personal and political level, Plutarch also portrays *Antonius*'s "cruelty to adversaries, unworthiness of office, inclination towards tyranny, as well as the more personal vices of drunkenness and concupiscence" (Martindale and Taylor 2004, 183).

¹⁷ Ternaux also mentions Aubigné's pamphlets in which the king of France is defined as a woman-king or as a man-queen (Garnier 2010, 9).

¹⁸ Garnier: "le naturel des Femmes est volage" (1.145).

¹⁹ Garnier: "D'auoir ... laisse telle Deesse" (1.106).

²⁰ Iustly complaine I she disloyall is,/Nor constant is, euen as I constant am,/To comfort my mishap, despising me/No more, then when the heauens favour'd me. (1.141-4)

²¹ "O father, O my native city, from you I departed in shame" (*Eur.* 166; see also 488-90).

²² For her haue I forgone my country, / Caesar unto warre prouok'd / . . . For loue of her, in her allurements caught / Abandon'd life; I honour haue despisde, / Disdain'd my freends, and of the statelye Rome / Despoilde the empire of her best attire (1.7-16)

²³ "MEDEA: And so I shall ask from you this much as a favor: if I find any means or contrivance to punish my husband for these wrongs . . . In all other things a woman is full of fear, incapable of looking on battle or cold steel; but when she is injured in love, no mind is more murderous than hers. CHORUS-LEADER: I will do so. For you

has become a “cruell, traitres, woman most vnkinde” whom he accuses “dost, forsworne, my loue and life betraie: / And giu’st me up to ragefull enemie” (1.17-9). Differently from Garnier, Mary Sidney’s heroine did not disown Antoine’s “flammes”, i.e. his passion, but she was forswearing his “loue” (1.17). Although at this point she is seen as a traitress, this is the first of a series of remarks which legitimise their relationship as being more substantial than mere passion, and indeed as a loving one, which will culminate in Cleopatra’s self-definition as Antonius’s “wife” (2.2.170) (“espouse” 2.556) and which contribute to the legitimisation of their children who, as will be seen and as can be seen from this first observation, is stronger in Mary Sidney than in Garnier.²⁴ Moreover, Sidney’s version depicts a Cleopatra who chooses not to hand Antonius over to the enemies because she is “mal-sage” (unwise); her actions are not attributed to her absentmindedness, but she seems to be fully aware of her own actions, which she takes deliberately. The strong and resolute character of Cleopatra is constructed according to Mary Sidney’s own interpretation, seemingly portraying a figure in which the audience might have recognised the English Queen’s strength and resolution.

While being indebted to Garnier’s Euripidean Medea model, this passage shows one of Mary Sidney’s first autonomous attempts, which also entails the use of a Medea model derived from Studley. As already seen, the Jason-like Cleopatra of Antonius’s account is not only accused of betraying him, but also of abandoning him in the hands of his enemies – Medea was left without friends and with no place to go because of the crimes she had

will be right to punish your husband” (259-67). Although the English translation uses the verb “to punish”, ἐκτείσῃ (*ekteise*) actually comes from *ektinomai*: *exact full payment for a thing, avenge*, E. *HF* 547; *take vengeance on someone* (τινός) Id. *Med.* 267. The literal translation would thus be: “For you will be right to take vengeance on your husband.”

²⁴ Mary Sidney enhances the legitimacy of Cleopatra’s bond with Antonius – and thus of the status of their children as heirs – also in comparison to Plutarch, who remarked that Antony had married Octavia after meeting and allegedly falling in love with Cleopatra and underlined the legitimacy of the Roman marriage while despising Antonius’ union with Cleopatra: “it seemed also that Antonius had bene widower euen since the death of his wife Fuluia. For he denied not that he kept Cleopatra, but so did he not confesse that he had her as his wife” (1579, 984). Plutarch also denounced Cleopatra’s love for Antonius deeming it as false and only driven by political interests: “Cleopatra knowing that Octauia would haue Antonius from her, and fearing also that if with her vertue and honest behaiour, (besides the great power of her brother Caesar) she did adde thereunto her modest kind loue to please her husband, that she would then be too stronge for her, and in the end winne him away: she suttelly seemed to languish for the loue of Antonius, pyning her boldy for lacke of meate. Furthermore, she euery way so framed her countenance, that when Antonius came to see her, she cast her eyes vpon him, like a woman rauished for ioy. Straight againe when he went from her, she fell a weeping and blubbering, looked ruffully of the mattter, and still found the meanes that Antonius should oftentyne finde her weeping” (995).

