Seneca’s Medea in Republican Spain
precedents, creation and impact of its 1933 production

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Seneca’s *Medea* in Republican Spain:

Precedents, creation and impact of its 1933 production.

by Oliver Baldwin.

Doctoral thesis in Classics.

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Abstract.

On the 18th of June 1933, the Roman Theatre in Mérida, once the Roman Emerita Augusta, witnessed the performance of Seneca’s *Medea* by Spain’s leading theatrical company, the Xirgu-Borràs Company. This crucial event was attended by the Prime Minister of the Second Spanish Republic alongside two ministers, the Ambassador of Italy, many MPs and a great number of intellectuals. At the Roman Theatre they joined many men and women of Mérida and the surrounding region of Extremadura to witness a performance and cultural republican ritual that has remained inscribed in Spain’s cultural and social memory.

This production of Seneca's *Medea* in republican Spain stood at the centre of pivotal discussions on issues such as national identity, national reconfiguration, regime building, socialist, liberal and fascist ideologies, secularism, Women's Rights and new European aesthetics of theatre making. This thesis intends to explore, analyse, clarify and understand this.

It is divided into five chapters. The first reconstructs what took place in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933, the day of the performance of Seneca's *Medea*, its genesis and impact. It is the most detailed reconstruction of the performance of Seneca's *Medea* in 1933 Spain to date. Chapter II answers the integral question of the contemporary Spanish understanding of Seneca. This is explored by assessing the previous knowledge and reception of Seneca until 1933, its shift in perception towards a reappraisal of Seneca's tragic credentials and its role within a broader discourse of republican national identity. Chapter III analyses how Seneca's *Medea* fits into the active development of such a republican identity: the national reconfiguration in the building of the republican regime. It does this by reassessing the production of Seneca's *Medea* within the frame of the Republic's cultural and educational agenda, its promotion of republican citizenship and the creation of a National Theatre. Chapter IV discusses the implications and responses provoked by the performance on the republican secularisation of Spain and the development of constitutional rights for women. Finally, Chapter V establishes the 1933 production of Seneca's *Medea* in Spain as an essential example of the broader aesthetic movement of theatrical renewal that had spread throughout Europe and revolutionised the stage. This thesis demonstrates that the ancient tragedy *Medea*, by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, served as an essential tool to reassess, redress and reconfigure fundamental ideological, national, cultural, political, civic and aesthetic questions of the Second Spanish Republic.
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**Introduction: A Spanish Medea in Republican Spain.**

1. Socio-political and cultural context.

   a) Seneca’s Medea in Mérida.

On the 18th of June 1933 Seneca’s *Medea* was performed before more than three thousand spectators in the ruins of the Roman Theatre in Mérida, Western Spain. This production of Seneca’s *Medea*, translated by the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno and produced by the leading Spanish theatre company of the time, the Xirgu-Borràs Company, with full backing from the government of the Second Spanish Republic, became one of the most important theatre performances in Spanish History. The present thesis disentangles the genesis, development and consequences of this event, alongside the underlying motives for it, its socio-political and cultural context and the diverse responses and discussions it provoked.

The Xirgu-Borràs Company was at the vanguard of the Spanish stage during the 1930s. The Teatro Español in Madrid had been under concession to Margarita Xirgu since 1930, closely aided by her artistic director, Cipriano Rivas Cherif. Both Rivas Cherif and Xirgu had a long experience in introducing avant-garde plays and staging techniques to Spain, in exploring new perspectives on Spanish theatre classics and in sponsoring new dramatic talent, among them Federico García Lorca. Xirgu merged her theatrical reputation with that of the renowned actor Enric Borràs, who brought his long experience and theatrical pedigree to the partnership. During their time at the Teatro Español, in their repertoire and technique, the names of Lorca, Calderón, Lope de Vega or Valle-Inclán were to be heard alongside those of Copeau, Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt, Adolphe Appia or Richard Wagner. Rivas Cherif, Xirgu and Borràs made a theatrical powerhouse out of the Teatro Español by merging avant-garde, new staging techniques and innovation with tradition, Spanish drama and popular appeal. The centre of Spanish Theatre in the 1930s, of its Silver Age, as it has been named, was indeed the Teatro Español.
The Xirgu-Borràs Company produced and performed Seneca’s *Medea* in 1933. In it, its leading actress, Margarita Xirgu, played a red-clothed Medea, who enacted her pain, witchery and revenge before those assembled, finally killing the children of Jason, performed by a convincingly overwhelmed and scared Enric Borràs. Their acting on stage was assisted by the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, led by the maestro Bartolomé Pérez Casas, which played pieces by Gluck (see pp. 48, 284-288). The performance ended in a climax of theatrical spectacle in which an escaping Medea, on her dragon-led chariot, chased by a maddened torch-holding crowd, disappeared behind the columns of the *scaenae frons* while the orchestra played the prelude to Gluck’s *Alceste*. The audience roared with emotional cheering and applause.

The whole endeavour was set into motion when the renowned philosopher and republican intellectual Miguel de Unamuno added his name as translator of Seneca’s *Medea* in December 1932. Unamuno had accepted the invitation of the then Ministro de Instrucción Pública (Education and Culture Minister), Fernando de los Ríos, to redress the apparent neglect in Spain of the tragic *oeuvre* of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, much esteemed for his philosophical work. Xirgu chose *Medea* as the Senecan tragedy to be translated and later performed. The Roman philosopher born in Córdoba would finally receive his great tragic vindication on the very soil that witnessed his birth.

Seven months later, the town of Mérida, once known as Emerita Augusta, received hundreds of visitors to witness the great spectacle that was Seneca’s *Medea*. Locals and nearby townsmen and townswomen were joined by national intellectuals, republican Members of Parliament, the ambassadors of Italy, Portugal and Uruguay and three representatives of the Government of the Second Spanish Republic: the Prime Minister, Manuel Azaña, the Ministro de Instrucción Pública at the time, Francisco Barnés and the Ministro de Estado (Foreign Minister), Fernando de los Ríos. The whole event became not only a memorable performance but also a republican celebration in its own right. Not only had the government funded the production with 50,000 pesetas, but the governmental committee was cheered at their arrival at the Roman Theatre, while the republican national anthem, the ‘Himno de Riego’, was being played.
The performance was a success and received much praise from those present. After all, a tragedy of the potency of *Medea*, authored by the philosopher from Córdoba, translated by a leading intellectual, Miguel de Unamuno, funded by the Republic and performed by the renowned Xirgu-Borràs Company had been staged at the ruins of the Roman Theatre of Emerita Augusta, which received its first theatrical performance in centuries. It was indeed an evening to remember, an historical event in Spanish Theatre History and an exultation of republican culture:

The performance, true première of ‘Medea’ by Seneca, in the Roman Theatre of Mérida was a famous artistic feat, worthy of the highest praise for its initiators and organisers, especially for Cipriano Rivas Cherif, supreme animator and head of the management of the Teatro Español. A happy complexity of success was involved in the magnificent endeavour, to which, willingly and generously, Poetry, History and Nature itself contributed, for the benefit of the superb spectacle.¹

After its success in 1933, Seneca’s *Medea* returned, alongside Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra*, to the Roman Theatre in Mérida in 1934 (Figures 62 and 63).² Both tragedies would be part of what became ‘the Roman Week’, completed by ‘classical dances’ and concerts. This ‘Roman Week’ sowed the seed of what would later become the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida. Ancient Drama would return annually to Mérida after the Spanish Civil War and the post-war years, when in 1953 Seneca’s *Phaedra* was performed in the Roman Theatre. The Festival of Mérida has to this date been held more than sixty times and has helped to put Spain and Mérida on the international scenic map.

¹*La Libertad* (02-09-1933). All translations in this thesis are my own unless otherwise stated.
²Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s play adapted from Sophocles’ *Electra* (1903), in the Spanish première of which, at Barcelona, Xirgu had starred in 1912, and which she had gone on to perform many times in different venues. The 1934 translation was by Eduardo Marquina.
b) Cultural context.

The performance of Seneca’s *Medea* took place in the midst of an ontological shift in the national self-consciousness of Spain. Two years earlier, in April 1931, the republican-socialist coalition won the municipal elections in the major cities of Spain and in key areas of the nation. Many read it as a plebiscite on the monarchy of Alfonso XIII, who had eight years earlier supported a dictatorship, that of Miguel Primo de Rivera, which lasted seven years, from 1923 to 1930. It had cost many their physical integrity, their jobs and even exile. The Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed on the 14th of April 1931. That very same day Alfonso XIII and his family left for exile.

The Second Spanish Republic was the result of decades of liberal and democratic protests against the monarchical regime initiated by Alfonso XII in 1874, the so-called Bourbon Restoration. Tensions between the monarchical establishment and the liberal elite had begun already in 1875, when Krausist professors were expelled from the university at the behest of the Catholic Church. As a response, liberal intellectuals created cultural and educational institutions that would become a beacon of progress in Spain, most importantly the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE).

The tension grew stronger twenty years later, in the midst of the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898) which ended with the loss of Spain’s overseas Empire, in what would be known as the Disaster of 98. This loss provoked an introspective process, in which intellectuals pondered on the essence of the Spanish nation, its ills and its necessary reforms. Unamuno became, alongside Ángel Ganivet, the great apologist of Seneca in Spain (see pp. 81-93), the leading theorist on the ‘Problem of Spain’.

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3 Krausism, an intelectual movement named for its founder, the German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), which advocated academic independence of thought and resistance to religious dogma, had been of particular importance in Restoration Spain. See Molero Pintado (1977: 24-25), Tuñón de Lara (1993: 3-7), Álvarez Junco (1995a: 48) and Holguín (2003: 25-26).
The ‘Problem of Spain’ was solved, at least for many, by the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship, which began in 1923. But soon, any illusions of prosperity and direction were shattered, and many liberals began to protest. The growing hostility from liberal intellectuals and politicians towards the Dictator and the King became almost total in the years 1930 and 1931. The Problem of Spain could no longer find its solution in the Bourbon Monarchy. A Republic was needed. On the 14th of April 1931, Unamuno, from the balcony of the Town Hall in Salamanca, from where he had been exiled seven years earlier by the Dictatorship, proclaimed the Second Spanish Republic.

A great number of these liberals, and also socialists, spearheaded the creation of cultural and educational institutions, including the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública itself. Through these, many Spanish students were able to study abroad, thus bringing, on their return, valuable skills and methodologies that could help Spain to prosper, progress and expand intellectually. In addition, the Socialist Party established cultural centres, known as Casas del Pueblo, providing the working classes with basic education and cultural interaction. The Republic was partly the result also of such liberal and socialist educational and cultural advancements and efforts. Many in the government were themselves beneficiaries of them or sympathisers with their intentions. Education, culture and social analysis thus became the motor of many of the intentions of the Republic.

Cobb wrote in 1981: ‘A symbol of the preference of institutionist intellectuals (ILE) for prestigious acts dedicated to the established culture was the staging of Seneca’s Medea’.\footnote{Cobb (1981: 78). Morán Sánchez agrees in placing the production of Seneca’s Medea as part of the legacy of the ILE; see Morán Sánchez (2018: 189).} Seneca’s Medea indeed fitted the political and cultural framework of the Republic as the intellectual descendant of the creators of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE) and the subsequent liberal intellectual reformists in Spain.
The exceptional intellectual prowess of Spanish letters and arts since 1875 brought with it the creation of what has become known as the Silver Age of Spanish Culture. Three generations would excel in it: the so-called Generation of ‘98, into which Angel Ganivet and Unamuno are often classified, the Generation of ‘14, which counted Manuel Azaña, Ortega y Gasset and Fernando de los Ríos amongst its members, and finally the Generation of ‘27, which united the likes of Federico García Lorca, Luis Buñuel or Salvador Dalí. All three generations participated culturally and politically in the arrival and development of the Republic.

Theatre played a major role in the Silver Age of Spanish Culture. The theatrical crisis was deep in the early 20th century, according to many critics and analysts, including Unamuno, Lorca and Rivas Cherif. The vices of naturalism and 19th-century realism had to be replaced by an essentialist, minimalist and emotional theatre that would convey the plastic and dramatic force of a poetic and meaningful play. Before the arrival of the Republic, many saw in the decadence of Spanish theatre a symptom and cause of the decadence of the regime. Trivial entertainments, comedies, musicals and cabarets were seen as symptomatic of an oligarchic, irresponsible and incompetent regime. Poetic theatre, tragedy, Spanish Golden Age drama and an engaging and avant-garde staging became, in turn, the theatre of a new, later republican, system.

Federico García Lorca’s development as one of Spain’s most renowned playwrights was encouragingly promoted by both Rivas Cherif and Margarita Xirgu. Xirgu had nourished Lorca’s theatrical talents ever since she played Mariana Pineda in 1927. Rivas Cherif almost directed Lorca’s Amor de don Perlimplín in 1929, but his theatre was forcibly closed due to the death of Alfonso XIII’s mother. Xirgu and Rivas Cherif staged a further four plays by Lorca (La Zapatera Prodigiosa, Yerma, Doña Rosita la soltera and Bodas de Sangre) until his assassination in August 1936. Besides using many recourses of Spanish Golden Age theatre, as many of his contemporaries, Lorca was probably the most precise and successful adapter of Greek Tragedy to his own and Spain’s sensibilities, most importantly in his influential Rural
Trilogy (Bodas de Sangre, Yerma and La Casa de Bernarda Alba).\(^5\) It is safe to presume that Lorca’s experience of Tragedy and the work done by Xirgu and Rivas Cherif in Elektra and Medea created a stimulating and productive exchange which lay at the centre of the careers of these three essential practitioners in Spanish theatrical history.

The Republic responded to the call of theatrical reform adequately, although not as extensively as desired. It established the National Lyric Theatre to protect Spanish music and Zarzuela (an indigenous form of musical theatre not dissimilar to operetta) and created the itinerant theatre groups of the Teatro del Pueblo (Theatre of the People) and La Barraca. The Republic also created the de facto National Theatre when it brought under its protection the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid, whose governmental delegate, its director, would be none other than Rivas Cherif, the director of Seneca’s Medea. Additionally, the Republic funded the staging of Seneca’s Medea with part of a budget established for the ‘renovation of the national theatre’.\(^6\) It is no coincidence that this was a tragedy, written by an ancient Spanish intellectual, translated by the leading intellectual of the Republic and staged by the leaders of theatrical reform, mainly Xirgu and Rivas Cherif. Seneca’s Medea was a new Spanish theatre for a new Spanish regime.

c) Socio-political context.

Holguin expresses a very pertinent and commonly held view in her indispensable book, República de ciudadanos: ‘While a good part of the rest of Europe rejected the parliamentary system in favour of authoritarian regimes, Spain embraced a liberal-leftist democracy as the panacea for all its evils’.\(^7\) This is partly explained by the fact that the arrival of the Republic was, primarily, an intellectual and social response to the seven years of authoritarianism under the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), sponsored by King Alfonso XIII. During


\(^6\) Gaceta de Madrid (22-05-1933).

\(^7\) Holguin (2003: 3).
these years, Spain had turned in an opposite direction to the reformist and leftist governments that sprouted in Europe after the Great War, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and partially followed the authoritarian path of Italy—by different means but with much collegiality.⁸ Therefore, republic, progress, liberty and modernity seemed one and the same, and the strongest rebuttal of Spain’s authoritarian experience. The Republic was to be an essential shift in the constitutional compass of the nation.

Nevertheless, Holguín is right to point out the exceptional status of the Second Spanish Republic in its international context. Spain became a democratic liberal Republic. It allied itself quite clearly with the Third French Republic and had an important voice at the League of Nations. But its period of republican consolidation (1931-1933) coincided with the invasion of Abyssinia in 1932 by Mussolini’s Italy and the accession of Adolf Hitler to the chancellery of Germany, followed by the Reichstag fire, in 1933. The Ambassador of Italy, Rafaelle Guariglia, chief representative of Fascist Romanità in Spain, attended the première of Seneca’s Medea in the once Roman town of Mérida. He brought with him a gift from the Campidoglio and gave a speech in which he highlighted the fraternity between both countries (see pp. 179-182). What the Italian Ambassador wished to do was to use the ancient ties between Hispania and Latium to promote a new, resurrected brotherhood. He was ultimately unsuccessful. Prime Minister Azaña, diplomatically deflected the advances of the fascio. But Fascism’s chief apologist in Spain, Ernesto Giménez Caballero, was more successful. He was part of a group that would create, in October 1933, the most notorious philo-fascist party in Spain, Falange Española, led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the late Dictator. Although almost anecdotal in 1933, Falange Española would later become one of the cornerstones, once modified and purged of its revolutionary tendencies, of the Franco regime after the Civil War. Although Spain had chosen a different path to authoritarianism, it was in no way immune to it.

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Despite the enthusiasm of many at the change of the regime, Spain had serious socio-economic problems. In 1930, 5.06% of agrarian property owners owned 67% of cultivated land in the whole country, which meant that 2,000,000 agrarian workers, and their families, lived in poverty.\(^9\) In parallel, it had also inherited a 32% illiteracy rate from the Dictatorship.\(^{10}\) The Republic faced a population of 80% of unschooled children in certain areas, according to the first Ministro de Instrucción Pública.\(^{11}\)

The Republic thus had to deliver practical policies. School places had a 96% increase between the final years of the Dictatorship and the first years of the Republic, from 1,040 places to 2,036.\(^{12}\) The Second Republic established a free, universal, obligatory and secular primary education, making public authorities responsible for the education of their infant population and integrating teachers into the State-funded sector. This represented a marked shift from the scarce and Church-sponsored education Spain had had up to that moment.

The new Republic had come to dethrone a system based on monarchy, Catholicism, militarism, authoritarianism, isolationism and oligarchy. It therefore had to promote a national identity based on liberal and participatory democracy, republican citizenship, progress, science, culture and secularism. It needed to make the subjects of the Bourbon dynasty become rightful citizens of the Republic. State force had to be replaced by civil intelligence. Poverty and backwardness had to be superseded by State responsibility. Ethno-nationalism had to be supplanted by cultural and republican nationalism. Class distinction had to be uprooted to give way to civic unity. The first line of its Constitution of 1931 reads: ‘Spain is a democratic Republic of workers of any class’. But it also had to become a Republic of letters, a Republic of free citizenship, a Republic of progress and a Republic of civic rights.

\(^{10}\) Domingo (1932: 8); Vilanova Ribas and Moreno Julia (1992: 141, 166); Álvarez Junco (1995b: 82); Holguin (2003: 62, 174).
\(^{11}\) Domingo (1934: 158).
One of the means of spreading this counter-hegemonic discourse was to create State-sponsored endeavours of cultural dissemination. To this end, libraries were set up in towns and villages, an itinerant cultural organisation, the Misiones Pedagógicas, was created to bring art, music, theatre and civic education to remote areas of Spain, and the itinerant theatre group La Barraca visited town squares to perform plays from Spain’s Golden Age. The objective was to help every citizen of the Republic, however secluded, benefit from the joy and communal spirit of a progressive and democratic Republic.

Seneca’s Medea formed part of this project of republican cultural dissemination. Its funding decree equates it with the Teatro del Pueblo, the subsidiary theatre group of the Misiones Pedagógicas, and La Barraca.\textsuperscript{13} Seneca’s Medea brought to the people of the long-neglected region of Extremadura not only a first-class spectacle by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, but a republican endeavour and, even, the head of the republican government himself, Manuel Azaña.

The Republic tackled seven major areas of reform, those of Education and Culture, Territory, Agrarian Reform, Militarism, Labour, Women’s Rights, and Secularism. As seen, Education and Culture were pressing issues not only for socio-economic progress, but also for the instauration of a new national discourse and citizenship. The pressure the Republic met from primarily Catalan, but also from Basque, nationalism was resolved by the idea of the integral state, which had a united territory, but with delegated powers for key regions in some cases. The largely ineffective Agrarian Reform was intended to solve problems related to poverty and also create a landowning citizenship, on the lines of French republican citizenship. Instead, it helped in alienating large landowners who began increasingly to plot against the Republic. The Military needed to be purged of its reactionary forces. A new promotion system needed to be created alongside renewed Armed Forces that would be loyal to the Republic and the Constitution. Labour reform was essential to solve the underlying problems that had brought Spain to periodic crises. In addition, the biggest parliamentary group in the Constituent

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Gaceta de Madrid} (22-05-1933).
Parliament of 1931 and within the republican government between 1931 and 1933 was the Socialist Party, which had led much of the working-class protest in Spain, as had the anarchists. The final two areas of reform, Women’s Rights and Secularism, were intended both to satisfy social and economic demands, and also to complete the creation of a new, liberal, democratic state.

Social and legal equality were developed primarily by the granting of universal suffrage and the legalisation of divorce. This meant that women in Spain, for the first time in history, were able to determine both their public and private futures. The performance of Seneca’s Medea took place in Mérida precisely in the aftermath of this development and only months before women could vote in a Spanish general election for the first time, in November 1933.

In the eyes of many liberals and socialists at the head of the Republic, the Catholic Church had brought not only the repression of their own ideas and their expulsion from their own professions, as in 1875, but had also kept Spain away from progress, science, liberty and democracy. The Republic needed to break from the Church in order to secure civic liberty, thus promoting freedom of conscience and worship, and cease Church privileges and intervention, religious schooling and interference from the Vatican. The production of Seneca’s Medea was developed and executed in a country and at a time in which many Catholics had been effectively alienated from their regime by what they saw as an anti-Christian persecutory Republic.

