

# Placing Medea

## Transfer, Spatiality, and Gender in Europe 1750–1800

Uppsala and Stockholm, April 25–27, 2018



Confirmed keynote speakers:                      Professor Edith Hall, King's College London  
   Professor Fiona Macintosh, Oxford University

The late eighteenth century saw a variety of Medeas performed on stage in Europe ranging from Jean-Georges Noverre's 1763 ballet *Jason et Médée* and Richard Glover's tragedy *Medea* (1767) to Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter's successful melodrama *Medea* (1775) and François Benoît Hoffmann's and Luigi Cherubini's opera *Médée* (1797). Performances took place in Stuttgart, London, Gotha, and Paris—just to mention a few venues. In the same decades texts and scores of these works were printed, reissued, translated, revised, and circulated throughout Europe. Some Medeas of the late eighteenth century never reached the stage but were printed as texts, for example, the Swedish author Bengt Lidner's opera libretto *Medea* from 1784 and Friedrich Maximilian von Klinger's two Medea tragedies, one from 1786 and the other from 1790.

The sheer number of Medea dramas is considerable, which raises questions about why this particular and rather extreme character of ancient tragedy is placed on stage and on the page throughout Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. As a transgressive character Medea seems to overstep a number of eighteenth-century borders: language borders, nation borders, cultural borders, borders of ideal motherhood and femininity, and genre borders. How is this surging eighteenth-century interest in Medea, one that moves beyond national borders, to be interpreted within a European perspective?

The eighteenth-century Medea has recently received renewed attention from scholars of various disciplines and nationalities. The groundbreaking work of Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh in publications such as *Medea in Performance 1500–2000* (Oxford

2000; with Oliver Taplin) have paved the way for subsequent scholarship. However, several studies focus exclusively on a single nation or language area, and the transgressional trajectories of the European Medea story seem to be a neglected field of study. The conference aims at bringing together scholars from various language areas and disciplines with a focus on the late eighteenth-century Medea. It will address themes concerned with the transgressions of Medea, focussing particularly on space and gender.

The Medea story from Antiquity is certainly concerned with space—the Colchian enchantress betrays her family and flees to Greece with Jason—and the question is how and why this story is translated and transported to different parts of Europe in the late eighteenth century. Is a German Medea identical to a French or a Swedish one? In what sense does Medea in the eighteenth century connect to the literary models of Athens and of Rome respectively? How are Athens and Rome, as models, constructed as real or imagined spaces, in relation to Paris, London, or Stockholm? How does the transgression of genre borders affect the Medea theme?

Gender in the eighteenth-century is connected to spatiality, not least through the concept of the public-private divide. The discussion about Habermas' conceptual framework was intensified after the 1989 English translation of his seminal *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962). The Medea figure poses a challenge to the notions of eighteenth-century femininity as centred on the private sphere: on tenderness, sexual modesty, and motherhood. A question of interest is how this vengeful child murderess from Greek and Roman antiquity fits into the sentimental framework of European eighteenth-century culture.

The conference wishes to highlight the transcultural aspects of the various European Medeas, displayed by gendered spaces, local appropriations, and reconsiderations of otherness. How can we move beyond the national point of departure and incorporate an awareness of the specific local conditions of Paris, London, or Gotha? In what sense do the Medea texts and performances engage in a transfer across language borders, nation borders and cultural borders? And how are these spatial aspects interconnected with gender issues?

The conference is interdisciplinary, bridging disciplines such as literature (comparative literature as well as specific European languages and literatures), theatre studies, gender studies, classical reception, musicology, performance studies, and material culture, and it aims to relate Medea to issues about transcultural exchange in the late eighteenth-century European culture.

We welcome submissions in the form of individual papers (20 minutes). The following topics can serve as guidelines in exploring Medea from 1750–1800: cultural transfer; gender; spatiality; translation and adaptation; the barbarian; public and private; local

adaptations and European classicisms; the stage as a gendered space; genre and space in Europe; circulation of performances, texts, and music in a European perspective; reception and performance; music, text, and gesture as a means of conveying passion.

The conference is organized by Prof. Anna Cullhed, Department of Culture and Aesthetics (Literature) at Stockholm University, in collaboration with Theatre Studies, Stockholm University, and the research network AGORA, Uppsala University. It is generously supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ), the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, which is currently funding the project “Moving Medea: The Transcultural Stage in the Eighteenth Century”, and by the Faculty of Humanities, Stockholm University.

The general programme:

Wednesday, April 25

Keynote lectures in Uppsala—in collaboration with AGORA

Thursday, April 26

Conference in Stockholm

Friday, April 27

A visit to the Drottningholm Palace Theatre

Please send an abstract of 200 words and a five-line biography to [anna.cullhed@littvet.su.se](mailto:anna.cullhed@littvet.su.se) by 1 August, 2017.

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