committed for Jason who had repudiated her, abandoning her to her destiny. For Mary Sidney, Antonius sees Cleopatra as a “woman most unkind” like Jason is for Studley’s Medea “amoste unthanckfull man” who has dared to “spoyle” Medea of her “countrey . . . syre, / and kyngdom” (*Stu.* 5.Bv) as Antonius had “forgone” his “country”, “abandoned life”, “honour . . . despised”, “disdained” his “friends” and “of stately Rome despoiled the empire of her best attire” (1.8-14). Antonius’s address to Cleopatra, “dost, forsworn, my love and life betray / And gi’st me up to rageful enemy” (1.17-9),²⁵ can be seen as reminiscent of Jason’s “and yet forsake me wretche forlorne, to straye in forreyn soyle” (*Stu.* 5.Bv).²⁶ The construction of the character of a Medea-like Antonius follows Studley also in his invocation of revenge for Cleopatra’s betrayal: “But you, O gods (if any faith regarde), / With sharpe reuenge her faithles change reward” (*M. S.* 3.35-36). The reference to “sharpe reuenge” is Mary Sidney’s invention, where Garnier used the word punishment: “Ses trompeurs changemens seront d’eux chastiez” (her deceptive changes will be chastised by them [the gods]).²⁷ Belle and Cottagnies note how this passage in Garnier resonates with “Dido’s invectives against unfaithful Aeneas (Virgil’s *Aeneid*, V. 519-20)” (2017, 132, note 7) while also spotlighting Mary Sidney’s innovative contribution and “ironic play on the notion of ‘pietas’ (faith / faithfulness)” (*ibid.*). The apparently inventive use of the concept of *pietas*, however, can be traced back to Medea’s first appearance in Studley’s translation, where we can also find the invocation to the gods (“O gods” 3.35) and the idea of revenge against a faithless lover (“sharpe reuenge her faithless change rewarde” 3.36):

O Gods whose grace doth guide their gobbles

...

O Lord of sad and lowrynge lakes,

o Ladye dire of Hell,

(Whom though that Pluto stale biforce

yet did his troth excell

The *ficle fayth* of Iasons loue,

that he to me dothe beare,)

²⁵ Garnier: l’ay pour elle quitté, / Mon païs, et Cesar à la guerre incité, / . . . / l’ay mis pour l’amour d’elle, en ses blandices pris, / Ma vie à l’abandon, mon honneur à mespris, / Mes amis dedaignez, l’Empire venerable / De ma grande Cité deuestu miserable: / . . . / Inhumaine, traïstresse, ingrante entre les femmes. / Tu trompes, pariurant, et ma vie, et mes flammes: / Et me livres, mal-sage, à mes fiers ennemis (1.8-19).

²⁶ In this case we can say that Mary Sidney resorted to Studley and not to Seneca since the latter’s account lacks the pathos of his English counterpart and the linguistic and structural elements that recur in Studley, although it contains the main ideas of loss of father, country and kingdom.

²⁷ Translation mine.

With cursed throte I coniure you,
 o grysiye gohstes appeare.
 Come out, come out, ye hellish haggges,
reuenge this deede so dire.
 (*Stu.* 1.Bir, 1.Biv)²⁸

Through Antonius's words in Mary Sidney's play, Cleopatra becomes the "faithless" Jason, who has abandoned his lover, and who must be subject to revenge.²⁹

Cleopatra's embodiment of the male characteristics attributed to her by Antonius is the first step in the construction of a reversed motherhood which will then be developed by the following identification of Cleopatra with Medea in Act 2.³⁰ As will be seen, Mary Sidney's Cleopatra shares her warlike attitude with Medea, as well as her unmotherly attitude driven by stronger feelings for her children's father than her children themselves. The comparison with Jason endows Cleopatra with a manliness which brings her in closer alignment to Medea's unmotherly characterisation. Sidney also derives from Garnier Euripides's peculiarly sympathetic attitude towards Medea (Hutchins and Lofgreen 2014, 10), and the same attitude is also directed towards Cleopatra who, in Garnier's and Sidney's versions, proves her love and resolution as early as the second act even though she was defined as a traitress at the beginning. Cleopatra's foreignness, excessive passion, and her actions which bring on Antonius's suicide as well as her children's exile, could be perceived as negative traits, however, as Euripides' Medea, she arouses, both in Garnier and in Sidney, the sympathy of the audience who pities her pain, and sympathises with her love sacrifice. In this case, Cleopatra shares with Medea some traits which are traditionally associated to her as a female character, namely her jealousy – Cleopatra is jealous of Antonius and worried he might go back to his wife Octavia, as Medea is jealous of Jason and his new wife – and the exclusive feeling – of love in the case of Cleopatra and of hate, derived from her previous unconditional love of Medea – respectively towards Antonius and Jason. In this sense, Antonius

²⁸ This quotation from Studley's play retains the spelling except for the italics for names. The emphasis is mine.

²⁹ In this case, Mary Sidney's text is more similar to Studley's translation than to Seneca's text: Seneca's Medea does not mention Jason's fickle faith and she does not invoke revenge but the vengeful furies against Creon and Creusa: "triformis, quosque iuravit mihi / deos Iason, quosque Medeae magis / fas est precari: noctis aeternae chaos, / aversa superis regna manesque impios / dominumque regni tristis et dominam fide / meliore raptam, voce non fausta precor, / nunc, nunc adeste, sceleris ultrices deae" (7-13).

³⁰ Antonius and Cleopatra seem to be talking to each other through the acts but actually never meet in the play till after Antonius' death.

can be identified with the treacherous Jason, who has two wives simultaneously³¹ and who easily condemns his children to exile.³²

Euripides's *Medea* "appropriates a wide range of images and terms from the male spheres of battle and athletics" (Mastrorarde 2010, 264), sentiments which are echoed by Cleopatra's status as ruler and military leader, as well as her selfish suicide which leaves her children motherless, all contribute to her depiction as a *Medea*-like figure, enhanced by Mary Sidney's translation.