Many reforming and progressive republicans were abruptly awakened from their utopian objectives when the centre-right won the democratic general elections of November 1933, only months after Seneca’s Medea. The alienated monarchists, Catholics, conservative landowners and those disillusioned in the middle classes, alongside a new radical Right, had responded to the profound and rapid change which had been proposed and partly enacted. The most voted coalition was that of the CEDA, a Catholic coalition of landowners and reactionary groups that clearly intended to rescind many of the socio-political and economic reforms of the constituent period. The demons of the past reappeared in the elections of 1933. The monarchists and
apologists of the Dictatorship, Renovación Española, won seats in Parliament, as did José Antonio Primo de Rivera, although he won his seat with the support of the Unión Agraria y Ciudadana (Agrarian and Citizens Union) and not with his own political party, Falange Española.

It seemed that the vision of a liberal secular democracy had been challenged, if not entirely erased. And indeed in a way it was. Although the Left won the elections of 1936 in a coalition called the Frente Popular, the reactionary forces and insurrectional generals staged a coup d’état only months later. The Civil War began with two visions of Spain slaughtering one another. It ended with the victory of General Francisco Franco, as the prologue to forty years of repressive and authoritarian dictatorship that ended in November 1975 with the natural death of the Caudillo at the age of 82.

The Republic’s progressive change of regime thus really only became a project and not a developed reality. Many of the original republican-socialist coalition’s plans for the integral reform of Spain were frustrated and finally abandoned or rejected. In November 1933 the constituent period ended, and with it the possibilities of that vision of a new Spain becoming a reality. Despite its many imperfections, the period offers, historically, a brief glimpse of the extraordinary social, cultural, political and diplomatic potential Spain could have achieved. Seneca’s Medea was one of the enacted examples of this potential. It is a reminder of what could have been and never was. Seneca’s Medea is the distant echo of a Spain that wished to resurrect its progressive and cultural self only to be muted by war and authoritarianism. The intention of this thesis is to do justice to this echo and restore the production as best as possible, so the cultural waves it produced may penetrate forty years of dictatorial silence and a further thirty years of democratic compromise, debate and change. The next pages bring voice and colour back to the 18th of June 1933 performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida; and with it, to a Spain that could have been, but never was.
2. Sources, methodology and challenges.

Given the vast array of themes, sources and methodology this thesis contends with, it is important here to lay out the focus, limitations and exclusions this research has entailed. I will focus on three main challenges for the completion of this thesis. First, the issues related to sources. Second, the overarching methodology of this research, alongside the perspectives and challenges entailed. Third, a brief explanation of the chronology used, the themes tackled in this thesis and those that have regrettably been excluded, due to a lack of evidence or space.

a) Sources.

The primary sources for the elaboration of this thesis suffer one major handicap: the Spanish Civil War. The existence of a fratricidal and ideological war and the subsequent forty-year silence create several problems with regards to sources.

First, documentary evidence, ranging from official documents, to letters, diaries or notebooks, suffered much destruction or misplacement. This is particularly frustrating for the research underlying this thesis. For example, it is well-documented in newspapers of 1933 that the performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida was filmed (see p. 55). Such a film is nowhere to be found, despite the efforts of the author of this thesis. Also, it is very probable that Rivas Cherif, the director of Seneca’s Medea, kept a stage diary of some sort in which he annotated the creative process of his stagings.14 This has also been lost.

Secondly, the slow re-appearance of documentary and bibliographic evidence after the end of the Civil War, but primarily in the last forty years of democracy in Spain, has met with difficulties. One is the understandable problem of cataloguing and describing new evidence that arrives in state or private archives in Spain. Although the archivists I have encountered in my

research are formidable, they are not theatre historians or specialists in the cultural endeavours of the Second Spanish Republic. In addition, they have had to deal with archival restructurings throughout the last four decades, which has meant the re-cataloguing of documents, whenever the staff numbers or funding has made this possible. New documents emerge every day and are identified by scholars. The research for this thesis has unearthed many unpublished photographs and identified many more (see Appendix 1: Figures 11, 13-15, 20, 23, 27-29, 39-47, 49-52, 55, 69, 75 and 77). Another difficulty is the lack of re-editions, which makes the accessing of bibliographic evidence at times excruciating. Some editions of letters or diaries have been of vast use for many scholars, but more needs to be done in this regard.

Thirdly, the Civil War, and the ideological confrontation it entailed, make most recollections written after it politically or historically biased. Their context also plays a part in this. To write within Franco’s Spain or in exile did not have the same pressures or personal resentments. It is perhaps disingenuous to ask these sources to be dispassionate and objective about what happened before the Civil War. This often means that claims have to be checked, contextualised or simply laid out for the reader to interpret.

The secondary literature on Seneca’s Medea poses further issues, the most important being the non-existence of a thorough analysis of what occurred on the 18th of June 1933 in Mérida, its origins and consequences. Books, chapters, sections and articles have been written on the subject, which have been of inestimable use for the present thesis. The reason why these are incomplete or vague at times is because their intention was other than to analyse the performance and its surrounding themes. They are either special editions of the text with

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16 The exception to this is Pociña (2002b: 887-896). Even so, the spatial limitations make this chapter somewhat broad and introductory.
contextual prologues or epilogues,\textsuperscript{17} articles or chapters analysing the broader phenomenon of the performance and reception of ancient drama in Spain,\textsuperscript{18} books on the History of the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico in Mérida or on the Roman Theatre,\textsuperscript{19} or articles on specific aspects of the production, such as Unamuno’s unperformed choral verses for Medea.\textsuperscript{20} Other secondary sources touch on the production of Seneca’s Medea, but only briefly, for their larger interest is in broader subjects, such as the careers of Margarita Xirgu, Unamuno, Rivas Cherif or Lorca or the cultural endeavours of the Republic.\textsuperscript{21}

This thesis contends with these problems by uniting, comparing, checking and explaining a combination of primary and secondary sources. The vast majority of the primary sources used are newspapers or publications from the 1930s. These offer the researcher a variety of voices and appreciations but also an invaluable amount of information with which to pursue his or her work. In addition, photographic and documentary evidence is used in order to reconstruct, when possible, the actual creation of Seneca’s Medea, its context, responses or implications. Primary bibliographic evidence is also used throughout, although when these are of a later date than 1936, they are treated with caution: pre-1936 sources are preferred. This research also builds upon the commendable work of many previous scholars which helps in assessing the veracity or chronology of sources, but also in constructing a clear picture of the crucial context of the production explored in this thesis, without which it could not be understood.

\textsuperscript{17} Domínguez (2008).
\textsuperscript{18} Morenilla Talens (2006); González-Vázquez (2015).
\textsuperscript{19} Monleón (1985; 1988; 1989; 2009); Sánchez Matas (1991); Caballero Rodríguez (2008); Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011); Morán Sánchez (2018).
\textsuperscript{20} Robles Carcedo (1998).
b) Methodology and perspectives.

The now growing sub-discipline of Classical Reception provides scholars and readers with new perspectives on both antiquity and the society, *oeuvre* or text the reception entails. It provides the scholar and reader with demonstrations of the potency and social, political or cultural capital that Greco-Roman antiquity has enjoyed in Western culture, and in others, ever since Homer himself. It also provides the scholar and reader with a catalyst, a framework and a rationale to understand key periods of history, national evolutions or aesthetic periods of art. When an act of reception takes place, the original intention is usually to think, create or express through and with Greco-Roman antiquity. If one asks why, how or with what intentions antiquity has been used in a given circumstance, one may also contribute a set of unforeseen or formerly unclear answers to broader and varied disciplines which have lain beyond the boundaries of disciplines such as Classics and Ancient History. These potential answers, in turn, also pose, like an academic boomerang, questions which are of relevance to the study of antiquity as a literary, historical, philosophical or political discipline.

The present thesis responds to the current developments in Classical Reception. It analyses thoroughly, comparatively and empirically, the material at hand, its context, its underlying rationale, the responses it provoked and the consequences it created. In doing so, it sheds light on the understanding, use and even manipulation of Greco-Roman antiquity in Spain in the first decades of the 20th century. It is of course limited in its scope and reach to the reception of Seneca, Medea, the Roman Theatre in Mérida, Ancient Drama and Hispania during the first two years of the Second Spanish Republic, but it nevertheless seeds many other questions that in the future may be answered or analysed by other research.

This thesis also, with due humility, supplements the study of the Second Spanish Republic and early 20th-century Spanish History, Thought, Literature and Theatre. The understanding of Seneca as an ‘essential Spaniard’ clarifies questions of Spanish nationalism, and the varied interpretation of its implications illuminates aspects of the main ideological conflict that
emerged from 1898 until 1936. The understanding of Seneca as the (very influential) first Spanish thinker and dramatist, strong in 1933, may possibly create new frameworks with which to analyse Spanish letters at key stages of their development. The production of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida also proposes new perspectives on the cultural agenda of the Second Spanish Republic and its intention of creating republican citizenship and unity. The themes of paganism, secularism, sorcery, marital strife, female empowerment or infanticide in the performance of Seneca’s Medea may also bring new questions to those who study the break of Church and State and its socio-political consequences, as well as the impact of the Women’s Movement on Spanish republican law and society. Finally, the use of ancient drama to pursue new scenic languages and aesthetics, alongside its inclusion within the Spanish dramatic canon and the exploitation of ancient dramatic spaces, may encourage scholars of Spanish Theatre to ponder on new perspectives for their studies. These enquiries will ultimately aid scholars and students in appreciating and understanding the accumulation of interpretations of antiquity that ultimately constitute perceptions of Greece and Rome in Spain to this day, and, in comparing them with other societies, these may clarify the perceptions of these societies too.

The veracity or implausibility of the claims developed by the interpretations of the topics mentioned in the previous paragraph, which are those of this thesis, also contribute to the study

22 Although it does not allude to Seneca’s essential Spanishness while it does discuss Saguntum or Numantia, the inestimable work of Álvarez Junco (2011) is a productive starting point.
23 For the reception of Seneca in Spain see seminal works by Blüher (1983) and Fothergill-Payne (1988) and the unpublished thesis by Del Río Sanz (1992).
27 Classical Reception in Spain is still at an underdeveloped stage in comparison to the UK and the US. In addition, the Spanish custom so far has been to focus on matters of—mostly literary—tradition, rather than of reception; for a brief explanation of these terms and their difference see Budelmann and Haubold (2007). Even so, examples of Classical Reception in Spain can be found in Pujante Álvarez-Castellanos and Gregor (1996), Lópe and Pociña (2002), De Paco Serrano (2003), Bañuls, De Martino and Morenilla (2006), Camacho Rojo (2006), González Vázquez and Unceta Gómez (2007), García Jurado, González Delgado, González González and Mainer (2010) and other works by these authors.
of antiquity. Seneca’s alleged ‘essential’ Spanishness may bring questions of ancient identity, cultural differences and belonging in Imperial Rome to the desks of Roman Historians. The exploitation of the ancient sites in Mérida may prompt questions on ancient spectacles in the provinces and the importance of towns and cities to their hinterland and the broader Roman Empire. The republican exploitation of the production of Seneca’s Medea may be seen as parallel in some way to the use of ancient spectacles in Rome and its provinces. The themes of paganism, secularism, feminism or infanticide provoked by the staging of Seneca’s Medea in 1933, may create a stimulating framework with which to ponder on atheism in Seneca’s oeuvre, ancient femaleness and maleness and questions of marriage and maternity. It is indubitable that these questions have been asked for decades, if not centuries, before these lines were written. These do not intend to directly question, amend or stimulate new perspectives on such questions, but to analyse how they were addressed by the creators of Seneca’s Medea, their sponsors, admirers and detractors. Nevertheless, the results may reignite many questions on antiquity or perhaps pose them anew. In addition, the questioning of the assumptions made by republican Spain about antiquity in their engagement with it surrounding Seneca’s Medea may aid in questioning received assumptions that permeate our own, present, understanding of antiquity.

Classical Reception, considered within a broad conceptual framework, poses many questions of methodology. What are the exact remits, scopes, perspectives or methods by which to pose the questions and deliver the answers—this is invariably a conundrum of this discipline. Different methodologies may be used to analyse different phenomena or texts and extract different conclusions. It is self-evident that different material, in different contexts, in different circumstances and by different authors, necessitates different frameworks, methods, skills and

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29 See e.g. Johnston (2017).
30 This is a growing field, pioneered in e.g. Hall and Wyles (2008), which studies the craze for performances of danced tragedy all over the Empire, and in the essays on ancient theatre outside Athens edited by Bosher (2012).
31 See e.g. McAuley (2012).
32 For a broad overview of discrete established approaches; see the monumental collection by Hardwick and Stray (2007).
tools. This is the specific case of this thesis. When analysing the reception of Seneca in Spain, the author must understand Spain’s Intellectual History. When analysing the republican use of Seneca’s Medea, the author must understand key principles of Cultural History, Political Philosophy or Cultural Materialism. When analysing the impact of Secularism or Women’s Rights in the reception of Seneca’s Medea in 1933, the author must be aware of the issues just mentioned, alongside those of Spanish Constitutional Law, Feminism or Spanish Catholic History. Finally, in the aesthetic analysis of the staging of Seneca’s Medea, the author must understand, in addition to some of those already mentioned, the principles of Performance Studies, Theatre History or Theatrical Aesthetics. It is the combination of all these diverse and interweaving perspectives, with a broad understanding of concepts such as reader’s response theory, reception theory or the contextualisation of text, that informs the results of this research and cumulatively illuminates the extraordinary impact, intentions and consequences of the staging of Seneca’s Medea in 1933.

In addition to the broad methodological framework of Classical Reception, the very nature of theatrical performance, as a multilayered cultural artefact, also informs the methods and execution of this thesis. Any given theatrical performance unites, in its enactment, a theatrical text, a spatial language, an embodiment and execution of the words and actions, the reputation and identities of its creators, its cultural context and tradition and the responses, both rational and emotional, of an audience which cannot entirely disentangle itself from its own private, social, cultural or political circumstances. It unites both contingent and non-contingent elements. It is for this reason that any attempt at analysing a theatrical performance, even more in the case of one as profoundly impactful as Seneca’s Medea, must take into account the decisions, responses and contexts that surround that performance. This thesis focuses on how this was developed and exposed by the performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933.

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33 This is the fundamental argument underlying the essays in Hall and Harrop (2010).
34 See Hall in Hall and Harrop (2010: 14-26).
But even though the theoretical frameworks explained above serve in establishing perspectives on the assessment and display of evidence, key specific questions surface in this thesis. First, how to establish a causal or coincidental connection between sources. Secondly, what is the hierarchy in the sources and their interpretation? Thirdly, how much of the author’s subjectivity mediates the results of this research. All these questions have been primarily resolved, or intended to be resolved by three overarching methodological propositions. First, it is the evidence provided by the empirical assessment of the sources that drives the conclusions of this thesis. Secondly, sources are checked against one another or with the aid of secondary literature, in order to discern their evidential quality and their usefulness to the conclusions. This is at times detailed for the reader to assess, but on other occasions, a judgment by the author has already been necessitated. Thirdly, authorial voice is inevitably an essential part of any academic research, however objective, rational or scientific the data or evidence might be. This is even greater in the case of the Humanities. The scholar stands as both transmitter of and interlocutor with the subject, evidence and materials at hand. Even so, my intention has been to establish a hierarchy of results and claims which broadly respond to the categories of proven, partially evidenced, inferred and, infrequently, just suspected.

c) Themes incorporated and excluded.

One of the challenges of Cultural History, and thus of the Reception of Antiquity, is how far one should follow the labyrinth of evidence to prove the genealogy, origin or consequences of ideas, interpretations or responses. The specific spatial limitations of this thesis and the correct deployment of evidence and conclusions have brought with them key decisions with regards to chronological and thematic limitations.

The thesis adopts three overlapping chronological frameworks, in order to refine its focus and establish limitations. The primary framework encompasses the period between 22nd March 1932 and 19th November 1933. This includes the genesis of the production of Seneca’s Medea, its staging and tour and the elections of November 1933. This is the core chronological framework
for this thesis. In order to expand its remits to evidence, contexts, origins or responses beyond it, two more frameworks intersect with it. First, one that runs from the 14th of April 1931 to the 17th of July 1936, that is, the life of the Second Spanish Republic, which also includes, beside the 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea, its return to Mérida in 1934. Secondly, a further long-lens framework commences on 24th February 1895, with the beginning of the Cuban War of Independence, and ends on the 18th of June 2008, with the 75th anniversary celebrations of the performance of Seneca’s Medea in 1933 by the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico in Mérida. These three chronological frameworks, with some exceptional allusions to moments outside of them, will aid the reader of this thesis, as they have helped its author, to understand the roots and consequences of the staging of Seneca’s Medea in 1933 and the responses to it.

Seneca’s Medea, as mentioned, enjoyed several performances in the years 1933 and 1934. These later continued in exile during 1936. The present thesis places at its centre the 18th June 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea in the Roman Theatre in Mérida. All other subsequent performances are used in order to supplement the evidence, illustrate the consequences or demonstrate the intentions of the first performance in June 1933. This means that this thesis, regrettably, does not address the creation of the Roman Week in Mérida in 1934, which clearly necessitates its own, much needed, attention.

The selection of topics and themes analysed and explored in this thesis has been dictated by the evidence used in the course of the research and the logic posed by its socio-political and historical context. The journalistic, documentary and bibliographic sources, with the addition of their context, overwhelmingly point towards the reception of Seneca in 1933, republican nation-building, political ideology, poverty, culture, feminism, secularism and theatrical aesthetics.

The evidence and context also point towards three topics which are of some relevance to the production of Seneca’s Medea and its reception: Agrarian Reform, Labour and territorial organisation. These have had to be excluded from this thesis primarily because they are comparatively less prominent in the sources used, and in order to bring clarity and focus. The
excluded topics should receive more attention in future research, along with the historical reception of Seneca in Spain, Spanish Nationalism and Antiquity, Comparative Theatre History in relation to Spain and Spanish Cultural Internationalism.

3. Chapters of this thesis.

The factors discussed so far inform the division of the exploration and analysis of the performance, genesis and impact of Seneca’s Medea in 1933 into five chapters. These are broadly co-extensive with five main themes: The description of facts and events on and surrounding the 18th of June performance (I); intellectual, literary and nationalist responses to the figure of Seneca (II); the role of Seneca’s Medea in republican nation-building and ideological disputes at the centre of the Second Spanish Republic (III); the relevance of Seneca’s Medea to the major socio-political changes of the Republic (IV) and the theatrical and aesthetic languages and tools used in the performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida (V). These themes necessarily overspill each chapter and often cross-fertilise one another, which is why extensive cross-referencing has been used.

Given the lack of a comprehensive and detailed account of the event that took place on the 18th of June 1933, its genesis and the consequent events that followed from it, it is evidently necessary to reconstruct these events and therefore provide the reader with an understanding of what took place, as will happen in Chapter I. This chapter will thus aid in explaining the context and sequence of many of the detailed discussion in subsequent chapters. In order to create this reconstruct, and given the problems posed by other scholarly works on this subject seen above, I have made an extensive use of journalistic accounts—news features, reviews and articles—that appeared in the Spanish press of the time. The information provided by these accounts has been critically reassembled—with the aid of other scholarly work where appropriate—so as to reconstruct what happened on that day and at other events related to it and explain who was involved in the event and how. This way we shall also better understand the immediate and
subsequent impact of the performance, primarily in its 1933 tour, its return to Mérida in 1934 and in the establishment of the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida.

Chapter II is titled ‘Seneca and Hispania’. Its main focus is to analyse the veracity of the remarks the Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, made to Unamuno on the neglect Seneca had suffered as a dramaturge and the appropriateness of his tragic vindication to the agenda of Spanish republican nationalism. The implications of this are many. In what way was Seneca neglected as tragedian but hailed as a moralist and philosopher in Spain? How did Spanish intellectuals respond to or make use of Seneca’s natal origins in Córdoba, Spain? What were the exact parameters and development of said vindication of Seneca the tragedian? What cultural and republican value was added by Unamuno’s role as translator? How did republican counter-hegemonic discourse use a newly vindicated Seneca for its own understanding and promotion of a progressive, civic and cultural nationalism?

Given the governmental backing and funding Seneca’s Medea received in 1933, how does its production play a role in the educational and cultural agenda of the republican government? In what way does it respond to a new paradigm of republican culture? Is the choice of Mérida a consequence of the republican desire to unite the nation through cultural dissemination? Is the theatrical nature of Seneca’s Medea a fitting example of a broader use and promotion of theatre? What were the contemporary receptions and readings of the production’s centrality to the Republic’s cultural and political agenda? In order to clarify all these issues, Chapter III, ‘Republica nunc sum’, follows on the development of the republican national vision by exploring its implementation through education and culture, the role Seneca’s Medea played in this and the political readings of said role by those in favour and against it.

‘Medea and the social revolution’ is the fourth chapter of this thesis. It explains how and why Spanish society, primarily those voices in the opposition press, responded to the staging of Seneca’s Medea regarding, primarily, two areas of republican reform: Secularism and Women’s Rights. It thus intends to answer two main questions. Firstly, how did the legislative and social
agenda of Secularism and Church-State separation affect readings of issues such as atheism or paganism in Seneca’s *Medea* by mainly Catholic commentators? Secondly, given the vast legislative improvement in Women’s Rights undertaken in the first two years of the Republic, primarily through suffrage and divorce, how did Spanish society understand and respond to, be it directly or indirectly, issues such as marital strife, female empowerment or infanticide, all central to Seneca’s *Medea*?

The final chapter, ‘Hispano-Roman tragedy on a reformed stage’, analyses the performance of Seneca’s *Medea* in the Roman Theatre in Mérida in June 1933 and the theatrical and aesthetic decisions taken primarily by its stage director, Cipriano Rivas Cherif. This poses many questions. How does the staging of Seneca’s *Medea* respond to broader uses of Ancient Drama in European or Spanish theatrical avant-garde? How does its director confront and resolve the theatrical challenges of the perceived unstageability of Senecan tragedy and the bare structure of a ruinous Roman Theatre? Given the combination of tragedy, spectacle, music, dance and on-stage masses in the production of Seneca’s *Medea*, how does the Dionysian element, in Nietzschean terms, guide the orchestration of all these elements into a final exultation of theatrical prowess?

In answering these questions, this thesis will demonstrate how the production, performance and tour of Seneca’s *Medea* became, however unintentionally, the enactment of many of the issues, trends, notions, fears and reforms that took place during the constituent period of the Second Spanish Republic. It channelled disparate conceptions of the Spanish nation and its destiny, the attempted consolidation of a new regime, the major social change of a society in mid-transformation and a new way of making theatre. Seneca’s *Medea* in 1933 came to perform and channel, in its origins, development, themes, performance and responses, the problems, concerns and hopes of Spanish society as it was during the first two years of the Second Spanish Republic. This thesis thus comes to re-enact, contextualise and assess how such an enactment of Spanish society was staged with the confidence, spectacularity, passion, fury, fear, drive and apotheosis of Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida.
I. Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida: A reconstruction.

On the 18th of June 1933, the ruins of the Roman Theatre in Mérida, in Western Spain, awaited their first professional performance in sixteen centuries: Seneca’s *Medea*, translated by the philosopher and playwright Miguel de Unamuno, performed by the Xirgu-Borràs theatre company and directed by Cipriano Rivas Cherif. The performance gathered local people from the region of Extremadura, national authorities, international dignitaries and intellectuals and became a success of profound repercussions and impact:

It has been a long time since there was last in Spain a theatrical event of the magnitude of that celebrated on Sunday in the Roman Theatre in Mérida. It found in the audience the resonance, support and devotion which in any cultured country events such as this encounter and awaken.36

This chapter is a reconstruction of the day of its performance, its creation and its subsequent impact. This reconstruction begins by describing what happened in Mérida, the production details relating to cast members, stage design and atmosphere, the—limited—reconstruction of the performance itself, and how it was received by the press and by the people in Mérida (1). It continues with a brief explanation of the genesis of and preparations for this production in order to understand all the decisions that led to the performance of Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida (2). Finally, it ends with a short but essential discussion of the immediate consequences, restagings and new performances of this production, beginning with the tour of Seneca’s *Medea* in 1933, its return to Mérida in 1934 and its future impact on the creation of the Festival Internacional de

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36 *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
Teatro Clásico de Mérida (3). The following reconstruction of events lacks a detailed discussion of many specific details, which shall appear in the appropriate chapters, so as to not distract from the purpose of this chapter: the reconstruction of events on—and surrounding—the 18th of June 1933 performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida.

1. The 18th of June 1933.

a) The event.

Over three thousand people attended this important event. The theatre originally had enough capacity to sit five thousand spectators, but, in order to guarantee comfort and avoid having an unmanageable crowd, it was decided to reduce the seats to three thousand by not selling tickets for the summa cavea. Even so, Rivas Cherif and the Mayor of Mérida had decided to add extra seats in the first three rows and so extend the theatre’s capacity, given that tickets had been sold-out for days.

In the theatre, locals, ‘eager to hear Medea’, according to the Prime Minister, Manuel Azaña, were joined by audience members from Madrid, Barcelona and other provinces, including some from neighbouring Portugal and some from even further afield, like Toulouse. A group of ateneistas, members of one of the most distinguished intellectual institutions in the country, the Ateneo de Madrid, also attended under a ‘reptile fund’ given to them by the Ministerio de Gobernación, according to José Prat, an ateneísta himself. The expression ‘reptile fund’—his own—seems to express an undercover purpose in sending them to Mérida on behalf of the government. Since the source of this funding is the equivalent of the British Home Office, some

37 Spartá (17-06-1933); Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933); Las Provincias (20-06-1933); El Socialista (20-06-1933); Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933); El Sur (21-06-1933).
38 Región (19-06-1933); La Libertad (20-06-1933).
40 Región (19-06-1933); La Libertad (20-06-1933).
sort of security or political goal might have been in place, but the specific intentions, if any, of the government or Ministry remain unknown. In the Roman Theatre, *ateneistas* from the Ateneo de Madrid sat alongside those from the Ateneo de Sevilla and the Ateneo de Huelva.\(^{42}\) Within the three thousand spectators, Juan Herrera, the critic for *Diario de Córdoba*, found it necessary to highlight the presence of ‘many ladies’ in the crowd (see pp. 228-230).\(^{43}\) But, even though urban and cultured people were part of the audience, Rivas Cherif, *Medea*’s director, remembers the preponderance of simple rural folk while in prison under the Franco regime in 1945:

There would be no more than five hundred qualified people who, given their official situation, their correspondence or their selfless passion, faced up to the troubles of travelling and the bad accommodation in the rich but ill-prepared town of Extremadura. The concurrence that watched and listened, overcome with emotion, and clamorously applauded the Senecan *Medea*, were the innocent and magnificently sensitive local and regional peoples of Mérida; an audience of fair-goers, a bullfight audience.\(^{44}\)

The ticket prices were of 25 pesetas for a first-class seat, 10 for a second-class and 5 for a third-class, the last being the first to be sold-out (Figure 26).\(^{45}\) All tickets included a complimentary cushion and the spectators were seated by ushers from the Seville Red Cross.\(^{46}\) For the price of 80 pesetas, one could enjoy a return ticket from Madrid to Mérida, accommodation for one night, lunch on the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) of June and a second-class ticket for the performance (Figure 1).\(^{47}\) There were also reduced train tickets for the occasion. Many of these tickets and accommodation could be purchased in Madrid at either the Patronato Nacional de Turismo, the Teatro Español or at Casa Daniel.\(^{48}\) The Mayor of Mérida reduced the third-class tickets to half

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\(^{42}\)*Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933). See also López Díaz (2011: 257).
\(^{43}\)*Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
\(^{44}\) Rivas Cherif (1991: 111).
\(^{45}\)*La Libertad* (20-06-1933).
\(^{46}\)*El Sol* (20-06-1933).
\(^{47}\)*Luz* (13-06-1933).
\(^{48}\)*El Heraldo de Madrid* (07-06-1933); *Luz* (07-06-1933); *La Voz* (07-06-1933); *ABC* (08-06-1933, 13-06-1933, 15-06-1933); *Luz* (13-06-1933).
the price for members of workers’ societies,\textsuperscript{49} and many students received free tickets.\textsuperscript{50} The performance was due to begin at half past six, but had to be delayed to wait for the ‘fast’ train, arriving from Madrid with many spectators. Miguel de Unamuno did not travel among them, as some have argued.\textsuperscript{51} He had arrived at mid-day with his three sons.\textsuperscript{52}

Such was the number of people gathered in Mérida that all the cafes and restaurants were completely full and the Mayor’s office had expressly to organise accommodation in inns, small hotels and private houses,\textsuperscript{53} which apparently were insufficient, according to Azaña.\textsuperscript{54} Many had arrived in private cars or by train, but also more than ten buses had arrived in Mérida, with at least one containing ateneistas from Madrid and another transporting Madrid journalists.\textsuperscript{55} Other journalists had been invited by their respective regional Comisiones de Instrucción Pública (Education and Culture Committees).\textsuperscript{56} A trip had also been expressly organised by a tourist association for the event (Figure 38).\textsuperscript{57} The anticipation flew through Mérida and reached the parish of Saint Eulalia, where the priest, even in the midst of religious tensions, encouraged his parishioners to attend the show that evening (see pp. 194-212).\textsuperscript{58} The city of Mérida, in one of the historically poorest regions in Spain, had rarely seen ‘such liveliness’.\textsuperscript{59}

In order to ensure full security, given the large number of people who were to descend on the city, a division of Guardias de Asalto, the republican police, had arrived that morning on the

\textsuperscript{49} This information is part of a denunciation from local anarchists in Mérida who protested the apparent favour shown by the socialist Mayor to socialist unions; see La Libertad (Badajoz) (22-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{50}La Voz (19-06-1933); Crónica (02-07-1933).
\textsuperscript{51} Monleón (1985: 40); Sánchez Matas (1991: 57).
\textsuperscript{52} Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933); ABC (20-06-1933); La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933). See López Díaz (2011: 258).
\textsuperscript{54} Azaña (2007: IV, 782).
\textsuperscript{55} Región (19-06-1933); La Libertad (20-06-1933); La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933). See Sánchez Matas (1991: 68) and Caballero Rodríguez (2008: 414).
\textsuperscript{56} Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{57} La Libertad (11-06-1933); La Voz (16-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{58} La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933). The priest seems to have gifted an image of Saint Eulalia to Xirgu herself, see Xirgu (2018: 283).
\textsuperscript{59} Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933). See also La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
early train from Seville and were billeted at the Hernán Cortés barracks. It seems, though, they did not have to intervene, since, according to *La Libertad*, ‘not even the smallest incident took place’ and the entrance and exit to and from the Roman Theatre was ‘a model of order’.

Mérida also welcomed the Prime Minister of the Republic, Manuel Azaña, and his wife, who had arrived at the Plaza de la República at around five o’clock that day, alongside the Mayor of Madrid, the Ministro de Instrucción Pública (Education and Culture Minister), Francisco Barnés, and the Ministro de Estado (Foreign Minister), Fernando de los Ríos. The Prime Minister, having been received at the Town Hall, ascended to the balcony and spoke to those gathered in the square. The authorities assembled at Mérida also included Teófilo Hernando, President of the National Culture Council, the director of Fine Arts, Ricardo de Orueta, the Mayor of Mérida, Andrés Nieto Carmona, the Mayors of Seville and Cáceres, the Deputy Mayor of Córdoba, the General of the First Infantry Brigade of the First Organic Division, José Mijaja, the Chief of the Military Cabinet of the Ministry of War, lieutenant colonel Saravia, the Director General of the Civil Guard, the Governor General of Extremadura and the Governor of Badajoz. The foreign dignitaries that day in Mérida were the Ambassador for Uruguay, the Portuguese Ambassador and the Italian Ambassador, Rafaelle Guariglia, who bore a gift to mark the fraternity between Rome and Mérida (see pp. 179-182). He seems to have brought two gifts from Rome. One was a wreath which was placed at the altar of Dionysus in the theatre. The other was a laurel branch given to the Town Hall, for which the Council later decided to buy a glass urn (Figure 37). After Azaña’s speech they all walked together to the theatre escorted by a troop of local workers, down a path marked with arrows and indicators by the

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60 *La Libertad* (18-06-1933, 20-06-1933); *La Voz* (Córdoba) (18-06-1933); *La Voz de Asturias* (18-06-1933); *La Voz* (Madrid) (19-06-1933).
61 *La Libertad* (20-06-1933). See also Región (19-06-1933) and *La Libertad* (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
62 *La Correspondencia de Valencia* (19-06-1933); *Hoja Oficial del Lunes* (19-06-1933); *La Región* (19-06-1933); *Crónica Meridional* (20-06-1933).
63 Hernando was Unamuno’s successor in this post. The Consejo Nacional de Cultura had substituted the Consejo Instrucción Pública.
64 *La Voz* (Madrid) (19-06-1933); *El Sol* (20-06-1933); *El Sur* (21-06-1933).
65 Región (19-06-1933); *El Sol* (20-06-1933); *La Libertad* (Badajoz) (20-06-1933, 22-06-1933); *La Voz* (Madrid) (22-06-1933); *La Libertad* (23-06-33); Rivas Cherif (1991: 67-68); Azaña (2007: IV, 781).
66 *La Libertad* (20-06-1933).
Guardias de Asalto. Among the republican retinue were the translator Unamuno, as were Maximiliano Macías and José Ramón Méïda, the archaeologists who had uncovered the Roman ruins in Mérida, which also comprised a circus, an amphitheatre and gardens (Figures 31 and 36). The septuagenarian chief archaeologist, Méïda, according to the Prime Minister, ‘seemed tearful and panting with emotion’ when at the Roman theatre.

Among many other distinguished spectators were the journalist Miguel Morayta Martínez, the traumatologist Manuel Bastos Ansart and the doctors and MPs Gregorio Marañón (Agrupación al Servicio de la República) and José Sánchez-Covisa (Acción Republicana). The actress Carmen Ruiz Moragas, also attended, as did the renowned geologist, palaeontologist and archaeologist, Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco and the pedagogues Juana Ontañón and Gloria Giner de los Ríos. Among the audience one could count also the intellectual, ateneista, federal-republican MP and co-exile with Unamuno, Rodrigo Soriano, who wrote a very heartfelt article for El Heraldo de Madrid on the production. Many more MPs attended, like the federal-republican Eugenio Arauz Pallardó, the Galician Federalist Luis Peña Novo, the radical republicans Salazar Alonso and Juan Revilla, Enrique Ramos Ramos and Pedro Rico, from Azaña’s Acción Republicana and the independent Bernardo Giner de los Ríos. In Mérida one could also find José Díaz Fernández, Mr. Ballester Gozalvo, Emilio Baeza Medina and Antonio de la Villa, from the Radical Socialist Party of the minister Francisco Barnés, and the socialists Mr. Vidarte, Mr. Saborit, Mariano Rojo, Antonio Canales, Pablo Valiente, Mr. Nuñez Tomás, Mr. Muiño, Teodomiro Menéndez, Narciso Vázquez and one of the three female MPs, Margarita Nelken (see pp. 217-219). Thus, the largest political contingency came from the strongest party in Parliament, the Socialist Party: a total of eleven if we add the minister

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67 El Sol (20-06-1933).
70 La Libertad (20-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
71 La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933); La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
72 El Heraldo de Madrid (20-06-1933).
73 La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933); Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933); La Libertad (20-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
Fernando de los Ríos. A further eleven, national, regional and local, senior public authorities attended. The performance of Medea was also solemnly attended by a special delegation from Seneca’s birthplace, Córdoba.

The Prime Minister, the Ministro de Instrucción Pública and the Ministro de Estado, alongside the Italian Ambassador, entered the theatre to tumultuous applause and the republican national anthem, the ‘Himno de Riego’. They sat, ‘as if a proconsul’ according to Azaña, accompanied by both the civil and military regional governors and the Mayors of Mérida and Madrid, in the place reserved for the imperial legate, which had been decorated with a red carpet and silk ropes (Figures 31 and 32). The audience cheered Unamuno as he took his seat (Figure 31). Other distinguished guests and authorities sat in the first three rows, as did the Spanish, European and American journalists.

And so, at approximately 19.00 hours, the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, conducted by Bartolomé Pérez Casas, performed the overture to Gluck’s Iphigénie en Aulide. On its final note, Margarita Xirgu as Medea entered on stage dressed in red and gold, crying her initial summoning: ‘Marriage gods and you Lucina...’. And so the performance of Seneca’s Medea began.

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74 *La Libertad* (20-06-1933); *El Sol* (20-03-1933); *Luz* (19-06-1933).
79 *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
80 *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
82 *El Sol* (20-06-1933); *El Sur* (22-06-1933).
b) The performance.

Seneca’s *Medea* was directed by Cipriano Rivas Cherif, the experienced avant-garde stage director at the Teatro Español (Chapter V). His assistant director was Fernando Antón, also assistant director of the Xirgu-Borràs Company. The cast on stage was formed by the Xirgu-Borràs theatre company (Figure 76). The roles were allotted as follows:

Medea: Margarita Xirgu.
Jason: Enric Borràs.
Nurse: Amalia Sánchez Ariño.
Creon: Alberto Contreras.
Messenger: Pedro López Lagar.
First chorus leader: Enrique Álvarez Diosdado.
Second chorus leader: Enric Guitart.
Chorus members: Luis Torner, José Cañizares, Fernando Porredón and Ricardo Merino.
Unknown characters: Fernando Aguirre, Pilar Muñoz, Eloísa Vigo, Amanda Nalda, Manchuli Sanz, Laura Bové and María Arias.

Medea’s children were performed in this production by two girls, for no discernible reason. The fifteen chorus members appeared on stage in circular formations around the altar in the orchestra, including the bearded chorus leader (on the chorus in this production see pp.290-293). We only know the identitites of six actors who performed in the chorus. The total of fifteen could have been completed by the acknowledged actors with unidentified characters mentioned above. The production programme boasted a hundred and twenty extras on stage, of which we know at least ninety finally performed, most probably the ninety soldiers from the Sixteenth

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83 Luz (19-06-1933).
84 Luz (19-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933); L’Humanitat (13-09-1933). See also Rodrigo (1974: 193, n.60).
85 Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933); La Voz (Córdoba) (20-06-1933).
Regiment who had arrived in Mérida to work as extras.\textsuperscript{86} It is improbable that the number of extras, added to the characters on stage, would make two hundred in the final scene, as \textit{Diario de Córdoba} wildly exaggerated.\textsuperscript{87} The figure was most probably half that.

The 20\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933 review in \textit{El Sol} mentions a group of dancers dressed in yellow and green. This is the exact narration of their appearance on stage, before the first choral interlude:

\begin{quote}
Into the semicircle of the ‘orchestra’ bursts the chorus—girls dressed in yellow tunics and green capes—preceded by the old man that governs it. It places itself around the altar and tells of the terrible crimes Medea has committed for the love of Jason in the expedition of the Argonauts. The chorus dances with a bacchic rhythm to the well-measured beat of Gluck’s ‘Orphée’. Merging their voices with the orchestra, they sing nuptial trills in celebration of the wedding of King Creon’s daughter.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

The critic clearly states that this female chorus ‘dances with a bacchic rhythm’, which became ‘more dynamic in its dramatism’. This makes the combination of singing ‘nuptial trills’ and energetically dancing simultaneously very difficult to accomplish. Even so, the newspaper \textit{La Libertad} confirms the existence of a group of dancers: ‘the symbolic character of the dancers [was] quite appropriate’.\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Sparta}’s review of the performance of \textit{Medea} in the Teatro Español in Madrid later that year fleetingly mentions a ‘pleasant ensemble of voices and female dancers that accompanied the tragedy’.\textsuperscript{90} Although the tragic chorus was undoubtedly male, a female group of dancers also performed in the June 1933 performance in Mérida, as \textit{El Sol} reports, which very probably appeared in every choral interlude.\textsuperscript{91} The photographic evidence clarifies the matter entirely.

\textsuperscript{86}\textit{La Voz} (Madrid) (19-06-1933); \textit{El Debate} (20-06-1933); \textit{La Cruz} (22-06-33).
\textsuperscript{87}\textit{Diario de Córdoba} (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{88}\textit{El Sol} (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{89}\textit{La Libertad} (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{90}\textit{Sparta} (04-11-1933).
\textsuperscript{91}Similarly to Gémier’s \textit{Oedipe, roi de Thèbes}, in 1919; see Baron (2008: 165) and Macintosh (2009: 137-138).
The academician (*académico correspondiente*) of Spain’s Royal Academy of History and conservator at the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano in Mérida (MNAR), José Luis de la Barrera, kindly forwarded much documentary evidence for this research from the personal archive of his father. In this collection of photographs, we find five portraying dancers, either solo or in ensemble (Figures 27, 28, 29 and 65). Dancers undoubtedly performed in the Roman Week in Mérida, to which *Medea* returned, in September 1934, as we shall see below. Most photographs in De la Barrera’s collection seem to date from 1934. It is therefore entirely probable that the photographs of dancers in this collection should be dated alongside the rest in the collection as taken in 1934, and not in 1933. In addition at least two of the photographs of dancers portray the dancer Josefina Cireza alone, who performed in the Roman Week in 1934 only (Figure 65).

Even though probably dating from 1934, the three photographs of an ensemble of dancers are of the female dancing chorus in Seneca’s *Medea* the critic from *El Sol* remembers in 1933 (Figures 27, 28 and 29): their clothing in two of the ensemble photographs can be easily distinguished as the same costume worn by the three girls that stand—smiling—behind Medea’s chariot in two of the photographs of the final scene that survive (Compare Figures 27 and 28 with Figures 4 and 5). The long, light-coloured, sleeveless tunics they wear are attached at both shoulders, just as in the ensemble pictures. To these two photographs, an additional photograph of three dancers from the collection of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano (MNAR) in Mérida should perhaps be added (Figure 30). In it, the dancers wear similar tunics and cover their heads with a veil, which is held up in one of the three ensemble photographs from De la Barrera’s collection (Figure 28). Figure 29 shows a group of sixteen dancers with the same costume as in the other photographs, with the addition of a darker veil that encircles their body and is attached on the right shoulder. This is very probably the green cape referred to in *El Sol*. The photographic evidence thus most certainly supports the premise that the three ensemble photographs from José Luis de la Barrera’s collection, as well as perhaps the one from the MNAR collection, portray the dancers in yellow tunics with green capes mentioned in *El Sol*.
The colourful clothes worn on stage were designed in a pseudo-archaeological style by Margarita Xirgu’s brother, Miguel Xirgu, the costume and set designer for many of her productions. The sparse stage design was the creation of Siegfried Burmann and Piti Bartolozzi. Sadly, we do not have photographic or documental evidence for each and every costume. The photographs that have survived are almost entirely black and white or sepia, making colours and textures indiscernible (see Appendix 1). Nevertheless, much can be reconstructed.