At the same time, readers in late Elizabethan England might have recognised in such a strong and belligerent queen hints at Elizabeth I and her rule, and, as will be seen in the following pages, they might have considered the abandonment of her children, heightened to the point of becoming a political sacrifice if seen through the application of the *Medea* model, as analogous to the political sacrifice of the English people due to of Elizabeth's resolution not to settle the succession question.

3. Cleopatra: Unmotherly Sacrifice

Among the many instances of the motifs that can be traced in Mary Sidney's play via Garnier,³³ one of the most interesting within the English context of the 1590s is Cleopatra's relation to her children. Belle and Cottagnies have remarked that Mary Sidney's translation was connected to the political attitudes of the Sidney Circle about the interests of the Protestants and the widespread preoccupation for the succession (2017, 44). Once brought to England, the French tragedy's political message, obliquely referring to the French civil wars and Henri III, could well be adjusted to the English milieu, especially because "Garnier's lines carry what could be construed as telling allusions to the unfolding succession crisis and the Spanish threat" (Kewes 2012, 250). In this historical context, it is worth pinpointing the implied correspondence that is present between *Medea* and Cleopatra in their own relationships with their children at the cusp of their existential crisis. As Seneca attracted interest for the depiction of unruly passion over stoic self-control and its effects on politics, so a female version of that same issue could not be

³¹ As will be seen, in Garnier and more markedly in Mary Sidney, Cleopatra is considered as Antonius's wife.

³² Once again, the feminine and masculine attributes associated with the story of *Medea* are both present in Antonius's character who, like *Medea*, sees nothing but his love, and, at the same time, as both Jason and *Medea*, easily sacrifices his children: "Take Caesar conquest, take my goods, take he / Th'honour to be lord of the earth alone, / My sons, my life bent headlong to mishaps, / No force, so not my Cleopatra take" (3.55-8).

³³ These form part of my broader research on this topic.

less attractive. The fact that Cleopatra is a queen makes her a special mother and her motherly affection cannot but have political implications, we can assume (even without considering specific intentions on Sidney's part) that any question of queenly disregard for the royal offspring could have an impact on the political imaginary of the 1590s in England. A Medean inflection in the construction Cleopatra's persona could only add layers regarding issues about royal legitimacy, expulsion, abandonment of her children.

A correlation starts to take shape between Cleopatra's and Medea's characters as early as Act 2 of Garnier's and Sidney's plays; similarly to Medea who is ready to sacrifice her children to hurt Jason, Cleopatra, although driven by a different feeling as we will see later, is willing to renounce her children and her own life³⁴ for Antonius. In Mary Sidney's translation the construction of Cleopatra's character and her final self-sacrifice, seen through the lens of the Medea example, demonstrates the queen's refusal of her political and motherly rights; this characterisation could be seen as mirroring the uncertainty about the future of the English Queen's rule and succession.³⁵ To highlight the theme of neglected succession, and the consequences of Cleopatra's suicide, such as the sacrifice of her royal descent, Mary Sidney elaborated on Garnier's several references to the royal ancestry of Cleopatra and her children.³⁶ Moreover, while Garnier suggested moderation to his King

³⁴ In Plutarch, on the other hand, she delays her death in case this could save her children and assure them a prestigious life.

³⁵ Mary Sidney's choice of Garnier and of his representation of the Roman conquest of the Egyptian territories could also be seen in the light of her fight in favour of the Protestant cause. Mary Sidney was probably aware of the attempts to influence the decisions of Elizabeth I and to convince her to support the Huguenot cause in which her husband and her brother Philip were involved (Hannay 1990, 46). Mary Sidney was also a friend of Mornay – whose *A Discourse of Life and Death* was published along with *Antonius* in 1592 – who had been an ambassador for the Huguenots to the Queen (Hannay 1990, 46). Through her connections and patronage, Mary Sidney showed her political engagement and disposition in favour of the Protestant alliance. Mary Sidney also personally witnessed some of the crucial historical events which contributed to shaping the political scenario of the time such as the 1588 attack by the Spanish armies and the menace of an invasion. Although the Spanish Armada was defeated, the attack prompted a feeling of vulnerability in the English people, who identified the cause of the foreign threat in the question of succession. See, for instance Kewes 2012, 249.

³⁶ For instance, allusions to descent from the sun are scattered in various parts of *Antonius* (and they are also reminiscent of Medea, who declared her descent from the sun in Euripides, Seneca and Studley): In *Antonius*, Phoebus is the one who “did with breath” inspire life in the Egyptian people; and Cleopatra, in her final monologue, compares herself to “Phaëton's sisters, daughters of the sun” (5.105).

Cleopatra also knows that by killing herself she will deprive her children of their “royall right” (2.2.171) (In Garnier there is no reference to the royal right but to the “goods of their ancestors”: “biens de leurs ayeux” 2.557), and of their “heritage” (2.2.173).

through the condemnation of Antonius' voluptuousness, Mary Sidney's expansion of the references to female and motherly figures seems to be in line with the motherly metaphor cherished by Elizabeth's royal propaganda.³⁷

It is apparent in Sidney's depiction of the queen's belligerent behaviour that she applied the Medea model to her interpretation of Cleopatra's character, which Sidney derives from Garnier but renders more forceful. If Antonius is prey to the "destructive power of unruly passion" (Belle and Cottagnes 2017, 46) and shares the irrational lust for revenge which characterises Medea in both Euripides and Seneca,³⁸ Cleopatra acquires at one point the manly, combative qualities of Medea, stubbornly deciding to go to war out of jealousy for Antonius.³⁹ Her will to fight is unbending and mirrors the

Finally, in her final speech, Cleopatra asks her children: "Remember not, my children, you were born/Of such a princely race; remember not/ So many brave kings which have Egypt ruled/ In right descent your ancestors have been;/ That this great Antony your father was,/ Hercules' blood, and more than he in praise./ . . . /Who knows if that your hands, false Destiny, /The sceptres promised of imperious Rome, /Instead of them shall crooked sheephooks bear (5.59-69).

³⁷ As William Camden recalls in his 1615 *Annales*, in her speech to Parliament of 1559, Elizabeth famously claimed that she was "already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England" and asked her subjects: "reproach me so no more, . . . that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children" (27, 28). Although the political representation of the Queen as "mother of her nation" (Dunworth 2010, 34) might provide political stability at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, towards the end of the sixteenth century Elizabeth's decisions not to settle the succession question could result in the destruction of her own children, whether because her people could be left to face civil wars, or the power of unfavourable foreign rulers. As a matter of fact, when Mary Sidney translated Garnier, Elizabeth was 57 and it was clear that her people would have been her only offspring. In 1587 Mary Stuart had died, an event which could have drawn even more attention on the succession theme.

³⁸ But, as previously stated, he shows closer links with Euripides' Medea for the emotional trajectory that sees him move from self-pity to a wish for revenge and finally a desire to die.

³⁹ Plutarch's Cleopatra participates in the war too, but initially it is because Canidius brings her with him, only afterwards does she decide to stay, however, not on the grounds of her jealousy for Octavia and love for Antony, but because she had financed part of the war and in order to prevent Octavia from stopping the war: "Cleopatra furnished him with two hundred [ships], and twenty thousand talents besides, and provision of vittells also to mainteyne al the whole army in this warre. So Antonius, through the perswasions of *Domitius*, commaunded *Cleopatra* to returne againe into AEGYPT, and there to vnderstand the successe of this warre. But *Cleopatra*, fearing least *Antonius* should againe be made friends with *Octavius Caesar*, by the meanes of his wife *Octavia*: she so plyed *Canidius* with money, and filled his purse, that he became her spokesman vnto *Antonius*" (996). Cleopatra's participation in the battle in Plutarch does not acquire the unfeminine and unmotherly characteristics associated with it in Garnier and highlighted by Sidney.

Colchian woman's refusal, in Euripides, of her biological right to motherhood in favour of combat, as a growing awareness of her own unfeminine agency ("I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once", Eur. *Med.* 250). Seneca offers a dissimilar version insofar as, differently from Euripides, he makes Medea from the outset "even more powerfully angry than Euripides", and more clearly capable of atrocity" (Heavey 2015, 5). Most importantly, Seneca does nothing to connect her to war like Euripides does, especially within the rigid dichotomy present between motherhood and combat.⁴⁰ In Euripides, her warlike and anti-motherly character emerges by degrees, precisely as in Garnier's *Cleopatra*. Besides, as in Euripides, at this point Medea is onstage with the nurse, and it is the chorus-leader who responds to her speech, exactly as in Garnier *Cleopatra* speaks to her women, Eras and Charmion, in either case being in conversation with, or overheard by, secondary or somewhat external characters; in Seneca, instead, she speaks with Jason. In Sidney's play, 2.2., *Cleopatra* comes out as a more active character in the Euripidean style than her French counterpart, where she appears more passive and self-critical in recollecting her decision to go to war:⁴¹

CLEOPATRA

Antoine (hé qui fut oncq' Capitaine si preux?)
 Ne *vouloit* que i'entrasse en mes nauires creux,
 Compagne de sa flotte, ains *me laissoit peureuse*
 Loin du commun hazard de la guerre douteuse.

...

Mais *las ie n'en fis conte*, ayant l'ame saisie,

CLEOPATRA

Antony (ay me, who else so braue a chiefe!)
Would not I should haue taken seas with him;
 But *would have left me fearfull woman* farre
 From common hazard of the doubtfull warre.

...

But *I car'd not*: so was my soule possest,

⁴⁰ When Jason tells her that "Acastus instat" (521) ("Acastus is close by", 363), she actually offers him the opportunity to escape from the war: "Propior est hostis Creon: / utrumque profuge. non ut in socerum manus/armes, nec ut te caede cognata inquires, / Medea cogit: innocens mecum fuge" (521-4) ("A nearer enemy is Creon: escape from both of them. Medea does not compel you to arm yourself against your father-in-law, nor to stain yourself with kindred blood. Keep your innocence, and flee with me", 363).

⁴¹ Quotations from Sidney's play retain the spelling except for the italics for names. All emphasis is mine.