Firstly, Medea wore a long red tunic, held on her shoulder by two golden straps (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 26, 48 and 53). The top of the tunic fell from her collar-bone to her waist, draping over her sides and down to her ankles. Golden flames grew, resembling the shape of inverted commas, from the top’s thick lower border in gold. Medea also wore a hair band, probably in red and gold as well. The costume’s design unquestionably had the unrestricted movement of the actress in mind. The effect of the golden flames reflecting the natural, electric and torch light, against the marble backdrop must have been truly memorable: ‘red and fiery as an eternal lively and waving flame’ is how Medea is described in Sparta.93

The only design drawing that survives to this day is Jason’s costume, kept in the Museu de Badalona (Figure 10). It consisted of two pieces, a blue ankle-length tunic and a cream-coloured full-body cape (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 48 and 53). The blue tunic had a lower edging on which two parallel stripes were separated by upright white spade designs (as in the card suit) with pink broad rounded arrows inside them. The cape had a lower border with a series of upright isosceles triangles, with a gold reflecting rim. This consisted of a single piece of rectangular cloth attached by a brooch on the right shoulder, thereby covering the left arm and leaving the right arm bare. This cape would have facilitated the execution of grand sweeping gestures,

92 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933, 20-06-1933); Sparta (10-06-1933, 17-06-1933); El Socialista (20-06-1933).
93 Sparta (24-06-1933).
projecting a feeling of pathos and a suitably classical tragic tone to the audience. Jason also wore a knotted leaf-pattern headband with the ends falling to the back of his neck.

We have no further information, besides the photographs, as to the costumes in the cases of Creon (Figures 11, 12 and 58), the Nurse (Figure 24), the two girls who played Medea’s children (Figure 6 and 24) and the chorus (Figures 13, 14, 15, 18 and 19). The soldiers, who wore short tunics under a short armour with a breast plate and a leather-looking lower fringed skirt, were dressed in blue and brown, according to *El Sol* (Figures 4 and 15). Other characters are difficult to identify from the mass of extras on stage, and they all follow a similar design of short or long tunics with geometric edgings (Figures 4, 5 and 24).

The designs were successful in recreating, to an avant-garde taste, a mythical past, or, as the critic of *La Voz* put it, they ‘suited the times well’. They had evidently evolved from the big dramatic tunics and togas used by previous generations. They are more dynamic, simpler designs, which suggest rather than copy ancient clothing. The path followed in designing the costumes seems to have been to innovate within tradition, to renovate, rather than to revolutionise. The costumes in general have an aesthetic intention curiously similar to Norman Wilkinson’s designs for Granville-Barker’s production of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1912, 1915)—restaged in London precisely in 1932-1933—, perhaps pointing towards a common influence by Leon Bakst’s own ancient Greek designs. Nevertheless, no specific knowledge of the designs of Wilkinson or Bakst by the creators of Seneca’s Medea can be so far proven.

It seems that Miguel Xirgu was originally also responsible for designing Medea’s chariot. But, at some point, Piti Bartolozzi was chosen to design the chariot and the dragons’ costumes. The costumes consisted of a cream-coloured skirt with a slim elongation up the actor’s chest, very

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94 *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
95 *La Voz* (Córdoba) (20-06-1933).
96 Hall (2012: 250).
98 Rivas Cherif in *El Sol* (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158)
similar to how long aprons are worn (Figures 4, 5, 14, 54 and 55). On the front of the skirt, a
darker head-shaped figure showed a large frontal big eye in an exaggerated, cartoonish style. Up
the skirt’s elongation on the chest, a continuation of the head shape ascended, as if suggesting
an ear or a horn. The actors had a snake-like bangle that wrapped around their right arm,
commencing on their left shoulder. They wore a crested hood with a circle that may also
resemble an eye. Of the two actors, one wore a sandal on his right foot and a type of boot on his
left foot, and the other *vice versa*.

The chariot was a two-wheel chariot, very similar to a Roman *biga* (Figures 4, 5, 13, 54 and
55). The front panel was painted with curved ascendant lines which very probably were meant
to resemble flames. From this painted panel a tall pole rose vertically, with a snake-like
decoration curling to its tip. The mysterious creatures, justifiably called ‘symbolic’ by one
reviewer,\(^9\) and the fiery chariot they pulled, might have helped in creating an atmosphere of the
paranormal, of the mythical, as if extracted from a surreal bestiary. The escape vehicle thus
aided in the creation of inductive theatrical suggestions.

The stage was bare except for props and the columns remaining from the original *scaenae frons,*
which also hosted three copies of the mutilated statues of Proserpina, Ceres and Pluto, the
originals of which were kept inside the local museum,\(^10\) as Mélida had asked (see Figures 35
and 36).\(^11\) We also know a prompter was present to aid the actors,\(^12\) placed in one of ‘the two
holes which could be seen at one side and the other of the proscenium and were equidistant
from the altar stone in the centre of the orchestra’ (see Figures 3, 4, 17, 18, 19, 21 and 22),
according to Rivas Cherif in 1945, who gives us further details:

> As I had always thought, and in order to benefit Borrás, who was always insecure, we
> had to have someone who would prompt. To this effect, in one of those holes on the

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\(^9\) *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
\(^10\) *Sparta* (17-06-1933); *Hoja Oficial del Lunes* (19-06-1933).
\(^12\) *El Sur* (22-06-1933).
floor a place was arranged; and in order for it to be better disguised, without it clashing with those marbles, mister Mélida quickly offered us two gravestones from the city’s museum.\textsuperscript{103}

Beyond the \textit{scaenae frons}, the background was nature itself (Figure 28).\textsuperscript{104} Nature, unknowingly, played an important role in the stage-craft. The moon came out just as Medea was invoking her powers (Sen. \textit{Med.} 770-810).\textsuperscript{105} Shortly after, it seems, a flock of storks flew ‘repeatedly and low over the theatre of enchantment’, according to Rivas Cherif,\textsuperscript{106} when Medea was casting her spells on the nuptial clothes to be worn by Creusa (Sen. \textit{Med.} 811-842).\textsuperscript{107} As darkness drew in, torches and lights were used to illuminate the stage as the dramatic intensity grew,\textsuperscript{108} a seemingly appropriate gesture given the fate which was looming on the stage. Rivas Cherif recounts this crepuscular setting in 1945:

And since such a passage of the performance [the casting of spells on Creusa’s clothes] was already at dusk, the effect of the lights reinforcing the rising moon’s own emphasised the romantic dramatism of the ruins, as some providential storks added the enigmatic stroke of their flight on the chiaroscuro of the tragic theatre.\textsuperscript{109}

The action on stage was accompanied by the music performed by the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid and a choir of tenors, sopranos and baritones, conducted by Bartolomé Pérez Casas which had arrived the previous day.\textsuperscript{110} They played on the left edge of the stage, if seen from the \textit{cavea}, tucked away beside one of the lateral \textit{aditus} (Figures 18, 20 and 25). They performed the

\textsuperscript{103} Rivas Cherif (1991: 266).
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{La Libertad} (21-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{La Libertad} (21-06-1933). All the verse numbers for Seneca’s \textit{Medea} follow Seneca (2002). For Unamuno’s translation see Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 76-77).
\textsuperscript{106} Rivas Cherif (1991: 232).
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{La Crónica} (19-06-1933, 30-10-1933); \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (20-06-1933); \textit{Crónica} (25-06-1933); Unamuno in \textit{Ahora} (22-06-1933). See also Guansé (1963: 68), Rivas Cherif (1991: 232) and Azaña (2007: IV, 782). For Unamuno’s translation see Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 77-78).
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{El Sur} (22-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{109} Rivas Cherif (1991: 266).
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{La Libertad} (18-06-33); \textit{La correspondencia de Valencia} (19-06-1933); \textit{La Libertad} (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
overtures to *Iphigénie en Aulide* and *Alceste*, and chorus pieces from *Orphée et Eurydice*, all operas by Gluck (on music see pp. 284-288). The overture of *Iphigénie en Aulide* opened the play, as Medea appeared on stage. The choral pieces from *Orphée* were played alongside the chorus’ appearances. There are four choral interventions in this opera (Act I scene 1, Act II scene 1 and 2, Act III scene 3) which corresponds to the amount of choral interludes in Unamuno’s translation of Seneca’s *Medea* (Sen. Med. 56-115, 301-379, 579-669, 849-878). Whether the choral pieces from *Orphée* performed in Mérida were performed in the order dictated by the score is unknown. The evidence indicates that the orchestra and the choir performed after the tragic chorus had spoken their words, thus managing to ‘express the lyrical intention of the chorus’, as *Diario de Córdoba* would state. Finally, the overture to *Alceste* was played to add intensity and close the final scene, as the crowd, holding torches, chased the murderous Medea.

We learn that Rivas Cherif, *Medea’s* director, had achieved brilliant scenic and physical action and decided not to use masks so as to ‘not conceal the facial luxury of emotions’, according to *El Sur*. The director’s intention was to stage the play in ‘the Greek style’. This, as the analysis of the performance offered in Chapter V shall reveal, did not mean any style of archaeological or pseudo-archaeological performance—except perhaps in a certain mythical air of the costume design. By ‘Greek style’, the journalistic sources meant the following of ancient stage conventions, primarily which entrances each character would use to appear on stage. In this way, Medea entered through the central entrance, the *aula regia*, the antagonist, Jason, entered from the right, all other characters from the left and the chorus entered through the

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113 *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
114 *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
115 *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
117 *La Voz* (Madrid) (19-06-1933); *Hoja Oficial del Lunes* (19-06-1931); *La Voz de Aragón* (20-06-1933); *El Socialista* (20-06-1933); *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933); *La Voz* (Córdoba) (20-06-1933); *El Sur* (22-06-1933).
parodoi which lead to the orchestra.118 This use of specific entrances seems to be confirmed in Rivas Cherif’s own description of the Roman Theatre in Mérida in his handbook on Spanish Theatre History and Practice, Cómo hacer teatro, written while in prison in 1945:

On one side and the other of the stage there is an entrance for the chorus. At the back, closed by a tall wall with two tall small temples decorated with columns and statues, it has three open doors also, the central one for the protagonist and, on one side and the other of this central one, the other two for secondary dramatic personae.119

Beyond the guidance that Unamuno’s translation of Medea and other disparate clues in the press and scholarly works may offer, a full understanding of the on-stage movements, actions and performance is lacking. The very brief evocation in Sparta, by Felipe Lluch, gives us an idea of the plastic impact the performance must have had on its audience:

Medea, red and fiery as an eternal lively and waving flame, crossed the stage at a quick pace, she merged with the stones, holding on to the mouldings, hiding in its gaps, marking, with her energetic and resolute pace, an unforgettable footprint on the trodden slabs of marble.

There Medea was. But not as a pale and blurred memory, but as a beating and blinding reality. There she was, prisoner of the gravest monster, jealousy, turning in her chains, desperate and bloody. Beside her, Jason, cold and unemotional, majestic and still, replied with a clear and hurt voice to the coarse imprecations of Medea. And between both, the indecisive and hesitant figure of the nurse, who was fearful in her expression and obscure and weak in her diction, as if broken and defeated by ruthless destiny.120

118Sparta (17-06-1933); Luz (19-06-1933); Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933); La Libertad (21-06-1933); El Sur (22-06-1933).
120Sparta (24-06-1933).
El Sol, in its aforementioned 20th of June 1933 review, offers an account, colourful in its poetic descriptions but not too rich in facts, that explains in more detail the scenic movement and action. The following description is a brief amended summary and reconstruction of what this review describes about the on-stage performance.

At the end of the overture of Iphigénie en Aulide, Xirgu descends in red costume with her arms open ‘before the magnificent architecture that serves her as background’. ‘With a trembling voice, which swells and roars and cries out’, she begins her monologue. When she has finished, she ‘turns desperately to the palace and the audience bursts into the first ovation’.

The chorus, preceded by an old man, enters the orchestra and places itself around the altar to Dionysus and begins its speech. When finished, the dancing chorus dances with ‘bacchic rhythm’ to the music of Gluck’s Orphée, and accompanying the orchestra they sing wedding tunes for the wedding of Creon’s daughter. When they have finished, the audience once more applauds.

Next, Medea appears on stage and begins her agon ‘in a hurt and violent voice’ with Creon, who is preceded and followed by four ‘decorative’ slaves. When Creon leaves, the audience sees ‘Medea’s new desperation, tragically beautiful in the attitude and movements of Xirgu, in a hurtful or aggressive voice’. After the agon, the chorus once more appears in the orchestra. This time with a ‘melancholic’ voice: they yearn for the days of heroes.

Jason appears on stage to beg Medea ‘with a storming or tender, robust, plain, clear voice’, so she ‘may not avenge in their common children her conjugal hatred’. But Medea ‘will satiate her furor on her own children’. The chorus appears once more and Gluck’s music shows ‘in its pathetic lyricism, a noble pain’.
Then, the lights light up the scene, ‘lighting with sinister clarity the figure of Medea’. Medea, accompanied by a slave, prepares all her potions and charms following ‘the rhythm of a flute that cries in the orchestra’. Then Medea, at times ‘either lying on the floor or standing up straight’, holds the deadly dagger. The Nurse, with a softer voice than her colleagues, tries to placate Medea’s fury. Medea then foresees the horror that is to come.

Suddenly, the Messenger—female according to the review, but officially performed by Pedro López Lagar—appears on stage announcing the horrible fire that has taken hold of the town and palace and the chorus of extras forms a frieze around her: ‘The night becomes red-tinted’. Jason and Medea argue for the last time. The Nurse brings the children to Medea and Jason calls his soldiers. The women cry and run away while the fire breaks out behind the walls and the audience cannot contain its admiration. Medea now appears on her chariot, pulled by two ‘symbolic dragons’, and Jason restrains the hatred of his soldiers, who ‘wish to kill her’. Then Medea kills her children and throws the body of one to Jason, who cries his final lines: ‘Leave for the deep spaces of the high firmament to testify, wherever you roam, that there are no gods!’ (Sen. Med. 1026-1027).121

Finally, the Orquesta Filarmónica play the final notes from the overture to Alceste and Jason runs off stage with his child in his arms, while the mad crowd on stage tries to hunt Medea down. The smoke slowly dissipates and the crowd, after a moment of silence, shouts a ‘delirious clamour of enthusiasm, an emphatic bravo around the theatre’. Seneca’s Medea has ended.

The account above broadly follows the text that survives with three exceptions. It fails to mention the two dialogues between the Nurse and Medea (Sen. Med. 116-179, 380-430),122 and the final chorus entrance (Sen. Med. 849-878),123 between Medea’s final monologue and the Messenger’s entrance. I believe that these omissions are probably due to an imprecise recollection or a lack of space, common at times in reviews. This at least must be the case with

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the two dialogues between Medea and the Nurse, for they are essential to understand the pathos in *Medea*, and their elimination would leave a very frontal and declamatory play, full of monologues and the verbal tennis that *agones* often are. *L'Humanitat* praises one of these dialogues, as performed in Barcelona, although it does not specify which, pointing towards the staging of at least one of them, if not both. But it is possible that the final chorus speech, otherwise short, could have been in fact eliminated. It might have caused an undesirable anticlimax in the growing intensity on stage and the director might have decided to keep the action alive by jumping from Medea’s emotionally charged speech to the news that the Royal Palace was on fire and King Creon and his daughter were dead. *L'Humanitat* and Rodríguez Cordola in *La Vanguardia* do claim that Seneca’s *Medea* had been cut in places in the performance in Barcelona. But it has yet proven impossible to find the truth of such possible or claimed cuts, where these took place and whether they were executed also in Mérida.

There is one final discrepancy in the account of *El Sol* which is necessary to point out. The account above mentions that the Nurse, after Medea has appeared on stage to prepare her potions, tries to placate Medea’s fury. In the text, the Nurse’s intervention seems to be a lone monologue and not a direct address to Medea (Sen. *Med*. 670-739). I am uncertain if this is once again memory playing tricks on the critic, but if it were to be true, this might be a reference to a possible change in the script to make the Nurse’s monologue seem addressed to Medea. However, yet again, there is no further evidence to prove this was the case.

*Medea*’s director, Rivas Cherif, does recount the adaptation he made of the divisions into acts and of the curtain-fall in the Roman Theatre in Mérida. This brief recollection, made in 1945, also gives us some interesting clues as to the final scene of *Medea*:

> In *Medea* in Mérida, the pauses for the acts, which do not interrupt the tragic movement in the precise moments of the action, were marked, without any violence towards

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125. *L'Humanitat* (15-09-1933); *La Vanguardia* (15-09-1933).
Seneca and Unamuno’s text, by the chorus’ interventions in the orchestra, off the stage.

And at the end, the curtain-fall was not necessary after Medea’s rapture towards Hell, accompanied by a multitude, materially ignited with vertiginous torches, to the rhythm of the infernal chariot; and meanwhile Jason ventured, overcome, through the columns of the palace after his desperate imprecation: ‘There are no gods!’

We know that the audience was engaged from the very beginning, and it moved much of the rural folk who had attended the performance: ‘The crowd was spellbound’, writes Azaña.

The audience was so engaged that it almost acted as ‘one of the main characters’ or ‘a silent chorus’ (see pp. 293-295). Xirgu’s performance was often interrupted by prolonged applause. Such was the emotion engaging all present, that at a high-point in one of Medea’s speeches, a spectator spontaneously shouted: ‘Long live the republican art!’ He was then arrested by the police, following the Mayor’s orders, and taken to spend the night at the local police station.

Ricardo Senabre explains that the performance had been filmed by a team expressly sent for such a purpose, although he does not provide details on who was involved or why. Seneca’s Medea was filmed by Luis R. Alonso and his crew, with a delegate from Gaumont-Pathé. I suspect this recording was used as part of the Noticiario Fox, which screened in many theatres and cinemas in Madrid and which had Medea as one of its news reports. It most probably was also part of the ‘Medea’ report advertised for 10.45 on Monday 28th of August 1933 at the Cine de la Opera and Cine Palacio de la Prensa in Madrid, which in the former was followed by The

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129 El Sur (22-06-1933). See also Ahora (21-06-1933).
130 La Veu del Vespre (19-06-1933); El Noticiero Universal (19-06-1933); Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933); El Luchador (19-06-1933); Las Provincias (20-06-1933); La Voz de Aragón (20-06-1933).
131 See Monleón (1985: 40) and Sánchez Matas (1991: 65 n.8).
132 Senabre (2008: 34).
133 La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
Mad Genius (1931) and in the latter by The Hatchet Man (1932).\textsuperscript{136} The civil governor of Ciudad Real officially permitted the showing of this film.\textsuperscript{137} The film is, unfortunately, yet to be found.