A mon tresgrand malheur d'ardente ialousie:	(To my great harme) with burning ialousie,
Par-ce que ie craignois que mon Antoine absent	Fearing least in my absence Antony
Reprint son Octauiie, et m'allast delaissant.	Should leaving me retake Octavia.
(Garnier 2.453-56, 463-6)	(Sidney 2.2.67-70, 77-80)

Sidney makes a few lexical changes that increase the sense of Cleopatra's determination about her participation in battle. Narrative distance is interesting in this respect; if in Garnier we read that Antonius "ne vouloit" (did not want) her to go to war, and he "[la] laissoit peureuse" (left her fearful), away from the war, in Sidney the change of the verb mode ("would not", 68, "would have left me fearfull woman", 69) suggests Antonius's *willingness* to leave her rather than his *actual leaving* her behind. While there is no doubt that Garnier's Cleopatra avows she was "peureuse", fearful, in Sidney she assigns this opinion to Antonius, thus stepping back from any acknowledgment of feebleness. Going by Cleopatra's report, we do not know whether she was in fact fearful; what we know is that this is what Antonius thought. Thus, narrative distance here detaches the narrator from the event, suggesting Cleopatra's resistance to sharing Antonius's opinion on womanly weakness, and at the same time her resistance to regretting her own agency. The exclamative "las" (77), revealing her grief in the French play, is done away with; the reference to her ensuing disgrace is more clearly a parenthetical remark (78); and Cleopatra, who "car'd not" for Antonius's concern, becomes central in the last lines, where *her* absence, not his, as in Garnier, is the possible cause of Antonius's own return to Octavia. In these lines, Cleopatra more accurately evokes the image of Euripides's Medea standing with a shield in battle than her French counterpart does (250).

Mary Sidney's construction of a more masculine and belligerent queen goes in the direction of her refusal of motherhood in the name of the love sacrifice she commits at the end of the play. What becomes clear in the unfolding of Sidney's drama is the total erasure of anything outside the monadic identification of Cleopatra's own self with Antony, exactly like Euripides' and Seneca's Medea's before her. While this aspect is observable both in the French play and in its English translation, there is a passage in Sidney's text which seems to imitate Euripides more than Garnier. In 2.2, Garnier's Charmion calls Cleopatra "mere rigureuse" (*Gar.* 170) (rigorous mother)⁴², to which Cleopatra significantly responds "espouse debonnaire" (good-natured wife)⁴³

⁴² Translation mine.

⁴³ Translation mine.

with a challenging shift of focus from her children to her husband. Mary Sidney's translation of the first line is "hardhearted mother", a peculiar choice that moves the attention from Cleopatra's moral rigour to her unpassionate hard-heartedness. Of course, rigour here is connected to ideas of hardness and possibly, if we assume a Euripidean interference, with Euripides's Greek qualification of Medea as hard as stone or iron: "wretch, you are, it seems, a stone or a piece of iron. You mean to kill the children you gave birth to with a fate your own hand deals out" (1280). Mary Sidney might well have elaborated on the spur of her own invention, but Buchanan's translation does mention Medea's bosom, meaning 'heart' ("Misera, aut ferrum aut silicem gestas / pectore", 1345-6), and poses the question that this might have a connection with Mary Sidney's own choice. On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that this is the only Latin translation circulating at the time that mentions her "pectore".⁴⁴ The comparison with the Euripidean anti-heroine serves Mary Sidney to start her construction of Cleopatra's wicked motherhood. Cleopatra is not only hard-hearted as Buchanan's Medea, but she is associated with the concept of wretchedness, like Euripides's Medea who was defined as a wretch in relation to her decision to kill her children (in 819 and 1280).⁴⁵ Sidney also associates Cleopatra's wretchedness with her motherhood in discourses concerning her offspring and their destiny. For instance, while Garnier used the less effective "pauvrette" (2.403) in the same occasion,⁴⁶ when Cleopatra complains about the loss of her realm and children, she defines herself as a "wretch":

O pauvrette! ô chetive! ô Fortune
severe!
Et ne portoy-ie affez de cruelle
misere,

O wretch! ô caitive! ô, too cruell
happe!
And did not I sufficient losse sus-
taine,

⁴⁴ See for instance Melanchthon: "O misera, num es saxum aut / ferrum" (245); and Stiblin: "O' misera, nimirum saxum, aut ferrum est" (162).

⁴⁵ Medea is actually defined in 1280 as a wretch with a heart of stone or iron: "τάλαιν', ὡς ἄρ' ἦσθα πέτρος ἢ σίδαρος, ἅτις τέκνων/ὄν ἔτεκες ἄροτον αὐτόχειρι μοῖρα κτενεῖς", since ὁ τάλαιν derives from the verb *tlaō* which means *suffer, undergo hardship, disgrace*. And in 817-820: CHORUS-LEADER: Yet will you bring yourself to *kill your own offspring*, woman?/ MEDEA:It is the way to *hurt my husband* most./ CHORUS-LEADER: And for yourself to become the most wretched of women./MEDEA: Be that as it may. Till then all talk is superfluous (817-820) [ΧΟΡΟΣ: ἀλλὰ κτανεῖν σὸν σπέρμα τολμήσεις, γύναι; /ΜΗΔΕΙΑ: οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα δηχθεῖη πόσις./ΧΟ.: σὺ δ' ἂν γένοιό γ' ἀθλιωτάτη γυνή./ΜΗΔ.: ἴτω· περισσοὶ πάντες οὖν μέσφ' λόγοι.]. My emphasis.

⁴⁶ Mary Sidney uses the word "wretch" two other times, in 1.53 and 1.71, in these cases to translate Garnier's "miserable" referred to Antonius.

Mon royaume perdant, perdant la liberté.	Losing my realme, losing my lib- erty,
Ma tendre geniture, et la douce clairté	My tender of-spring, and the ioy- ful light
Du rayonnant Soleil	Of beamy Sunne
(2.404-7)	(2.2.18-21)

The feeling of impending fate is present in each play as both Medea and Cleopatra perceive the threat of imminent exile. This levelling feeling is enhanced by Sidney's translation of Garnier's "misère" (misery) as "loss", repeating it twice ("losing") in the following line, where Garnier uses "perdant". However, while she has actually lost her realm and her liberty, she has not lost her children yet. At this point in the play, if she had reconsidered her suicide, she would not have lost her children at all, as they would have accompanied her in exile. Thus, by listing them along her other losses at this stage, she seems already to be foretelling, as Medea does, an uncertain and bleak fate for her children. When compared to Garnier's text, and within the political context already recalled, Mary Sidney's words acquire a different meaning – which is enhanced by Cleopatra's comparison with Medea – as they stress the destiny of the queen's children and her role in preserving their wellbeing.

Also in this case, the Medea model is derived from Garnier and enhanced by Mary Sidney who includes her independent endeavour as well as once again following Studley's footsteps. In the English translation of Seneca, Medea is called a wretched mother since her desire to hurt Jason surpasses her maternal instinct:

NU.
A mother dere art thou,
Fly therefore for thy chyldren's sake.

ME.
Ye see by whom, and how,
A wretched mother I am made.⁴⁷
(11.Ciir)

The association of the word wretch with the concept of motherhood argu-

⁴⁷ In Studley, the reference to the father is accentuated if compared to Seneca: "NUTR Moriere, MED. Cupio. NUTR. Profuge. Med. Paenituit fugae./ MED. Fiam. NUTR. Mater es. MED. Cui sim vides" (170-1) ("NURSE You will die. MEDEA I desire it. NURSE Escape! MEDEA I regret escaping. NURSE Medea– MEDEA I shall become her. NURSE You are a mother. MEDEA You see by whom", 331), and no reference to her wretchedness is to be found in this passage. Only at the end of Seneca's tragedy does she define herself as a "misera" for having killed the children: "quid, misera, feci? misera?" (990) ("What have I done, poor woman? Poor woman?" 401).

ably derives from Mary Sidney's exposure to various sources, and is a step in the comparison of Cleopatra with Medea on the path that will lead to Cleopatra's final abandonment of her children to be configured as Medea's sacrifice of her children.

Despite her wild passion for Antonius, Cleopatra worries about her children's bleak future in exile, and like Medea, Cleopatra's feelings fluctuate between regret and rage. In both Euripides and Seneca, Medea shows concern about her children, but Euripides's account is closer to Sidney's play because Seneca's Jason banishes only Medea, not their children, and her preoccupation does not concern their fate in exile, but at home where she fears they might be punished for her faults; when Creon consents to saving them and raising them as his own children, she egoistically asks for them to be her companions in exile.⁴⁸ In Euripides, the children are exiled with Medea and she is, like Cleopatra, worried about them "wandering as beggars", deprived of their friends and country and abandoned by everybody like herself (*Eur.* 510-5).

In either case, when Cleopatra and Medea decide to 'kill them' it is because they deem the enemies' outrage even worse than death and see their children's sacrifice as the only viable option (*Eur.* 1059-62; *M.S.5.26-39*; *Gar.* 5.1819-30). My choice to use the word 'kill' here is to point out that the two mothers 'murder' their children in their own way: Medea physically as a vengeful act against Jason, Cleopatra imaginatively erasing their memory before committing suicide. Sidney shows at this point very subtle insights both into the psychology of a woman about to commit suicide from the grief of losing her husband and into her emotional response which involves the cancellation of all her affections, including her children, in preparation for the loss of her own life. This is something that cannot be found in the same way in Garnier. Besides, the Medea intertext here suggests a peculiar inflection that likens Cleopatra's suicide to Medea's subjective experience of her children's 'murder' as an act dictated by passion for the man they have lost – Medea for

⁴⁸ "Supplex recedens illud extremum precor,/ne culpa natos matris insontes trahat." (*Sen.* 282-3) ("As I depart, I make this last imploring prayer, that the guilt of the mother should not drag down her innocent sons", 341). Creon's reply is reassuring: he will welcome and protect the children as a father, thus removing all doubts about their survival and prosperity: "Vade: hos paterno ut genitor excipiam sinu" (*Sen.* 284) ("Go: I will shelter them in my fatherly embrace like their own parent", 341). Later, however, when speaking to Jason, she replies: "Contemnere animus regias, ut scis, opes/potest soletque; liberos tantum fugae/habere comites liceat in quorum' sinu/lacrimas profundam. te novi nati manent" (*Sen.* 540-4) ("My mind has the power and habit, as you know, of disdainning the wealth of kings. Only allow me to have the children as companions in my exile, in whose embrace I can pour out my tears. You have the prospect of new sons", 365).