The performance was also broadcast by Unión Radio throughout Spain, in which Rivas Cherif, Xirgu and Borràs spoke, and which had the cartoonist Augusto Fernández Sastre as ‘speaker’.\textsuperscript{138} This decision was praised by Alejandro Miquis, because, according to him, listening to Medea on the radio was closer to the way Seneca’s Medea was intended to be enjoyed, through readings, rather than the staging that took place in Mérida (for the debate on Seneca’s stageability in Spain, see pp. 258-262).\textsuperscript{139}

The final scene seems to have made a profound impact on spectators. According to El Sur, Margarita Xirgu ‘laughed, with immortal laughter, when she saw Creon’s palace burn’.\textsuperscript{140} The on-stage crowd created a fiery frieze of torches,\textsuperscript{141} and once the smoke had disappeared alongside the crowd that persecuted Medea and the Orquesta Filarmónica had finished playing the overture to Alceste, the audience broke into a ‘roar of admiration’, after an emotional silence, used to digest what they had seen.\textsuperscript{142} Azaña, the Prime Minister, writes the following about the final scene in his diary, on the 19\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933:

The final scene—in the dead of night—: the fire, the torches, the mass running through the prestigious architecture, produced a fulminating effect. The audience exploded into clamorous applause.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{136} ABC (27-08-1933).
\textsuperscript{137} Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Ciudad Real (06-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{138} La Época (19-06-1933); La Voz (19-06-1933); La Mañana (24-06-1933); Ondas (24-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{139} Nuevo Mundo (30-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{140} El Sur (22-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{141} Crónica (25-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{142} Crónica (25-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{143} Azaña (2007: IV, 782).
When the performance ended, at approximately 21.00, the cast appeared several times on stage to be applauded.\textsuperscript{144} ‘the audience, surrendering to the grandeur of the spectacle and the supreme art of Margarita Xirgu, paid a profoundly moving homage’, according to \textit{Diario de Córdoba}.\textsuperscript{145} The audience insisted on seeing Unamuno, Mélida and Macías on stage in order to applaud their work too. It was a complete success. The authorities seemed to have also been impressed by the performance, for they considered it ‘an unforgettable success’.\textsuperscript{146} The Prime Minister and other authorities left to the audience’s cheering and the national anthem.\textsuperscript{147} Xirgu was so moved by the experience that she confessed after the performance: ‘I have now done \textit{Medea} in Mérida... I can now die peacefully’.\textsuperscript{148} She would once more share her enthusiasm with Domène de Bellmunt that August: ‘It was magnificent, grandiose, colossal!—she says excitedly—I had never enjoyed myself as much as that day on that stage of real stone in front of four thousand people’.\textsuperscript{149} The impact of the performance was profound for all those involved, whether as performers or spectators, as evidenced in the words Felipe Lluch used to describe the theatre after the play had finished:

And the theatre remains alone and still under the cold stellar light; but it does not remain dead, as before; in the corners immortal voices live and in the shadows of the night now beats a heart it did not have.\textsuperscript{150}

To celebrate the performance, a banquet presided over by the Prime Minister took place later that same evening at the recently opened Parador Nacional de Turismo, paid for by the Town Council.\textsuperscript{151} Streams of praise washed through the banquet (Figure 33). It hosted over two

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{144}\textit{Full Oficial del Dillans} (19-06-1933); \textit{El Luchador} (19-06-1933); \textit{La Mañana} (20-06-1933).  
\textsuperscript{145}\textit{Diario de Córdoba} (20-06-1933).  
\textsuperscript{146}\textit{La Libertad} (21-06-1933).  
\textsuperscript{147}\textit{Hoja Oficial del Lunes} (19-06-1933); \textit{El Socialista} (20-06-1933).  
\textsuperscript{148}\textit{Sparta} (24-06-1933). This is also alluded to in \textit{Crónica} (02-07-1933), and quoted in Foguet i Boreu (2010: 147). See also Rivas Cherif (1991: 110).  
\textsuperscript{149}\textit{La Rambla} (28-08-1933).  
\textsuperscript{150}\textit{Sparta} (24-06-1933).  
\textsuperscript{151}\textit{La Voz de Asturias} (18-06-1933); \textit{La Region} (19-06-1933); \textit{La Voz} (Córdoba) (19-06-1933); \textit{Región} (19-06-1933); \textit{Luc} (19-06-1933); \textit{La Noche} (19-06-1933); \textit{El Noticiero Universal} (19-06-1933); \textit{Diario de las Palmas} (19-06-1933); \textit{La Voz} (Madrid) (19-06-1933); \textit{Diario de Burgos} (19-06-1933); \textit{Diario de la Marina} (19-06-1933); \textit{Full Oficial del Dillans} (19-06-1933); \textit{Hoja Oficial del Lunes} (19-06-1933); \textit{El}
hundred guests and everybody involved in the production gave several speeches of praise or gratitude at the end of the banquet. The food was clearly not of the Prime Minister’s liking: ‘I have never had a worse meal’, he writes in his diary.\textsuperscript{152} That same evening, the people in Mérida could also enjoy an entertaining soirée at the concert given by the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid at the Maria Luisa Theatre.\textsuperscript{153}

After the banquet, Fernando de los Ríos and Margarita Nelken escorted Xirgu and Borràs to the Socialist social club, the Casa del Pueblo, in Mérida. There the distinguished artistes were to give a poetry recital, presided over by the Minister, apparently until half past one in the morning.\textsuperscript{154} But the entertainment did not end there. Mérida continued to be active until the early hours, or as \textit{El Sol} put it: ‘At three o’clock in the morning the square in Mérida had the same appearance as if it were mid-day’.\textsuperscript{155}

c) Its reception.

We do not have a descriptive and objective account of the acting quality involved, beyond it being much praised and some general references to the acting styles of the two main actors, Xirgu and Borràs.\textsuperscript{156} One can safely speculate that Xirgu was focused, contained and passionate in her role, thereby bringing depth and conflict to Medea, while Borràs might have followed his usual naturalistic style of acting which, by the 1930s, would have been considered antiquated and over elaborate, thus showing Jason in a pathetic and unbalanced light.


\textsuperscript{152} Azaña (2007: IV, 782).


\textsuperscript{155} \textit{El Sol} (20-06-1933). A similar testimony was given by José Prats to Sánchez Matas (1991: 67).

\textsuperscript{156} On the acting styles of Xirgu and Borràs; see George (2004). See also Delgado (2003: 38).
This theory is substantiated by several comments in different reviews. Although it is true that no review speaks badly of Borràs’ performance and many say he was adequate, some even highly praising his work,\(^{157}\) most highlight Xirgu’s superior command of the stage. *La Libertad* says of her: ‘Margarita Xirgu culminated the expression of her art as tragedienne *par excellence* […] The play is her, the others are the necessary characters to highlight the figure of Medea’.\(^{158}\) Juan Herrera in *Diario de Córdoba* writes: ‘Xirgu made an admirable creation of the protagonist, fulfilling an extraordinary task. She was truly brilliant’.\(^{159}\) It is true that he praises Borràs’ work, saying he ‘shone in his role as antagonist, triumphing completely’, but Herrera certainly does not judge it to be as praiseworthy as Xirgu’s work. Another critic, Díaz Pérez, says that ‘Xirgu has understood how to embody her [Medea] precisely as the great Cordobés philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca painted her’.\(^{160}\) *El Sur* goes as far as to completely ignore Borràs’ work when referring to the actors involved as ‘Medea’ and ‘secondary actors’: ‘not even for a second did Margarita’s emotional, mimic and pathetic force decline […] the others tried to modulate their lines in a pathetic way, but without Xirgu’s good fortune’; Valery’s ‘Psalms on a voice’ should have been applied to Xirgu, according to the critic.\(^{161}\) Although Juan Chabás in *Luz* explains that ‘Margarita Xirgu’s work was heroic’, he does praise Borràs’ work in saying that he ‘was an admirable Jason’ and that ‘he was proper, containing those easy outbursts which are unnecessary for his mastery’, making, in my opinion, a clear reference to his antiquated acting style.\(^{162}\) Xirgu’s performance was so outstanding that *El Sol* wrote that she was ‘covered in flames’.\(^{163}\)

In an article for *Ahora* on the 22nd of June 1933, Unamuno expressed how the Spain of old had been resurrected that night, how the source of Spain had been revealed and how Xirgu had arrived at the ‘summit of her art’ (see pp. 134-136). Also on the 22nd of June, the Town Council

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157 *Luz* (19-06-1933); *Ahora* (21-06-1933).
158 *La Libertad* (21-06-1933).
159 *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
160 *La Voz* (Córdoba) (20-06-1933).
161 *El Sur* (22-06-1933).
162 *Luz* (19-06-1933).
of Mérida officially declared Xirgu and Borràs ‘adoptive’ daughter and son of Mérida, given the huge acclaim they had experienced with Medea (see Figure 37). According to Sáenz de Buruaga, two streets in Mérida, San Francisco and San Juan de Dios, were renamed after Xirgu and Borràs, respectively.

The performance of Seneca’s Medea reached the press in France, Italy, England and other European countries. Most of the Spanish press coincides in praising the performance of Seneca’s Medea and the whole endeavour. The work done by Margarita Xirgu and her company was lauded as: ‘masterful’, ‘a categorical success’, ‘unsurpassable’, ‘masterfully performed’, ‘truly brilliant’ and La Voz even goes as far as to say that ‘Margarita Xirgu and Enrique Borrás have reached the peak of their artistic careers’.

Lluch’s review in Sparta is overwhelmingly laudatory about Medea, even describing it as ‘that marvellous spectacle, perhaps the most moving, emotional and impressive of all we have seen’. But, nevertheless, he does briefly mention three elements which were imperfect: ‘the excessive polychromy of the chorus’ uniform, the limited voice of one actor, [and] the muffled sound of the orchestra, too far from the stage’. The performance received some florid comments from much of the press. El Sur comments that there was ‘a true emotion in the people, who are astonished at seeing the revelation of a beauty they considered dead forever’. Juan Chabás said it was necessary to mark ‘the 18th of June as an important date for our theatre’ and that ‘it

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166 See for example La Stampa (21-06-1933), Portsmouth Evening News (29-06-1933) or Le Temps (11-08-1933). See also La Libertad (20-06-1933) and Rodrigo (1974: 194, n. 62).
167 Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933); La Región (19-06-1933).
168 La Libertad (20-06-1933).
169 Hoja Oficial del Lunes (19-06-1933).
170 La Voz (Córdoba) (19-06-1933).
171 El Heraldo de Madrid (19-06-1933).
172 La Voz (19-06-1933).
173 Sparta (24-06-1933).
174 El Sur (20-06-1933).
would not have been better performed at Syracuse or Verona’ (see pp. 268-270).\(^{175}\) *El Sol* also exclaimed: ‘We will no longer have to go and find the best foreign companies abroad’.\(^{176}\)

Some of the press was confused over certain details and categories. Some believed the author was Euripides,\(^{177}\) *Blanco y Negro* mistook Jason for Samson,\(^{178}\) and others believed that the performance took place at the amphitheatre or circus in Mérida.\(^{179}\) So widespread was the misconception about *Medea* being performed in the amphitheatre that Mérida asked the Academy of Fine Arts to send a note to the press clarifying the misunderstanding, although one of his colleagues noted the misconception had stemmed from official sources.\(^{180}\) This serves to demonstrate that ancient drama productions in ancient venues were a new thing to Spanish society, as Juan Chabás and Rodrigo Soriano acknowledged.\(^{181}\) This was used by some critics to explain why some parts of the production were slightly amateurish and improvised.\(^{182}\) However, it was thought that Seneca’s *Medea* could begin to establish an ancient drama tradition in Spain, which would, in turn, help in a future polishing of manners and styles, as Alejandro Miquis suggests:

What has been said let it not be understood as censoring. All who have intervened in this 1933 *Medea* of Mérida are worthy of their art. For some this [*Medea*] has come too late; for others too early; for all, without a preparation they could not improvise. They have all done more than enough by doing it! If there were room for criticism, this would not be its place.\(^{183}\)

\(^{175}\) *Luz* (19-06-1933).
\(^{176}\) *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
\(^{177}\) *El Diario Palentino* (19-06-1933).
\(^{178}\) *Blanco y Negro* (25-06-1933).
\(^{179}\) *ABC* (07-06-1933); *El Noticiero Gaditano* (19-06-1933); *Full Oficial del Dilluns* (19-06-1933); *El Sur* (19-06-1933); *La Noche* (19-06-1933); *La Veu del Vespres* (19-06-1933); *La prensa* (20-06-1933); *El Socialista* (20-06-1933); *El Día Gráfico* (20-06-1933).
\(^{180}\) *El Siglo Futuro* (06-06-1933); *ABC* (06-06-1933). See also Morán Sánchez (2018: 223).
\(^{181}\) Chabás in *Luz* (19-06-1933); Soriano in *El Heraldo de Madrid* (20-06-1933).
\(^{182}\) *Luz* (19-06-33); *El Sur* (22-06-33); *Nuevo Mundo* (30-06-1933).
\(^{183}\) Miquis in *Nuevo Mundo* (30-06-1933).
Openly critical articles appeared in the press about the performance and the endeavour, but these coincide precisely with the right-wing or traditionalist press, which had a political agenda to promote in attacking the production (see pp. 182-189, 194-212). Such was the apparent vehemence of the attack delivered by one newspaper, *El Debate*, that the Regional Council of Badajoz brought a lawsuit against it, considering its comments to be slander. Mérida’s Town Council and many distinguished associations and clubs in the town made their protest, and their praise for Seneca’s *Medea*, public in several telegrams sent to the press.

It is difficult objectively to understand such a passionate protest against the very few lines on Seneca’s *Medea* published in *El Debate* the previous day, the 20th of June 1933. The telegrams of protest do not reference any exact details of what was published, and therefore of what they found upsetting. Perhaps the sparse attention in *El Debate* might have been seen as scornful. It might be argued that the mention of only two thousand five hundred seats being sold, the existence of many empty seats at the performance—a fact evidenced by the photographs of the performance—and the suspension of a formal reception for the authorities on the 19th, due to their absence, might have been seen as tendentious. Two comments might have been particularly upsetting, given their dismissive tone: The performance of *Medea* is described as ‘Rivas Cherif’s latest whim’ and the Xirgu-Borràs Company as ‘The “Our selves only” company and their friends, also known under the official title of “Always the same people”’. The tense political climate during the Republic is apparent in these comments. The performance of Seneca’s *Medea* undoubtedly became a politically charged arena for the tension and disputes of the time (see pp. 182-189, 194-212). The apparent offence caused by *El Debate*, and the impact *Medea* had on the audience, is strongly evidenced in one particular protest, which reads:

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184 *Las Provincias* (21-06-1933); *El Luchador* (21-06-1933); *La correspondencia de Valencia* (21-06-1933); *Diario de las Palmas* (21-06-1933); *La Libertad* (Badajoz) (21-06-1933).
With our spirit still vibrating due to the marvellous grandeur contemplated in the performance of ‘Medea’, whose memory will endure in us as long as our lives, we elevate the most energetic protest against the absurd, inexact and tendentious information published in ‘El Debate’. It is unutterable the sum of emotions provoked by this artistic manifestation, in which literature, music and theatre, in its spectacular aspect, left our soul swollen with evocations. We would just like to emphasise the masterful, unsurpassable, unequalled work of the brilliant Margarita Xirgu. Our concept of the loftiness of truth and art ravishes us with indignation when contemplating with what peerless audacity they have intended to dishonour the former and prostitute the latter, bringing to their core the most despicable passions, which we do not hesitate to call execrable. Against such behaviour we, the doctors of Mérida, protest.\textsuperscript{186}

The social impact of the performance was indeed significant. In a bullfight critique, titled ‘Medea and Colomo’, the critic Daniel Tapia Bolivar notes how many people from Madrid ‘doubted what to do, because on Sunday two tragedies would take place: Medea and a Bullfight’.\textsuperscript{187} He repeatedly juxtaposes these events: he criticizes the bull-fighter Felix Colomo’s artistry, saying that people needed more, so as ‘not to feel disappointed for not having gone to Mérida’. The two events merge evocatively when Seneca is evoked as a typical Cordobés aficionado, wearing a broad hat, who would have been thrilled with the tragic potency of the bullfighter Felix Colomo (see pp. 113-114).

This equation of Seneca’s Medea with bullfighting is repeated by two more links made in the right-wing satirical newspaper Gracia y Justicia and the magazine Gutiérrez. The former reads: ‘Well, there are people who call Seneca the Felix Colomo of the theatrical arts’.\textsuperscript{188} The latter, in a review of Medea that imitates bullfighting critiques, reads: ‘La Xirgu cuts an ear [of the bull]
and Enrique Borrás gives a couple of walking salutes around the arena’. 189 These two other mentions, alongside that by Tapia Bolivar, come to illustrate the popular impact Medea had made in Spanish society, as do the protest telegrams mentioned. The performance in Mérida was being equated to one of Spain’s most popular and Spanish events, bullfighting. Even the Madrid correspondent for The Manchester Guardian found it necessary to describe, in September 1933, that Medea was ‘of more educative value’ for the children present than attending bullfights. 190 It seems that in 1933 Seneca was close to being popularly conceived of as a true toreador, as Nietzsche had once described him, 191 and his Medea as a true Spanish fiesta (on Seneca’s Medea and bullfighting see pp. 113-114, 170-171).

2. The genesis of Seneca’s Medea.

The idea to stage Seneca’s Medea and mount this production seems to have emerged in a conversation after the première of Unamuno’s play El Otro on the 14th of December, 1932, also performed by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, in the Teatro Español. 192 That evening in the reception room of the theatre, the then Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, approached Unamuno and commented on how Seneca had been much praised as a philosopher but virtually ignored as a playwright (see Chapter II). Unamuno agreed with the Minister and Fernando de los Ríos suggested that he could translate one of Seneca’s plays in order to amend such an injustice. Unamuno agreed to do so if Xirgu chose it and were to act in it. Xirgu, it seems aided by Rivas Cherif, her artistic and stage director, chose Medea. Unamuno agreed to translate it.

189 Gutiérrez (24-06-1933).
190 The Manchester Guardian (15-09-1933). For another comparison between bullfighting and Medea; see Luz (05-09-1933).
If we follow Rivas Cherif’s account of the genesis of Medea, the meeting at the Teatro Español might have been an elaborate ruse in order to convince Unamuno to add his name to an already existing project.\(^{193}\) Rivas Cherif’s account is given on at least two separate occasions, with some very minor alterations.\(^{194}\) According to Rivas Cherif, Xirgu had already shown an interest in staging an ancient play in Mérida, or a modern version of one, like Hofmannsthal’s Elektra, with which she toured around the world, and still fondly remembered playing in the Chapultepec forest, Mexico (Figure 71). Then, after a performance of Goethe’s Clavigo on the 22\(^{nd}\) of March 1932,\(^{195}\) Fernando de los Ríos, who had actively sought to support cultural endeavours in Spain as Ministro de Instrucción Pública, suggested the staging of a Senecan tragedy to Xirgu (Figure 77).\(^{196}\) According to Rivas Cherif, she subsequently thought of staging Medea, and after gaining Borràs’ support, they both suggested Unamuno should translate it.

According to Modest Sabaté, the writer Farran i Mayoral, helped Xirgu in choosing Seneca’s Medea sometime in 1932:

Margarita Xirgu said to her illustrious friend: ‘mister De los Ríos (then minister of Instrucción Pública) has asked me to prepare some performances of classic theatre for the theatre in Mérida. I thought of studying Sophocles’ Antigone […] but mister De los Ríos would like me to do one of Seneca’s tragedies. Which do you think I should choose?’, she asked. Farran i Mayoral shared with her his idea about the little theatrical value of the plays by the Latin author, but he recommended “Medea” as the superior play out of the nine Seneca has handed down.\(^{197}\)

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\(^{193}\) Gil Fombellida (2003: 262) alludes to this possibility.

\(^{194}\) El Sol (13-04-1933, 03-06-1933); the latter see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158). This seems to be also aluded to by Rivas Cherif in El Redondel (09-07-1933).

\(^{195}\) For Clavigo see El Heraldo de Madrid (23-03-1932); Luz (23-03-1932); Ahora (24-03-1932). See also Rodrigo (1974: 183) and Gil Fombellida (2003: 214-216).

\(^{196}\) See Rivas Cherif in El Sol (11-06-1933), Crónica (02-07-1933); La Veu del Vespre (15-09-1933) and La Veu de Catalunya (16-09-1933). This seems to be confirmed by a letter dated that same day from Xirgu to her goddaughter in which she mentions the possibility of staging Medea in Mérida, see Xirgu (2018: 218). See also Guansé (1963: 66), Sánchez Matas (1991: 51-52) and López Díaz (2011: 254).

\(^{197}\) See La Veu del Vespre (15-09-1933) and La Veu de Catalunya (16-09-1933).
Mérida itself might have played an early role in the genesis of Seneca’s *Medea*. The Mayor of Mérida, Andres Nieto, had met Fernando de los Ríos alongside the President of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, in a visit to Madrid in January 1932, as López Díaz explains. The Minister then paid an official visit to Mérida in June 1932, when he had the opportunity to be guided by the archaeologist Maximiliano Macías through the monuments and dine thereafter with local authorities. The newspaper *La Libertad* had informed its readers in early May that prominent citizens of Mérida were speaking of the possibility of ‘a non-private festival, in a place where celebrations took place centuries ago’ materialising, but explains that it would consist of a world-famous archaeologist, a female narrator and a dancer. Indeed, there had been occasional local reappearances of the idea to use the Roman Theatre for performances, the strongest being that headed by Arturo Gazul in 1928. During the Minister’s meeting with the Mayor in January 1932, in which the creation of a Roman Art Museum in Mérida was discussed, and in his June visit, such an idea could have been mentioned or even actively addressed. Perhaps this possibility, and the meeting with Xirgu in March 1932, is what lays behind a revealing announcement Fernando de los Ríos makes at the end of an interview with *El Sol* on the 24th of July 1932:

> Within the programme of the Republic we can find, and it is my commitment, the creation of a national dramatic theatre, even using to this end the classical stages at Mérida and Sagunto for Greek and Roman tragedy.

The genesis of the project must be summarised as follows: In January 1932 the Mayor of Mérida might have addressed the idea of staging plays at the Roman Theatre with the Minister. The Minister discussed the possibility of staging an ancient play with the Xirgu-Borràs

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199 See *La Correspondencia* (05-06-1932), *Ahora* (07-06-1933) and *El Sol* (08-06-1933).
202 Caballero Rodríguez (2008: 403).
203 This is defended by Caballero Rodríguez (2008: 411).
Company in March 1932, a staging which could have been discussed with the archaeologist Macías in Mérida in June 1932. Staging a play in the Roman Theatre in Mérida then became a firm desire, as the Minister’s announcement in July 1932 signals. All that remained was to convince Unamuno to translate it, as occurred in December 1932. This sequence of events proves that the genesis of the production of Seneca’s Medea was a process that spanned the year 1932 and involved, at key stages, the advice and collaboration of the Mayor of Mérida, the Minister De los Ríos, Maximiliano Macías, the Xirgu-Borràs Company and Unamuno.