hatred, Cleopatra for love. It is a 'murder' that Cleopatra also commits politically, as by depriving them of her support as a mother and as Queen of Egypt, albeit destined to be a captive in Rome, she also deprives them of any possible hope for royal power they may want to regain in the future. This point may indirectly be evinced in Sidney's play in the way she translates Garnier's Act 4 in which Caesar condemns Antonius' decision "when his two children, Cleopatras bratts, / To *Phæbe* and her brother he compar'd" (4.76-7), which was in Garnier: "lors que ses deux enfans deux iumeaux d'adultere, / comparant à Diane et à Phebus son frere" (4.1420-1). The presence of Cleopatra's name – absent from Garnier's play, where Caesar neglects to mention the mother of Antoine's children – does not only give more relevance to her character but also contributes to strengthen her connection with the children. Sidney also implies legitimate lineage by both mentioning her and choosing to elide all reference to adultery, when translating Garnier's "twins of adultery" as "Cleopatras bratts", which evokes Studley's play, where Medea's children are called "tender brats" (7.B7r) and "mournyng brats" (16.Cviii), thus enhancing with her addition the ties already detected between the story of Cleopatra and that of Medea. The legitimation of the children's position at this point will further stress the impact of Cleopatra's suicide in Act 5 on their future: their abandonment is symbolic of political sacrifice; theirs is, potentially, a 'political murder'.

As previously stated, Mary Sidney's Cleopatra had begun to bewail the loss of her children as early as 2.2, after the defeat at Actium, where she seemed to prefigure her own as well as their future disgrace. In her long monologue she listed all her losses, incongruously as if she had already experienced them all in the same way (2.2.18-21). The deeply felt sense of all-encompassing mourning anticipates Cleopatra's behaviour in Act 5. For her, as for Euripides's Medea, the thought of her children being abandoned in exile is unbearable, and the prospect of death is the only possible answer. But, interestingly, this is not an answer they seem to claim agency for. Both Euripides's Medea and Cleopatra bid farewell to their children in tones of heartfelt sorrow (*Eur.* 1066-77; *Gar.* 5.1846-70; *M.S.* 5.55-79), and both hope that their children will reach a better place, both recognise the inevitability of their destiny, and allude to their children's father before being overwhelmed with pain. Both are still in time to 'save' their children, but in different ways, both go beyond the point where they can let them 'live'; and even though Cleopatra does not physically kill them, she kills her own motherly affection for them by murdering herself, leaving them to their destiny of captives, which may very well be one of death. Neither Medea nor Cleopatra take responsibility in this respect; instead, they blame the overruling power of destiny, which both seem to be unable to resist. Thus, at this point, agency becomes something they do not acknowledge as theirs; they move beyond gender

roles and ethical qualifications connected with 'doing'; unable to identify themselves as a woman, mother, or warrior, both feel subjected to fate, a transcendental agent they submit themselves and their children to.

In her final speech, after her children have seen her for the last time, Cleopatra shares yet another psychological trait with Medea, but this time the dialogue is with Seneca. Medea compares herself to Niobe – the emblem of a mother stricken with pain for the death of her fourteen children – after she kills the first child and is about to kill the second in front of Jason, (*Sen.* 953-7; *Gar.* 5.1886-91; *M.S.* 5.95-100). Although this is a famous image of motherly grief which did not need to be suggested by Seneca to slip into this tragedy, its position and function in the unfolding of Cleopatra's tragedy seem to be more than coincidental. The two women's allusion to Niobe, in different ways, subverts that conventional emblem: Medea wishes that she had as many children as Niobe in order to sacrifice them all and make her revenge more powerful; Cleopatra claims that her pain for losing Antonius and her reign is greater than Niobe's own for losing her children. In either case, the two women's use of the Niobe image declassifies the role of their children in the hierarchy of these two mothers' affections, in fact dislocating the sense of Niobe's overwhelming pain to that of the loss felt by a betrayed wife (Medea) and a bereaved lover (Cleopatra).

But in the translation from French to English, this passage becomes even more strongly connected to the Medea myth, precisely as one of infanticide. In Sidney, Cleopatra's imaginary detachment from her children before actually leaving them becomes a fact: "Thy children thou, mine I, poore soule, *haue lost*, / And *lost their father*" (5.101-2). Their loss is given as a *fait accompli*, precisely as the loss of Antonius. This was not so in Garnier, where the past tense of the verb "perdre" is used for Niobe ("*tu perdis tes enfans*" 5.1892), not for herself ("*ie pers les miens pauurette / Et leur père ie pers*", 5.1892-3). By using the past tense for both Cleopatra's children and their father, Mary Sidney underlines Cleopatra's personal experience of different losses in time as belonging to the past, although that of her children has not occurred yet and may be imminent only if she pursues her suicidal intent. Her children are still alive, and it is precisely her decision not to kill herself that could keep them 'alive' for her and leave open for them a possibility for dynastic inheritance in the future. But, as in Medea's case, motherly love is here replaced by the totalising love for a man that shuts away any other affection and the sense of life itself: "I *lost their father*, more than them I waile" (*M.S.* 5.102) ("*leur père je pers, que plus qu'eux je regrette*"; *Gar.* 5.1893). Because of their love and hatred, respectively, Cleopatra and Medea, in their own ways, sacrifice their children's right to a prosperous future for a man.