Once the decision had been reached, Unamuno translated Seneca’s play in two weeks. He did it with such apathy, according to Xirgu, that he was unwilling to accept any authorship payment.\(^{204}\) This was possibly due to his own self-admitted frustration with the lexical similarities between Spanish and Latin—a language he found arid when at school\(^{205}\)—forcing him, in some cases, to make creative changes in his translation.\(^{206}\) Rivas Cherif comments that Unamuno took on the task ‘with such emphasis that in two weeks he had conquered such a purpose’,\(^{207}\) with a probable charitable intent. Unamuno gave a reading of his translation at the Teatro Español on the 28\(^{\text{th}}\) of April 1933 before the Xirgu-Borràs Company.\(^{208}\) This roughly coincides with the three months Don Miguel himself explains it took him to do his translation,\(^{209}\) which he undertook with a ‘continuous spiritual joy’, by his own admission.\(^{210}\) Unamuno travelled to Toledo on the 4\(^{\text{th}}\) of May in order to read his translation, probably with new amendments, to Xirgu and Borràs, as he tells Mathilde Pomès in a letter signed on that very day.\(^{211}\) Beside his translation, Unamuno had written verses for the chorus, which were intended to be sung to the music composed by Oscar Esplá for the performance. These were ultimately not included in the production, since the music did not arrive in time to be performed with the

\(^{207}\) El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
\(^{208}\) El Heraldo de Madrid (27-04-1933).
\(^{209}\) La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
\(^{210}\) Región (19-06-1933).
choral verses, which do survive.\textsuperscript{212} Esplá told Unamuno he would use the music composed for his verses in a symphonic piece for choir, but I do not know to which piece he is referring or whether he actually did so.\textsuperscript{213}

Meanwhile, the Xirgu-Borràs Company went on to secure all the institutional backing possible. They secured a grant of 50,000 pesetas from the Consejo Superior de Cultura, which was ratified in May 1933 by the Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, with the condition it be staged also in Madrid, Barcelona and Sagunto.\textsuperscript{214} They then secured the backing of the Director of Fine Arts, Ricardo de Orueta, the two archaeologists responsible for Mérida (José Ramón Méjida and Maximiliano Macías), the president of the Patronato Nacional de Turismo, Enrique Ramos, the Mayor of Mérida and the regional MPs. All this support would prove essential in executing such an ambitious production, with not only staging, but also logistic, institutional, economic, cultural and security challenges.

Beyond this, we know little about the preparations for the 18\textsuperscript{th} of June performance in Mérida. We know that Bartolomé Pérez Casas was chosen to conduct the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid and the choir.\textsuperscript{215} The Orquesta Filarmónica also offered two concerts in both the Roman Theatre and the María Luisa theatre in Mérida.\textsuperscript{216} We know Medea was included in a cycle of Spanish classic drama at the Teatro Español, which also included La Celestina (Chapter III).\textsuperscript{217} Days before the performance, the Roman Theatre was altered somehow by a team of builders in order to make it more accessible and comfortable.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{212}El Sol (13-04-1933); La Voz (07-06-1933); Sparta (10-06-1933); Crónica (02-07-1933); Revista de la Biblioteca, Archivo y Museos, Ayuntamiento de Madrid (October 1933); Azaña (2007: IV, 781-782). See Sánchez Matas (1991: 51-52) and Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 276). For the choral verses see Robles Carcedo (1998).
\textsuperscript{215}Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
\textsuperscript{216}La Libertad (18-06-1933, 20-06-1933); La Voz de Asturias (18-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{217}Laúz (05-04-1933); La Voz (06-04-1933); Crónica (02-07.1933). See Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 184-185).
\textsuperscript{218}Laúz (06-06-1933).
At least three rehearsals took place in the Roman Theatre itself. The first took place on some date before the 3\(^{rd}\) of June, in the presence of Rivas Cherif, the production team, a visibly moved and emotional Macías and a couple of onlookers who were visiting the ruins.\(^{219}\) This could have coincided with Xirgu, Borràs and Rivas Cherif’s visit to Mérida on the 24\(^{th}\), 25\(^{th}\) or 26\(^{th}\) of May to begin preparations.\(^{220}\) In a letter sent by the chief archaeologist, Mélida, to his colleague Macías, we can also read that Rivas Cherif intended to visit Mérida also on the 14\(^{th}\) of June.\(^{221}\) Another rehearsal happened on the 16\(^{th}\) of June.\(^{222}\) The final rehearsal took place on the 17\(^{th}\) of June under the supervision of Unamuno, who found it difficult to correct much.\(^{223}\) The Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid arrived on the 17\(^{th}\) of June for the performance.\(^{224}\) Therefore, the only rehearsal with music must have been the final dress rehearsal that day (Figure 25). At this rehearsal, according to Rivas Cherif, an emotional Mélida, the septuagenarian chief archaeologist in Mérida, told him ‘with tears pouring out of his eyes’: ‘You do not know, you do not know, what this means to me’.\(^{225}\) Everybody involved was enthusiastic, adamant and eager to make a success of the performance. They succeeded beyond all expectations.

3. The legacy of Seneca’s Medea.

The production toured the country throughout the second half of 1933. As explained, the funding decree for Seneca’s Medea stated that it should also be staged in Sagunto.\(^{226}\) Even though Rivas Cherif did visit its Roman ruins to study their suitability,\(^{227}\) Medea was never staged in Sagunto, which was replaced by Salamanca. I am unaware of the exact reason for this. The sources are ambiguous on whether the cancellation was due to the difficult social situation

\(^{219}\) Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
\(^{220}\) See El Heraldo de Madrid (26-05-1933) and Morán Sánchez (2018: 188). In a letter, Mélida warns Macías (22-05-1933) that Rivas Cherif, Xirgu and Borràs would soon be visiting Mérida; see Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011: 367).
\(^{221}\) Mélida to Macías (22-05-1933); see Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011: 367).
\(^{222}\) La Libertad (18-06-1933); El Socialista (18-06-1933).
\(^{223}\) La Voz de Asturias (18-06-1933); La Libertad (20-06-1933).
\(^{224}\) Luz (17-06-1933); La Voz (17-06-1933); La Libertad (18-06-1933); La Voz de Asturias (18-06-1933). See also López Díaz (2011: 255).
\(^{226}\) For later performances at the Roman Theatre in Sagunto, between 1982 and 2008, see Monrós-Gaspar (2013: 339-355).
\(^{227}\) Luz (01-07-1933); La Libertad (02-07-1933); La Vanguardia (02-07-1933); La Tierra (07-07-1933).
in Sagunto, or the structural instability of its Roman Theatre. The official reason, according to the Ministry, was the need for construction in the theatre in Sagunto. Some newspapers suggest that Tarragona was considered as a potential venue too. Some also wished to see Medea performed in Alicante, and it was suggested to the Xirgu-Borràs Company to stage it in Ampurias, Catalonia. Seneca’s Medea finally visited Salamanca, Madrid and Barcelona in its 1933 tour.

The performance in Barcelona took place on the 14th of September 1933 in the open-air Teatre Grec of Montjuïc (Figures 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59). Rodríguez Codolà’s long article about Seneca and his Medea in La Vanguardia appeared in the programme for the Barcelona performance (Figure 60). The President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the highest office in Catalonia, attended. In accordance with the solemnity of the occasion, those present heard the national anthem, the ‘Himno de Riego’, and the Catalan anthem, ‘Els Segadors’, before and after the performance. Two extra performances took place in the Teatre Grec to satisfy the demand. A further two performances took place in the Teatre Poliorama on the 13th and 17th of October. Seneca’s Medea, as had happened in Mérida, was broadcast on Radio Barcelona (Figure 57). Medea in Barcelona was, once again, a great success.

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228 ABC (05-07-1933, 06-07-1933); El Sol (07-07-1933); La Tierra (07-07-1933, 12-07-1933); Gracia y Justicia (15-07-1933); Luz (27-07-1933); La Voz (27-07-1933); La Libertad (28-07-1933); El Siglo Futuro (28-07-1933); La Vanguardia (28-07-1933); La Provincia (Gran Canaria) (28-07-1933).
229 Gaceta de Madrid (27-07-1933); Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. Sección 15. Fomento de las Bellas Artes, to be found in Archivo General de la Administración, (05) 001.021, libro 42 top.32.101-00.103. From now on Archivo General de la Administración will appear as AGA.
230 La Vanguardia (13-08-1933); L’Humanitat (15-08-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (25-08-1933); Nuevo Mundo (03-11-1933).
231 Diario de Alicante (23-06-1933).
232 La Vanguardia (01-09-1933); L’Humanitat (03-09-1933).
233 La Veu del Vespre (15-09-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (15-09-1933); Luz (15-09-1933); El Mundo Deportivo (15-09-1933); L’Humanitat (16-09-1933, 17-09-1933, 19-09-1933); La Aurora (16-09-1933); La Voz (23-09-1933).
234 La Vanguardia (13-09-1933); Contemporània (09-1933).
235 El Mundo Deportivo (11-10-1933, 12-10-1933, 13-10-1933, 15-10-1933, 16-10-1933); L’Humanitat (13-10-1933, 17-10-1933); La Vanguardia (14-10-1933, 17-10-1933).
236 Radio Barcelona (23-09-1933); Ondas (07-10-1933).
237 El Heraldo de Madrid (15-09-1933); Luz (15-09-1933); La Voz (15-09-1933); L’Humanitat (15-09-1933); El Día Gráfico (15-09-1933); La Noche (15-09-1933); La Aurora (15-09-1933); El Noticiero Universal (15-09-1933); Contemporània (09-1933).
In Madrid, Seneca’s Medea was staged at the open-air Plaza de la Armería in the Palacio Nacional, the erstwhile Royal Palace (see p. 174), on the 1st of September 1933 at 18.45 in order to reproduce ‘a crepuscular effect’, 238 as in Mérida (Figures 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51). This performance was attended by the President of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, alongside a group of ministers (Figure 52). 239 Given the high demand for seats, it was decided to add two extra performances at the Palacio Nacional. 240 Tickets were also sold in great quantities, including standing tickets at the price of 0.75 pesetas. 241 Medea also inaugurated the Teatro Coliseo in Salamanca on the 5th of September 1933, with Unamuno in attendance. 242

In Madrid, on the 28th of October 1933, Seneca’s Medea would open the 1933-1934 season at the Teatro Español, under concession to the Xirgu-Borràs Company (Figure 61). 243 This performance had a chamber stage design by Siegfried Burmann, which preserved ‘all that is substantial to the play’, according to ABC. 244 We also know that, in addition to the original cast, the actors Torner, Porredón and Merino played the role of chorus leaders, and the actresses Laura Bové, Pilar Muñoz and Eloisa Vigo were given billing as slaves. 245 It is unclear whether these were the roles performed by these actors on the 18th of June in Mérida, although this is likely. Even though seemingly lacking the grandeur of Mérida, the staging at the Teatro Español made it possible for audiences to appreciate, close up, all the expressivity present in Xirgu’s performance, which remained rather distant in other spaces. Given Medea’s success throughout its tour, La Voz, on the 30th of October 1933, called Medea ‘the highest artistic manifestation of our present times’.

238 El Heraldo de Madrid (30-08-1933); El Sol (30-08-1933).
239 El Heraldo de Madrid (02-09-1933); Luz (02-09-1933); La Voz (02-09-1933); ABC (02-09-1933).
240 El Heraldo de Madrid (02-09-1933); Luz (02-09-1933); La Voz (02-09-1933); ABC (02-09-1933, 03-09-1933).
241 ABC (02-09-1933, 03-09-1933); The Manchester Guardian (15-09-1933).
242 La Voz (06-09-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (07-09-1933); ABC (07-09-1933); La Vanguardia (07-09-1933). See also Rabaté and Rabaté (2009: 609) and Juaristi (2012: 402).
243 La Libertad (29-10-1933); El Sol (29-10-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (30-10-1933); Luz (30-10-1933); La Tierra (30-10-1933); La Voz (30-10-1933); ABC (29-10-1933); Spartà (04-11-1933). See also Rodrigo (1974: 194; 2005: 223), Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 184, 278) and Gil Fombellida (2003: 271) and Foguet i Boreu (2010: 150).
244 ABC (29-10-1933).
245 ABC (29-10-1933).
The figures seemed equally as positive. According to Rivas Cherif, by the end of the year approximately 30,000 spectators had seen Seneca’s *Medea* and 11,000 of these had received free tickets, mainly students and workers. The total economic takings were approximately 65,000 pesetas. Given the original governmental investment of 50,000 pesetas and an addition of approximately 30,000 pesetas by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, such an amount was indeed no economic success.\textsuperscript{246} But, then again, it was never meant to be: ‘it could be said that Seneca’s tragedy is yet to be industrially exploited, and it could even be said that it will do good business...’, *Crónica* explained.\textsuperscript{247} Rivas Cherif claimed that Seneca’s *Medea* had been the theatrical event of the year.\textsuperscript{248}

Such was the success enjoyed by Seneca’s *Medea* at Mérida and on tour in 1933 that it returned to Mérida in September 1934 to be staged alongside Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra*,\textsuperscript{249} a role cherished by Xirgu (see pp. 65, 249 and 264), which she had also played in Madrid’s Retiro Park during the celebrations for the arrival of the Second Spanish Republic (Figures 72, 73 and 74).\textsuperscript{250} The performances in Mérida of *Medea* (3\textsuperscript{rd} and 7\textsuperscript{th} of September) and *Elektra* (5\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} of September), both with musical accompaniment by the Banda Republicana, were set in a week of celebrations and events described as the ‘Roman Week’, which included concerts and ‘classic dances’ by Joséfina Cireza on the 4\textsuperscript{th}, 6\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} of September, the last day being held in memory of Maximiliano Macías.\textsuperscript{251} This Roman Week had been designed by Rivas Cherif (Figure 62, 63 and 64), who already in July 1933 stated that it ‘will be like the beginning of

\textsuperscript{246} *Luz* (22-09-1933); *La Voz* (23-09-1933); *Crónica* (05-11-1933).
\textsuperscript{247} *Crónica* (05-11-1933).
\textsuperscript{248} *Luz* (22-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{251} *ABC* (25-08-1934); *La Voz* (Madrid) (03-09-1934, 05-09-1934, 17-09-1934); *Luz* (04-09-1934, 05-09-1934); *El Heraldo de Madrid* (04-09-1934, 05-09-1934, 13-09-1934); *Ahora* (Madrid) (05-09-1934, 09-09-1934, 12-09-1934); *El Sol* (05-09-1934, 14-09-1934); *El Adelanto: Diario político de Salamanca* (11-09-1934); *Diario de Almería* (25-09-1934).
resurrecting Spain’. He had the idea of also staging a Spartacus, whose author is not mentioned, and which ultimately remained unstaged.

This time round, the President of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, was able to attend, unlike in 1933, when his presence had been announced (Figure 1). He was accompanied by the then Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fáliberto Villalobos, the War Minister, Diego Hidalgo, and General Ruiz Trillo (Figure 66). Alcalá Zamora arrived in Mérida on the 8th of September 1934. They were received by the local authorities and a squadron of airplanes flew over Mérida as a sign of celebration, which was extended with a special bullfight in their honour. The President was only able to see the last performance of Elektra, which was held in honour of Mérida’s late chief archaeologist, José Ramón Mélida. The President therefore missed the opportunity to watch Seneca’s Medea in Mérida, although he had seen it in Madrid in September 1933. The performance of Medea was this time also a success, as Rivas Cherif proudly informs Unamuno in a letter dated on the 4th of September 1934:

It was magnificent, like the previous one. And the audience, who filled the seats, was subjugated by the spectacle and embellished by the dramatic verb of the tragedy. I am sorry you could not see it once more.

A few days later, on the 11th of September 1934, Medea was staged at the Plaza Anaya, in Salamanca, before the façade of the Palacio de Anaya, Unamuno’s long-time academic home (Figure 69). It was performed days before the celebrations and homage given to Unamuno on

252 Crónica (02-07-1933).
253 Luz (22-09-1933); La Voz (23-09-1933); Crónica (05-11-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (16-11-1933). Spartacus had featured in radical theatrical performances in both post-revolutionary Russia and subsequently Piscator’s cabaret theatre in 1920s Berlin; see Hall (2013: 306-7) and Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg (1994: 531, 543) respectively.
255 Letter from Rivas Cherif to Unamuno (04-09-1934), in Casa Museo Unamuno (41/39). From now on this will be referenced to as CMU. Also quoted in Domínguez (2008: 127).
256 El Adelanto: Diario político de Salamanca (11-09-1934, 12-09-1934); ABC (12-09-1934); Ahora (Madrid) (12-09-1934, 14-09-1934); El Heraldo de Madrid (15-09-1934); La Voz (Madrid) (17-09-1934).
his retirement, in which he would be proclaimed as Principal for Life and Perpetual Mayor of Salamanca. This homage had been organized by the University of Salamanca, the Mayor of Salamanca and the Government of the Republic, and attended by the President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora.

Rivas Cherif mentioned in a letter to Unamuno, signed on the 4th of September 1934, his intention to stage, in the Colegio Viejo, Unamuno’s La Venda with his youth company, Teatro Escuela del Arte, for the students of Salamanca to celebrate his retirement. He then entreated Unamuno to translate some scenes from Aristophanes (from Frogs, Birds, Lysistrata and Peace) to be performed at such an event. La Venda was finally performed on the 1st of October 1934, but the Aristophanic scenes were not translated or performed.

There was also a plan to stage Seneca’s Medea in Mussolini’s Italy, which was aborted due to the outbreak of the Second Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935 (see pp. 181-182). The company had been invited to do a short tour in Italy to stage Lorca’s Yerma, Seneca’s Medea and Lope de Vega’s Fuenteovejuna, in order to celebrate the centenary of Lope de Vega. The plan was to stage Medea in a grand scenario, with all the Fascist connotations of Romanitá, according to Rivas Cherif’s account in 1945:

In the Roman Forum, like a few years earlier the Comédie Française of Paris, we would perform our Senecan Medea. The four shows would then be staged in a theatre in Rome, in Florence, in Bologna, given my own doctorate in Law from that University and my stay in the Spanish College of Saint Clement, and in Milan. [...] Already in 1933, at the

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259 See CMU (41/39) and Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 329).
occasion of the first Medea in Mérida, which he attended with our government as a guest of honour, mister Guariglia, Ambassador of Italy, solemnly provided me with a laurel leaf from the Capitol which the Mayor of Rome sent to the Town Council of the ancient Emerita Augusta, where it remained displayed in a glass urn. The Italo-Abyssinian War suspended our trip, despite the Italian Government’s desire to not postpone it.261

It was also proposed that they could perform plays, including Seneca’s Medea, in Paris.262 North-American impresarios had also approached the Xirgu-Borràs Company about staging it in August or September 1934 in the U.S.A., but they were unsuccessful.263 Seneca’s Medea, nevertheless, did get to Latin America, as part of Xirgu’s 1936 American tour, with a poster designed by Muntanyola. Antonin Artaud watched it in February 1936 in Mexico City and reviewed the performance unsympathetically.264 It received a grand open-air staging in Mexico, at the Aztec pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacan, in March 1936.265 This tour would incidentally become Xirgu’s definitive exile after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War surprised her on tour in Latin-America, where she lived until her death in 1969.

The experience of staging Seneca’s Medea, and later the Roman Week in Mérida, seem to have encouraged the pursuit of similar future endeavours. The Los Angeles entertainment newspaper Variety informs us of a plan by the Xirgu-Borràs Company to stage an Iphigenia—it is unclear which—at the Greek colony of Ampurias in Catalonia, soon after the Roman Week in 1934.266 This was most probably the Iphigenia Lorca convinced Xirgu to stage in 1935, with a

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262 La Voz (03-07-1935); El Heraldo de Madrid (25-07-1935).
263 La Voz (23-09-1933).
266 Variety (11-09-1934).
translation by Farran i Mayoral, according to Rodrigo’s account.\(^{267}\) Perhaps, this might have been *Ifigenia Cruel* (1924) instead, an important and famed adaptation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris* by the Mexican Alfonso Reyes, if we are to believe the rather vague allusion Rivas Cherif made in his Mexican exile about wanting to stage Reyes’ play in the years surrounding the staging of Seneca’s *Medea*.\(^{268}\) The staging of this yet unidentified *Iphigenia* unfortunately did not take place, even though Xirgu had intended to stage it on her return from her 1936 tour.\(^{269}\) A return that never took place.

In a letter to Luis París, at the time the Governmental Delegate at the *de facto* National Theatre (see pp. 160-161), signed on the 6\(^{th}\) of September 1934, during the Roman Week, Rivas Cherif spoke of his intention to return the following year to Mérida and also show, ‘on this magnificent stage’, an *Orpheus, Norma* or Spontini’s *Vestale*.\(^{270}\) For such an endeavour he suggests the investment of 15,000 pesetas for the orchestra, 10,000 for the singers, and 5,000 for the choir, conductor and transport. He mentions that, if they were to create new costumes, it could all be done with a grant of 50,000 pesetas and that it would be easy to acquire a ministerial grant for the restoration of the theatre’s seats and steps. Sadly, due to governmental silence on their request to return to Mérida,\(^{271}\) the end of the concession of the Teatro Español to the Xirgu-Borràs Company, their own concentration on the centenary of Lope de Vega and the complicated political and social atmosphere leading to the Civil War in 1936, this project would not bear fruit.\(^{272}\) Mérida would not host a regular classical theatre festival until years after Franco’s victory in the Civil War, when a university troupe staged Seneca’s *Phaedra* in 1953, twenty years after the staging of Seneca’s *Medea*.

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270 MAE- Institut del Teatre (Document Sedó 10204).
271 *La Voz* (03-07-1935).
Conclusion. The foundation of the Festival de Mérida.