4. Conclusion

Mary Sidney's translation (which she completed in 1590) appeared during a troubled political period in which Queen Elizabeth's chances of assuring social cohesion and her people's wellbeing were continually undermined by the uncertainty of succession and by the impending presence of foreign sovereigns. For the dramatists of the time, Roman and Greek history, "remote in space and time", allowed for "an investigation of the moral and political consequences" (Kewes 2012, 244) of state decisions.

The historical and mythological frames suggesting a warning against foreign threats also serve to portray the figure of the mother who, in the early modern period, had become "the focus of an emotional account of political concerns" (Dunworth 2010, 52). The representation of the mother in political terms was often associated with historical, literary, or mythological figures which epitomised different kinds of motherhood; figures such as Medea, Agave and Jocasta provided dramatists with a series of *exempla* well suited for representing the political climate of the time. Through the portrayal of classical motherly figures often connected with the "collapse of royal families and the wreck of dynasties" (Ibid.), dramatists could obliquely voice their concerns about the Elizabethan succession.

Garnier's play inserted in the early modern English context becomes something else, the figure of Cleopatra changes, she is not only the voluptuous queen who charms Antonius, and thus the symbol of passion, love, sacrifice and "unjust death" for the canonical Christian thought. In England she is a queen who is giving up her reign and her children's royal right to the foreign enemy.⁴⁹

However close to her source, Sidney's translation does not only introduce innovations in the language and metre of the play, but she also contributes to its new metaphorical construction. By elaborating on the original in her translative approach, Mary Sidney did not only nuance the text semantically, but she also added an interpretative layer. When compared to Medea's children's destiny, the fate of Antonius and Cleopatra's children turns them into the victims of their parents' immoderate passion and selfishness, which foregrounds the theme of "the extinction of the princely line" through civil war – an issue clearly connected with contemporary fear of political unrest. Mary Sidney's translation and depiction of a female-like Antonius and of

⁴⁹ As Kewes states, early modern English plays often portrayed countries conquered by the Romans in order to artfully represent European states "currently at war with or annexed by Spain" (Kewes 2012, 253). This must have been particularly true in the period in which Mary Sidney translated *Marc Antoine*, right after the attack of the Invincible Armada in 1588.

a queen so passionately concentrated on her man as to disregard her children's future, acquires a different meaning in the context of Elizabeth I's reign characterised by fears regarding the question of succession.

Discussion of the possible dialogues between Garnier, Sidney and the ancient model of the Medea story needs further research; but the examples provided here suggest that if Garnier was one of several vehicles for the arrival of classical drama into England, its reception was not passive, and Mary Sidney operated a stylistic and conceptual re-elaboration of it in her translation. Admittedly, the story of Medea was well known and the question of Cleopatra's experience of the 'loss' of her children is something that could not be glimpsed in any way in Plutarch, who makes no mention of them in the context of her suicide, nor of her concern about them in his report of her death.⁵⁰ Nor would Shakespeare later dramatise anything other than her passion for Antony in his *Antony and Cleopatra*, even though Sidney's play has been listed amongst its sources.⁵¹ In the 1590s, Sidney's emphasis on Cleopatra's motherhood and psychological response to the loss of her children, may well have been favoured by her access to both Seneca's and Euripides's versions of Medea, suggesting revisions of Garnier's play, through which those classical models reached her already digested and integrated into the fabric of drama. Thus, Mary Sidney's *Antonius*, the first closet drama published in English by a woman in the early modern period (Williams 2015)

⁵⁰ Pelling 2002, § 85-6; Plutarch 1579, 1009. References to Cleopatra's children and Cesarion occurs elsewhere in the account of the life of Marcus Antonius with no connection whatsoever to her final moments and her decision to die.

⁵¹ "That Shakespeare read Mary Sidney's translation of Garnier during the research or composition of his play is suggested by the many verbal and conceptual parallels between the two works. . . . Bullough prints [*Antonius*] as an analogue and Spevack includes it among the major sources and influences. Ernest Schanzer has shown that echoes of Mary Sidney's *Antonius* – from almost the opening lines of her Argument to the final lines of her translation – run through Shakespeare's play" (Arshad 2019, 35). In his *Cleopatra*, a play overtly influenced by Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (Knight 2011, 211), Samuel Daniel shows a Cleopatra who "battles maternal instinct with her royal duty" (Knight 10n57) in a play in which the "themes of lineage and inheritance" (Knight 8n60) are felt very strongly and during a historical period in which succession was one of the major concerns in England. However, in Daniel's *Cleopatra* space is devoted to the character of Cesarion (the son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra who was killed by Octavian) as the only heir to Cleopatra's reign. Unlike Garnier and Mary Sidney who focus on "all Cleopatra's children, Daniel follows the account of Plutarch more closely. Although Cleopatra does briefly mention her other children, it is Caesarion who is the main character" (8n57). The children of Sidney's *Antonius* and Cleopatra seem to have disappeared from Daniel's play in which "Egypt will die alongside Caesarion as he is the last heir to the Egyptian throne. Egypt could be being paralleled with Renaissance England and the question of who will inherit the throne after Elizabeth I, as she has no children to succeed her" (10n71).

and a play whose title refers to the male protagonist, in fact interrogated female passion, motherhood and politics, and did so very probably following the model of *Medea*.

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