The 1933 performance at Mérida, the second 1934 performance, and the Roman Week around it, became the foundation stone for the present Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida, which has been running ever since, only interrupted by the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period. So much does the Festival owe its existence to the 1933 production of Medea, that in 2008 it celebrated its 75th anniversary in the production’s honour. Books were written about it, exhibitions were set up and radio programmes broadcast to honour Xirgu; conferences took place on the cultural agenda of the Second Spanish Republic, Xirgu’s career and Rivas Cherif’s work, and a statue of Xirgu playing Medea was unveiled on the 18th of June 2008, followed by a banquet at the Parador Nacional commemorating that of 1933. The famed actress Nuria Espert even performed fragments of Seneca’s Medea in a reconstruction of its 1933 performance. The statue of Xirgu as Medea still stands in one of the Roman Theatre’s wings in Mérida, reminding audiences old and new, that in 1933, Seneca’s Medea became the spark that lit the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida, which they now so enjoy and which has so successfully helped to put Spain on the international theatre map.

**II. Seneca and Hispania.**

Seneca is a theatre mask, of the Great Theatre of the World, and of the greatest theatre in the world, which has been Spanish theatre (María Zambrano).  

In December 1932, the Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, remarked to Unamuno how Seneca had been neglected as a tragic author in contrast to his popularity as a philosopher, as discussed (see p. 65). Unamuno agreed with the Minister’s observation and accepted to translate one of Seneca’s tragedies. Xirgu chose his Medea. The production of Seneca’s Medea thus came into being. The centrality of the Minister’s observation to the staging of Seneca’s Medea and to the following intention to revitalise the Roman philosopher as a tragedian, make it indispensable to assess the truthfulness of the perceived neglect of Seneca’s tragic work and the need to correct it.  

Through an exploration of the reception of Seneca in Spain, both as a philosopher (1) and as a tragedian (2), we shall be able to confirm or deny the Minister’s and Unamuno’s intuition and understand how Seneca’s tragic vindication took shape. This shall in turn help us to understand the role Seneca played in the minds and cultural history of Spain and its connection with Unamuno and the performance of Medea in 1933. To end, this chapter asks how the Spanish reappraisal of Seneca fits the broader reconfiguration of republican national identity (3).

Before we begin, it is important to address the idea of Lucius Annaeus Seneca being, in a way, two Senecas: the philosopher, or Seneca moralis, and the tragedian, or Seneca tragicus. This idea’s remote origins probably stem from the work of the influential Gallo-Roman scholar and diplomat Sidonius Apollinaris (Carmina, IX 230-238), who misunderstood Martial’s verses, ‘eloquent Corduba talks of the two Senecas and the one and only Lucan’ (Epigrammata I, 61,7-8), as a demonstration of two separate authors, that is, a Seneca moralis and a Seneca tragicus.

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276 For a more detailed account of the reception of Seneca in Spain see seminal works by Blüher (1983) and Fothergill-Payne (1988) and the unpublished thesis by Del Río Sanz (1992). See also Uscatescu, J. (1965) and Delgado León (1994).
*tragicus*, and not father and son. The distinction proved perennial. It has only been effectively discarded in the 20th century, by a vindication of the value of Seneca’s tragedies within his overall corpus, to which the staging of Seneca’s *Medea* in 1933 fully contributes (see pp. 258-264). But by 1933 the distinction between the two Senecas was still *de facto* practised in Spain, as is implicitly evidenced by the Minister’s observation.

As we shall discover in the first section, the overwhelming preference in Spain for the Seneca *moralis* up to 1933 is primarily founded on three interweaving threads: Seneca’s Spanish origins in Córdoba, his apparent Stoic compatibility with Christianity and his usefulness to Spanish interests. This extends from the Reconquista (the re-conquering of peninsular territory from Muslim Al-Andalus), through Spanish expansion in the Americas, culminating in the national crisis of 1898, the eventual outcome of which was the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic itself.

1. Seneca, the Spaniard.
   
   a) A Spaniard in essence.

José Prat, *ateneista* and key witness in the audience at Mérida in 1933, admits that he became interested in Seneca thanks to Ángel Ganivet, in allusion to Ganivet’s *Idearium Español* (1897):

   I was very interested in *Medea*, firstly, because of Seneca—thanks to Ganivet, who talked about Seneca’s natural and human stoicism; a great amount of us became senequists.  

   One of the historical roots of the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic was Spain’s loss of overseas colonies in 1898 and the concomitant introspective intellectual reflection. The so-called Disaster of 98 marked the end of the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). Spain’s defeat brought with it not only the loss of Cuba, but also of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam,

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279 See Blüher (1983: 30) and Del Río Sanz (1992: 63).

the Caroline Islands, the Mariana Islands and Palau. The Disaster of 98 disintegrated an Empire that had spanned four centuries and had once dominated practically every region on Earth. The identity crisis the war and the subsequent defeat caused, alongside other internal causes, stimulated a need for national introspection and reconfiguration, a broad representation of the so-called Generation of ‘98, in which Unamuno, Medea’s translator, is generally included.

This urge for an understanding of the problems and essence of Spain, must be framed within the broader European trends of national reconfiguration, primarily since the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and the emergence of ideas such as Volksgeist and Völkerpsychologie. The two books that would become the cornerstones of this exploration of the national character and essence of Spain were Unamuno’s *En torno al casticismo* (1895) and Ganivet’s *Idearium Español* (1897). As Cruz explains, while Unamuno was influenced by the social evolutionary theory of Spencer, Ganivet followed the steps of the sociological positivism of Hippolyte Taine, whose motto, ‘we must search out the causes after we have collected the facts’, could perfectly summarize Ganivet’s work:

> However, what is essential in history is the bonding of facts with the spirit of the country where they have taken place; only at this price a true, logic and useful history can be written.

It is precisely in Ganivet’s essential *Idearium Español* (1897)—republished in 1928, only four years before the meeting at the Teatro Español—that the theory of Spanish *senequismo* is first developed fully, as one of the factors of ‘the spirit of the nation’. *Senequismo* was understood

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284 Ganivet (1897: 80). This translation is my own. For an English translation of Idearium Español, see Carey’s in Ganivet (1946).
285 Similarly, Menéndez Pelayo stated: ‘Constituting Latinism the substratum or, better said, the most intimate and substantial element of the Spanish civilisation, in the language as in customs, institutions and
by Ganivet as the prologue to all his future work, according to Laffranque. Its arguments serve as a useful catalyst for much of the historical reception of Seneca and the overwhelming importance it gave to the Seneca moralis, which I will succinctly document below. The main premise of Ganivet’s theory of senequismo in his Ideaarium Español can be condensed into Ganivet’s own following words:

Seneca is not a Spaniard, a son of Spain by chance, he is a Spaniard in essence; and not Andalusian, for when he was born the Vandals had not yet arrived in Spain; were he to have been born after the Middle Ages he perhaps would not have been born in Andalusia, but in Castile.

Why would a Roman philosopher alive in the 1st century AD be the embodiment of one of the central essential aspects of a 19th-century Spain in mid-crisis? Surprisingly there is no consistent set of reasons for Ganivet’s defence of Spain’s inherent senequismo. The claim is, in practice, closer to a philosophical construct than to any substantiated argument. Nevertheless, its centrality to one of the most important books on the essence of Spain, make it necessary to untangle the main threads of its argument: Seneca’s ‘Spanishness’, Seneca’s essentially Spanish Stoicism and Seneca’s proto-Christianity.

Any informed reader will instantly be aware of the anachronism of calling Seneca ‘a son of Spain’, given the non-existence of such a national or even territorial entity in the 1st century AD. But Ganivet’s point is other. Seneca’s Spanishness is in his essence, not in his historical birth. It is this essence that makes him worthy of being born in Castile, the centre of medieval—and subsequent—power, rather than in Muslim Al-Andalus, currently the region of Andalusia, as Ganivet speculated. The service Seneca rendered to medieval Christian Spain and the Reconquista, and in further ethno-nationalistic discourse is evidently present here, however conscious Ganivet might or might not have been of such a service.

286 Laffranque (1966: 6).
287 Ganivet (1897: 6).
Under Alfonso X (1252-1284) and Sancho IV (1284-1295), Seneca began to appear as a Spanish figure in a consistent manner.\(^{288}\) He was a teacher of kings—as in Europe\(^ {289}\)—based on his *de Beneficiis* and *de Clementia*,\(^ {290}\) and a moral guide, given the vast popularity of compilations of his sayings,\(^ {291}\) which competed in wisdom with the Old Testament.\(^ {292}\) This, alongside his alleged proto-Christianity, explored below, was key to his rediscovery at a time of religious war between Christian Castile and Muslim Al-Andalus. Seneca’s Spanish birthplace, Córdoba, was first underlined in this context, even more poignantly after Córdoba, capital of the Caliphate until 1031, was re-conquered from Al-Andalus in 1236, a major feat in the Reconquista.\(^ {293}\) This continued until the end of Al-Andalus with the fall of Granada in 1492.

In the 15\(^{th}\) century ‘Seneca is considered Spanish’, as Schiff explained in 1905.\(^ {294}\) He becomes a great authority, with the translations of his books more than quadruplicating any other classical text, as Fothergill-Payne shows.\(^ {295}\) Even the Most Catholic Queen of Castile, Isabella, owned an edition of the *Epistulae ad Lucillium*, heavily annotated by her own hand.\(^ {296}\)

Seneca’s acquired ‘patriotic aura’, as Schiff terms it,\(^ {297}\) is most clearly seen in Pérez de Guzman’s 15\(^{th}\)-century defence of Spanish literary skills over Italian, in *Llores de los claros varones de España* and *Coronación de las Quatro Virtudes*.\(^ {298}\) Seneca is here an example of the predominant Spanish interest in moralistic above artistic literature, substance over form and seriousness over frivolity. This Spanish moralistic world-view, supposedly superior to a more


\(^{290}\) See Blüher (1983: 104-106).

\(^{291}\) On the textual problems of these compilations, including the addition of apocrypha and *sententiae* by Syrus; see Blüher (1983: 67-68) and Fothergill-Payne (1988: 5). On Syrus in/and Seneca see Paré-Rey (2011: 204-218). For a similar corruption of Seneca’s *sententiae* in Europe see Heller (1943).


\(^{293}\) See Blüher (1983: 74-88).

\(^{294}\) Quoted in Del Río Sanz (1992: 17-18).


\(^{296}\) Fothergill-Payne (1988: 13).

\(^{297}\) Quoted in Del Río Sanz (1992: 17-18).

Italian artistic world-view, was still defended in the 18th century. These 18th-century apologies for Spanish moralism were part of a larger dispute between Italian and Spanish scholars on the motives for Roman and Spanish literary decadence.\textsuperscript{299} This perhaps explains the apparent historical neglect of Seneca’s more artistic tragic oeuvre, which did not entirely suit the patriotic apologia of Spain as a nation of moralists, as Forner’s apology, published in 1786, exemplifies:

May Italy admire in good time the round and sonorous periods of its writers of the age of Augustus: Spain is happy with the virtues it learns in the lime-less sand of its stoic [Seneca].\textsuperscript{300}

Seneca’s importance in the formation of Spain from the Reconquista to the consolidation of Castile and the later defence of Spain’s national morality, is the basis for Ganivet choosing Castile as Seneca’s ideal birthplace. Seneca’s essential—and useful—‘Spanishness’ is thus a product of a tradition that had begun already in the 13th century and was emphasised precisely at the moment of Spain’s identity crisis in 1898.

Ganivet states that ‘the moral, and in a certain way religious, element’ of Spain’s ideal constitution is Stoicism, ‘the natural and human stoicism of Seneca’, he clarifies.\textsuperscript{301} Seneca’s Stoicism is thus instated as the moral, quasi-religious, component of the Spanish Volksgeist. This conception has deep historical roots, even to popular levels, for Ambrosio de Morales writes that in 16th-century Spain people would name as ‘a Seneca to a man who we want to call very wise’ (Crónica general de España, 1574).\textsuperscript{302}

\textsuperscript{300} Forner (1786: 113). On this work see Álvarez Junco (2011: 81-82).
\textsuperscript{301} Ganivet (1897: 5-6). For a plausible explanation of what Ganivet meant see Laffranque (1966).
\textsuperscript{302} Quoted in Blüher (1983: 335). ‘Seneca’s name, principally in his fatherland, Spain, becomes a synonym of wisdom’, Menéndez Pelayo (1958: 170).
Seneca’s Stoicism became central to the popular Neo-Stoic movement in Spain during the 17th century.\textsuperscript{303} The notorious writer Francisco de Quevedo, friend and follower of Justus Lipsius, the leader of international Neo-Stoicism, was influenced by Seneca.\textsuperscript{304} Seneca and Stoicism were pervasive stylistic and thematic influences in his work, concerned with death and Christian compatibility with Stoicism. He even decided to use the pseudonym Seneca while in prison in Leon. Quevedo became the visible leader of Neo-Stoicism in Spain which took the intellectual establishment by storm. ‘Although it is true that Lipsius introduces stoicism in Europe, in Quevedo we find the first ‘national’ and ‘entirely Catholic’ appropriation of stoic ideas’, Álvarez Solís explains.\textsuperscript{305} Quevedo’s is indeed ‘Seneca ad usum Hispaniae’, according to Serrano Poncela.\textsuperscript{306}

This absorption and reformulation of Seneca’s Stoicism in Spain’s Golden Age is the historical and cultural basis on which Ganivet can claim that ‘the natural and human stoicism of Seneca’ forms the moral element of Spain’s ideal constitution. Regrettably, the uniqueness of Seneca’s Stoicism is never explained clearly by Ganivet, and he does not mention any of Seneca’s works as proof. He rather, simply, states the following, creating much debate since:\textsuperscript{307}

> All of Seneca’s doctrine is condensed in this teaching: Do not let yourself be won over by anything foreign to your soul. Think, among the accidents of life, that you have within you a mother force, something strong and indestructible, as an adamantine axis, around which the mean incidents that form the plot of daily living turn; and whatever the occurrences that may fall upon you; may they be what we call prosperous, or what we call adverse, keep yourself firm and upright, so at least all may always say of you that you are a man.\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{303} Menéndez Pelayo (1958: 170); Blüher (1983: 390-417); Álvarez Solís (2011).
\textsuperscript{305} Álvarez Solís (2011: 18-19).
\textsuperscript{306} See Serrano Poncela (1965: 392).
\textsuperscript{307} See, for example, Maeztu (1946: 87) and García-Borrón (1956).
\textsuperscript{308} Ganivet (1897: 6).
Senecan Stoicism does not need to be substantiated by any textual source in Gavinet’s mind, for ‘it is so Spanish that Seneca did not have to invent it, for he found it already invented’.\(^\text{309}\) This is the crux of the whole theory: Spain is inherently senequist because Seneca is innately Spanish, and vice versa. In this way, Spanishness (the quality inherent in all Spaniards) and senequismo are established in a never-ending loop in which Seneca becomes the embodiment of Spanishness and Spain becomes the entity derived from senequismo. Ganivet will further illustrate this by explaining that reading Seneca—the Spaniard—helped him to understand his own Spanishness and therefore the essence of Spain as a whole.\(^\text{310}\) Ganivet further establishes an eccentric connection between Seneca’s own bloody suicide and the history of Spanish medicine and bloodletting as two interacting origins of one common Spanish interest in blood circulation, as demonstrated by Miguel Servet’s discovery of pulmonary circulation in the 16\(^\text{th}\) century.\(^\text{311}\) But, most revealingly, Ganivet establishes Senecan Stoicism as the substratum on which Spain’s own style of Christianity—some may read Catholicism—would develop:

And so in Spain, which was the seat of the most logical stoicism, not the most perfect or the most human, senequismo is merged with the Gospel in such a way that of our Seneca, if one cannot rigorously say that he ‘has the smell of a saint’, one can affirm that he has all the feeling of a Doctor of the Church.\(^\text{312}\)

Seneca’s proto-Christianity had its origin in Saint Jerome (de Viris Illustribus, 12), who portrayed him as a type of pagan saint, based on a set of apocryphal letters between Seneca and Saint Paul, also familiar to St. Augustine (Ep. 153, 14). These were distributed and accepted in Spain also in the 15\(^\text{th}\) century.\(^\text{313}\) Even though Alfonso X states that Seneca ‘was not a Christian’

\(^{309}\) Ganivet (1897: 6).

\(^{310}\) Ganivet (1897: 6-7).

\(^{311}\) Ganivet (1897: 8). Fernández Almagro finds this proposition rather absurd; see Fernández Almagro (1925: 209).

\(^{312}\) Ganivet (1897: 11).

\(^{313}\) Scorialensis N-III-16, dated from the 13\(^\text{th}\) century AD by Blüher (1983: 66). Later translated into Spanish in the 15\(^\text{th}\) Century (BNE, Madrid 1086 f108v-111v); see Blüher (1983: 154). See also Uscatescu (1965: 83). This was a common European phenomenon; see Mayer (2015: 277-280).
(Siete Partidas, II, xii, 3), several medieval accounts claim that Seneca had been executed alongside Lucan for his relationship with Paul. This is to be found, for example, in Lucas Tudensis’ Crónica de España, XVIII, and in Alfonso X’s Primera Crónica General de España, 177. The 13th century thus created an image of Seneca as a piously moral proto-Christian teacher of kings, who even had connections with a father of the Church. For this reason, 15th-century editions of Seneca understandably followed a Christian moralisation of his work. Within this tendency we find the Christian moral adaptation of Hercules’ labours in Enrique de Villena’s Los doce trabajos de Hercules, which uses the tragic Senecan accounts of Hercules in a moralistic, rather than theatrical, fashion:

Others believe that such a thing must be spiritually understood by taking Ercules [sic] as God, who is the tamer of all vices and all beastly customs. So it seems Seneca is saying at the end of his latter tragedy [Hercules Oetaeus].

This Christian re-appropriation of Seneca grows again with the demands of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, in which Spain was at the forefront. The alignment of Seneca and Christianity can be found in Quevedo’s recommendation of reading Stoic authors alongside the Book of Job. Seneca’s apparent compatibility with (Catholic) Christianity and the cultural memory of his supposed philo-Christianity were ideal in such a religiously hostile environment. It is therefore not entirely surprising that Seneca and Paul’s apocryphal relationship would once more resurface. Erasmus’ edition of Seneca’s Complete Works (Basel, 1515) had discarded the

315 Lucas de Tuy (1926: 121). For examples and possible origins of this version of Seneca’s death; see Blüher (1983: 79-85) and Delgado León (1994: 420).
316 Alfonso X (1906: 126).
317 This is mentioned within a review of the performance of Seneca’s Medea at the Royal Palace in La Libertad (02-09-1933).
320 Quoted by Del Río Sanz (1992: 277).
letters, but Lipsius in his edition of Seneca’s Complete Works (Antwerp, 1652) defended the legitimacy of another set of letters between Seneca and the Tarsian apostle, a theory amply accepted in Counter-Reformation Spain. Spain, in its time of need, in its new religious war against the enemies of Christianity, took hold of Seneca the Philo-Christian as an intellectual weapon and guide, as it had during the Reconquista. Seneca thus becomes, once more, embedded in one of Spain’s historical self-definitions as a Christian, wholly Catholic, nation of moralists in the pursuit of God. This view would continue far into the 19th century, if we are to believe Descola’s affirmation that the book Seneca cristiano was read then in religious schools in Spain.

Ganivet’s assessment of Spain’s essence in his Idearium Español (1897) reveals an inherent aspect of Spanishness, senequsismo, embodied by Seneca, as both its creator and its beneficiary. In this light, Seneca becomes a symbol for Spain’s moral, intellectual, and religious core. Senequsismo and Spanishness are one and the same thing and explain each other as both origin and consequence of their respective essences:

The Spanish spirit, coarse, shapeless, naked, does not cover its primitive nakedness with artificious clothing; it covers itself with the vine leaf of senequsismo; and this concise garb remains adhered forever and it reveals itself as soon as one delves slightly into the ideal surface or crust of our nation.

Unfortunately, the questions posed by Ganivet’s theory of Spanish senequsismo and Seneca’s Spanishness would remain unanswered by Ganivet himself. He committed suicide in Riga precisely in 1898. But his idea of Spanish senequsismo would have a great impact in Spain for

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324 For the acceptance of these alternative letters and Seneca’s relationship with Christianity see Blüher 1983 (362-367). On the acceptance of Lipsian philosophy over Erasmism see Álvarez Solís (2011: 15-16).
325 I have not been able to locate this book. See Descola (1968: 22).
326 Ganivet (1897: 6).
decades to come.\textsuperscript{327} Unamuno himself, in a letter he wrote to Ganivet in 1898, believed it necessary to rid Spain of a ‘pagan senequist moralism, whose exterior similarity with the crust of Christianity even you have mistaken’.\textsuperscript{328} But, although Unamuno may have had his own reservations about Ganivet’s full-blown enthusiasm for Spain’s senequismo, he seemed to have acknowledged a certain scent of Spanish senequismo in \textit{En torno al casticismo} (1895), the other cornerstone in the search for Spain’s essence: ‘Our Spanish vices, ever since Lucan and Seneca, culteranismo and conceptism, spring from the same source.’\textsuperscript{329} The core of Ganivet’s theory had undoubtedly permeated Spanish society by 1933, even prompting Gonzalo de Reparaz to make a truly bold claim:

Seneca was an Iberian of the old lineage of those Tartessian people who already possessed a civilisation when the Greeks wandered the mountains of Thrace.\textsuperscript{330}

Spain’s senequist substratum, after \textit{Idearium Español}, was a phenomenon with which anybody interested in discussing either the essence of Spain or Seneca had to forcefully contend.\textsuperscript{331} This would underpin two differing approaches on Spanish senequismo, one by the right-wing philosopher Ramiro de Maetzu in his \textit{Defensa de la Hispanidad} (1934) and the other by the left-wing philosopher and feminist María Zambrano in her \textit{El Pensamiento Vivo de Seneca} (1944). The dates of both books—primarily that by Maetzu, only a year after the première of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida—prove the impact created by Ganivet’s theory, and its relevance both during the Republic and the subsequent exile. In addition, Spanish senequismo would spark a tense historiographical confrontation between its defenders and detractors.\textsuperscript{332} According to Américo Castro, the leading detractor of senequismo, many Spaniards believe Seneca to be ‘a mysterious

\textsuperscript{327} Niceto Alcalá Zamora, later President of the Republic, chose to read Seneca while in prison in early 1931; see Alcalá Zamora (1998: 179).
\textsuperscript{328} Unamuno (2017: 760).
\textsuperscript{330} \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (24-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{331} Surprisingly, Azaña’s own critique of \textit{Idearium Español}, published in the 1920s, does not analyse senequismo; see Azaña (1997).
\textsuperscript{332} See Gómez-Martínez (1975).
reflection of Iberian forms of life and thinking;\textsuperscript{333} while Menéndez Pidal, one of its defenders, stated in the prologue to his History of Spain:

A Spaniard [...] carries within himself a particular instinctive and elemental stoicism; he is an innate senequist. Certainly much is owed to him [Seneca], and in turn Seneca, purifier of stoicism, owes much to the fact that he was born in a Spanish family.\textsuperscript{334}

The theory of senequismo is undoubtedly an intricate intellectual construction, but an intellectual construction nonetheless. It is a monolithic simplification of the spirit of a nation—if Volksgeists ever truly existed—with a history and set of influences of great diversity; it is somewhat delusional, given Seneca’s fragile claim to a Spanish origin. But it was also useful as an introspective theory of the Spanish nation, in which the pervasive and persuasive figure of Seneca would shine as a sunbeam of Spanish identity after the loss of an Empire, as it had always shone brightly in moments of need.\textsuperscript{335} Senequismo is simply the crystallisation of the relationship Spaniards had long had with Seneca at a time when such a tangible and well-seeded relationship was not only preferable, but perhaps indispensable. It is under the long shadow cast by Ganivet on Seneca and Spanishness that the Minister proposed to readdress Seneca. After all, as Prat explains, thanks to Ganivet, ‘a great amount of us became senequists’.\textsuperscript{336}

b) The American Prophecy.

José Prat continues explaining his reasons to attend the staging of Seneca’s Medea in Merida with a second item of his pre-existing knowledge on the tragedy:

\textsuperscript{333} Castro (1956: 55). See also Serrano Poncela (1965).
\textsuperscript{334} Menéndez Pidal (1947: xi).
\textsuperscript{335} This idea is shared by Laffranque (1966: 27) and Zambrano (1994).
\textsuperscript{336} Prat in Monleón (1989: 212). For a socialist take on the genealogy of senequismo see El Socialista (31-05-1933).
I was very interested in *Medea* […] secondly, because, for Americanists, the chorus of *Medea* that speaks of Thetis removing the veil that covers that part of the world and of Tule no longer being the last known land, is the anticipation of the discovery of the New World. It is said that Columbus cited Seneca’s text as an argument to convince those who surrounded the Catholic Monarchs.\textsuperscript{337}

This connection between Seneca’s *Medea* and Columbus’ journey is mentioned by Luis Araujo-Costa in his article on Seneca’s *Medea* in *La Época* in September 1933, and by Rodríguez Codolà in *La Vanguardia*, who includes the text in Latin and its Spanish translation.\textsuperscript{338} Unamuno also alludes to it in his article on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of June 1933 in *Ahora*, Bernat i Durán writes a veiled allusion to it in *El Noticiero Universal*\textsuperscript{339} and there also seems to be a sarcastic allusion to it in the right-wing satirical newspaper *Gracia y Justicia*, in October 1933.\textsuperscript{340} But what was this connection between Seneca’s *Medea* and the so-called discovery of America which still remained relevant for the audiences of 1933?

In the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, Fernado Columbus, the son of Christopher Columbus, noted in the margin of his copy of Seneca’s *Medea* the following reminder: ‘This prophecy was completed by my father, the admiral Christopher Columbus, in the year 1492’.\textsuperscript{341} He is commenting on the following chorus verses in Seneca’s *Medea*:

\begin{quote}
There will come an epoch late in time
when Ocean will loosen the bonds of the world
and the earth lie open in its vastness,
when Tethys will disclose new worlds
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{337}Prat in Monleón (1989: 212).
\textsuperscript{338}La Época (01-09-1933); La Vanguardia (13-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{339}El Noticiero Universal (15-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{340}Gracia y Justicia (14-10-1933).
\textsuperscript{341}Quoted in Sala Rose (1996: 179).
Seneca was thus reinterpreted as foretelling Christopher Columbus’ journey into unknown waters, who, by breaking the bonds of the world, would discover that there was a land beyond that known to Western culture.\textsuperscript{343} Seneca’s alleged prophecy was quickly made popular and became widely accepted by many in Spain and abroad.

The Flemish cartographer and geographer Abraham Ortelius knew of such a prophecy, which he understood had been written by a Spaniard, meaning Seneca, according to Farnabius (English scholar Thomas Farnaby) in his commentaries on Seneca’s tragedies.\textsuperscript{344} In 1557, Agustín de Zárate quotes the prophetic verses in the Prologue of his Historia del descubrimiento y conquista del Perú, with the words: ‘Regarding the discovery of this new world there seems to fit a saying in the form of prophecy, which Seneca makes in his Tragedy Medea in these words’.\textsuperscript{345} The verses again appear in José de Acosta’s Historia moral y natural de las Indias (1590) in his own translation.\textsuperscript{346} In Fernando Columbus’ own account of his father’s feats, Historia en la cual se halla particular y verdadera relación de la vida y hechos del almirante don Cristobal Colón, su padre y del descubrimiento de las Indias Occidentales, llamadas Nuevo Mundo, que pertenecen al Sereníssimo Rei de España, published in 1575 in Venice, the verses are quoted in Chapter VII, as ‘now known as very truly fulfilled by the Admiral’s own person’.\textsuperscript{347} In this book, alongside these verses, there is a list of authors who had also predicted the possibility of travelling to India from Spain, or vice versa, including Aristotle (de Caelo II.14), Averroes (Commentary to de Caelo), Strabo (Geographica I and II) or Pliny (Naturalis Historia II), among others. He also mentions Seneca’s appreciation in Naturales Quaestiones I, which, although not quoted by Fernando Columbus, reads as follows: ‘After all, how great is the distance from the farthest shores of Spain all the way to India? Only the space of a very few days if a good wind drives the ship.’(Sen. Nat Quaes. I Praefatio, 13).\textsuperscript{348} Despite the tragic

\textsuperscript{343} Columbus may have landed on Tile (Thule) in 1477, probably Iceland or Mainland, the biggest of the Shetland Islands; see Ballesteros Bereta (1945: 291-301).
\textsuperscript{344} Farnabius (1645: 14), quoted in Del Río Sanz (1992: 289).
\textsuperscript{345} Zárate (1577: Prologue).
\textsuperscript{346} See Lanuza (1973: 168-169).
\textsuperscript{347} Colón (1892: 32).
\textsuperscript{348} Translated by Corcoran in Seneca (1971: 10-11).
origin of the prophetic verses, their contextualisation in scientific or philosophical works indicates that they should be classified as examples of understanding Seneca as a national sage, not a tragedian. Even so, the equation of Seneca’s *Medea*, the Colchian princess and the discovery of America was further extended and diffused precisely in Golden Age court theatre, as Lope de Vega’s *El Vellocino de Oro* (1622) and Calderón de la Barca’s *El Divino Jason* (c.1630) and *Los tres mayores prodigios* (1636) prove. Consequently, in 1971 González Vergel set Unamuno’s translation of Seneca’s *Medea* during the American conquest, making Medea an Inca princess and Jason a conquistador. 350

The alleged and coincidental prophetic power of Seneca’s choral verses put the Roman again at the service of another of Spain’s national endeavours, the Discovery of the New World and Empire. Spain’s historic destiny was poetically legitimated by the vision of one of its most celebrated and ancient compatriots. The year 1492 saw Spain move from internal conquest, with the fall of Granada and thus the symbolic end of the Reconquista, to external conquest in America. Seneca’s usefulness to the nation closely followed such a change. Fernando Columbus’ interpretation of Seneca as the prophet of Spain’s overseas empire and Ganivet’s understanding of Seneca as the essence of Spain —the two reference points on Seneca’s *Medea* Prat had in 1933—stand as opposite landmarks of Spain’s international and national self-awareness, in its change from imperial power to European nation. As we shall see in the last section, Seneca would perform another national service in 1933: the consolidation of Spain’s republican national identity.

349 See Baldwin (2018).
c) Senequismo.

In the 1930s Francisco Vera wrote *Seneca: Siglo I* (1935?). Given that this commented anthology of Seneca was published in the years immediately adjacent to the premier of Seneca’s *Medea* in 1933, it is an accurate thermometer with which to measure the broad interest in Seneca in the 1930s. *Seneca: Siglo I* has three introductory chapters. The first concerns Seneca’s life. The second addresses his *oeuvre*—including a philological history of different editions and translations, amongst which Vera recommends Friedrich Leo’s Latin edition of the tragedies (Berlin, 1878-1879). The third summarises his thought. Vera, conventionally, understands Seneca as essentially Spanish: ‘This independence in his criteria prevents Seneca from being a systematic or methodical thinker, which would be enough to describe his philosophy as Spanish, if he did not have, in addition, other characteristics belonging to our race’. Vera then anthologises Seneca’s work in chapters divided into basic themes, whose order is as follows: Hymn to fortune; Pessimism; Immortality; Death; The right to commit suicide; Higher good; Virtues; Human fraternity; Internationalism; Friendship; Poverty; The impassiveness of a sage; Clemency; Wrath; Benefits; Temperament; Natural Questions and Proverbs. In each chapter, including the introductory chapters, he usually references different relations with or receptions and re-editions of Seneca’s *oeuvre* in diverse authors and ages, such as Christianity, Calderón de la Barca, Quevedo, the French Revolution, or Ganivet, amongst others. Vera thereby briefly exposes much of the previous Spanish reading of Seneca.

It is striking how little there is on Seneca’s tragedies in this anthology. There are only two direct quotations from Senecan tragedies, *Agamemnon* Act I Scene 2 and the chorus in *Troades* Act II. There is also one unique fleeting critical comment on how Senecan choruses can ‘resist a...
comparison with Greek tragedy for their beauty’.\textsuperscript{358} The mention of Calderón and Friedrich Leo’s Latin edition of the tragedies should be added to the comparably scarce interest in the theatrical aspect of Seneca in \textit{Seneca: Siglo I}.

Although in Vera’s book, the Seneca \textit{moralis} continues to dominate the Seneca \textit{tragicus}, the latter begins to demand some attentive consideration. Vera’s Senecan anthology therefore demonstrates the scale and significance of the reception and knowledge of Seneca in 1930s Spain, and how Seneca the tragedian continued to be overshadowed by his philosophy. But it also shows that Seneca \textit{tragicus} was beginning to counterbalance the inestimable impact of the Seneca \textit{moralis} in Spain’s history.

2. \textbf{Seneca Hispanicus.}

\hspace{1em}a) \textbf{Seneca \textit{tragicus}.}

A closer look at the reception of Seneca in Spain reveals, however, that the performative vindication of Seneca \textit{tragicus} in 1933 is in part the culmination of a discreet tendency which gained potency at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and in the first decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. This tendency in fact had its remote origins in Spain’s Golden Age or even in its Medieval courts, as we shall see. The vindication of Seneca’s tragic credentials is therefore not a mere learned and correct observation by the Minister that culminated in its redressing, but an interest in broader social, cultural, national and historical implications, as Rivas Cherif explained:

\begin{quote}
The Roman Cordobés [Seneca] affirms in his \textit{Medea} a personality with unmistakable features of a character all of its own, which, being once secular, places the first milestone of a cultural tradition which does aspire to worldly unity, but within the freedom of a national consciousness.\textsuperscript{359}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{358} Vera (1935?: 43).
\textsuperscript{359} Rivas Cherif in \textit{El Sol} (11-06-1933).
The influential Spanish philologist and historian Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, who also saw Seneca as ‘the offspring of our race’,\(^{360}\) believed it necessary in 1872 to redress the lack of a complete translation of Seneca’s tragedies into Spanish. He therefore proposed and drafted a ‘Translation Project of Seneca’ in 1872.\(^{361}\) The reasons for this are given at the beginning of the draft:

Knowing the lack of a complete translation of the tragedies of Seneca, scarcely known and studied generally and perhaps judged with unjust severity by some modern critics, and considering that in the beautiful Castilian language only in the Golden Age of our literature was there any work done on the poet from Córdoba, by don José Antonio González de Salas, who at the end of his excellent treatise *Ilustración al libro singular de la Poética de Aristóteles, Idea de la Tragedia antigua y moderna*, included a most beautiful imitation of the *Trojan Women*, and by Francisco López de Zárate, who reduced into one the two tragedies of *Hercules Furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, we now intend to present to the public…\(^{362}\)

Menéndez Pelayo’s project consisted of three books. The first would entail a life of Seneca, an introduction to the tragedies and the translation of *Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus* and *Troades*. The second would collect the translations of *Hercules Furens, Hercules Oetaeus* and *Agamemnon*. The final book would gather the translations of *Phoenissae* and *Octavia*, both ‘falsely attributed to Seneca’ according to Menéndez Pelayo,\(^{363}\) alongside commentaries and notes on the tragedies. Sadly, the projected work remained only partially executed. Menéndez Pelayo finished a life of the ‘illustrious Spaniard’,\(^{364}\) the introduction to the tragedies, including an analysis of their main features and probable original ancient sources and later versions,\(^{365}\) and

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\(^{360}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1958: 211). See also Menéndez Pelayo (1940b: 397; 1942e: 59; 1956: 107, 110).

\(^{361}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 105-159); Del Río Sanz (1992: 90-91).

\(^{362}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 105).

\(^{363}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 106).

\(^{364}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 107-114).

\(^{365}\) Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 115-134).
the full translation of *Agamemnon*366 (a strange choice, since for Menéndez Pelayo, ‘it is undoubtedly the worst of the tragedies after *Octavia*’).367 This project would regrettably remain not only unfinished by the time of his death in 1912, but also unpublished until 1956, when it appeared in Volume One of *Varia*, in his *Complete Works*.368

As Menéndez Pelayo rightly complains, the only complete translation into Spanish was that created in the 15th century.369 This was perhaps itself a translation of a previous Catalan one,370 from circa 1396, by Antoni Vilaragut371—although its true authorship has been disputed.372 The 15th-century Spanish translation would later become more popular than its Catalan model.373

The only other two attempts to expressly engage with Seneca’s tragic work were indeed those pursued by González de Salas and López de Zárate. The rebirth of an interest in the Seneca tragicus, two centuries after the translations into Catalan and Spanish, took place in the 17th century, in which the importance of Seneca as a hero for Neo-Stoicism and the Counter-Reformation coincided with the most important period in Spanish drama, its Golden Age. The need to supplement the pre-eminence of Seneca’s moral works and persona by redressing the apparent neglect of his tragedies thus had its deepest roots in 17th-century Spain.

López de Zárate attempted to synthesise—rather unsuccessfully—both *Hercules Furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus* into one unique play, *Tragedia de Hércules Furente y Oeta*, his only tragedy.

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366 Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 135-159). He mentions four translated tragedies by Seneca in his cover letter to join the national body of Archivists and Librarians in 1875, as it see Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 286). The details of these are not known to me.
367 Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 115).
368 See Menéndez Pelayo (1956).
369 He is aware of this translation; see Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 167). The surviving manuscripts are as follows: BNE, 7088; BNE, 8230; Biblioteca Palacio Madrid, II.1786; Scorialensis S.II.7; Scorialensis S.II.12; Biblioteca Colombina d Sevilla, 3291 in Registrum D. Fernando Colon; Biblioteca Nacional, 8486; according to Del Río Sanz (1992: 233-234). Only the first five are cited by Blüher (1983: 152, n. 118).
371 The manuscripts are: Biblioteca Gabriel Llabres (Barcelona); Archivo del Palau (Barcelona) ms. VII; Biblioteca Capitular (Barcelona) ms. 12, ff. 177-264; Biblioteca de Catalunya (Barcelona), 295; BNE, 14704; Biblioteca de Palacio (Madrid), 3096. See Blüher (1983: 127) and Del Río Sanz (1992: 228-229).
published within *Obras Varías de Francisco López de Zárate* (1651). This adventure-play of spectacular stage artifice has only a slight relation to Seneca’s Hercules dramas. From *Hercules Furens*, he takes Lycus’ desire to marry Hercules’ wife and so legitimise his power, Hercules’ triumphal return from Hades and his desire to kill Lycus. From *Hercules Oetaeus*, he takes Deianira’s jealous hatred of Iole and her intention to win back Hercules with the garment soaked in Nessus’ potion, in addition to Hercules’ killing of Lychas and his agony and acceptance of fate, death and eternal fame. However successful or faithful the attempt was, López de Zárate’s *Tragedia de Hercules Furente y Oeta* is an important example of how Seneca’s tragedies and their aspects of revenge, spectacular stage-craft and intricate plots fitted Golden Age dramatic tastes in a rather convenient fashion, even if they had to be adapted.

Out of a 17th-century project of a complete translation of Seneca’s tragedies, only *Troades* was finished by González de Salas, ‘the Spaniard of his time who best knew of classic letters’ in Menéndez Pelayo’s opinion. He added it to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics: Nueva Idea de la Tragedia Antigua* (1633). According to Menéndez Pelayo, ‘González de Salas translated the text faithfully and pompously, adding his own Gongorine emphasis and obscurity to Seneca’s emphasis’. That Seneca’s *Troades* would be added to a prescriptive book on theatre in the midst of Golden Age drama may point to Seneca’s importance for dramatists at the time, or, at least, to the need to address the dramatic example of Seneca. *Troades* was chosen because he considered it a true example of Seneca’s drama and undoubtedly attributable to Seneca, alongside *Phaedra* and *Medea*. ‘Being therefore true that of some of the tragedies the divine Seneca could have been the author, no other can as surely convince anyone of it being a true offspring of his, as *Trojan Women*’. This choice is also due to another, more Aristotelian, reason: ‘Among the Greeks and Romans I did not find, in my opinion, one more

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374 Schack (1887: 203-205); Del Río Sanz (1992: 582-592).
376 Menéndez Pelayo (1940a: 248).
377 Menéndez Pelayo (1940a: 247-252; 1956: 130); Del Río Sanz (1992: 609-621); Schack (1887: 205).
378 Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 130).
379 González de Salas (1633: 233).
380 González de Salas (1633: 227).
suited as an example of Aristotle’s Poetics’. No contemporary tragedy would satisfy his intention as this ancient tragedy could. Nevertheless the choice could receive potential criticism: ‘And if from a modern Spaniard it may deserve contempt, from the great Seneca, an ancient Spaniard, may it receive some esteem’. Once more, the perennial ethnic reading of Seneca the Spaniard is a reason for his consideration. González de Salas’ intention is thus clear, not only on prescriptive terms, but for patriotic reasons:

I believed it convenient to establish this monument to his memory, worthy amongst us of venerable esteem, in this way impeding that anyone may later try to disquiet such a secure possession.

Although there was not a translation into Spanish of Seneca’s Complete Tragedies by 1872, beside those composed in the 15th century, there had been some attempts at translating some tragedies, such as Troades by Santayana (1857), Phaedra by de Ochoa, entitled Hipólito (1870), and Lasso de la Vega’s Tragedias de Seneca (1883)—re-published in 1917 and 1928, which only included verse translations of Medea and Phaedra. Also, according to Menéndez Pelayo, El Abate Marchena had included some fragments of Seneca’s Troades in his tragedy Polixena (1808).

Menéndez Pelayo’s mantle regarding the promotion of the Seneca tragicus would later be donned by Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín in his Las Bacantes o del origen del teatro (1921), an edited version of his acceptance speech at the Royal Spanish Academy. He defended the inexistence of two Senecas, moralis and tragicus, and thus the existence of only one, who was ‘precisely a Spaniard’, even quoting Ganivet’s statement that Seneca was ‘a Spaniard in

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382 González de Salas (1633: 217).
383 González de Salas (1633: 217).
384 González de Salas (1633: 226).
386 Menéndez Pelayo (1942c: 170-171; 1956: 130).
essence’.\textsuperscript{387} According to Bonilla, given Roman drama’s lack of originality, Seneca was more original than Plautus or Terence. In a footnote the learned academician wrote the following irate remark:

No complete translation yet exists in Castilian of Seneca the tragedian, and it should be truly shameful for our humanists, indefatigable authors of Dictionaries and Grammar Books.\textsuperscript{388}

Indeed, the attempts to address Seneca’s tragic work in Spain, thus counterbalancing the prominence of Seneca moralis, continued to be unfruitful almost fifty years after Menéndez Pelayo’s outcry. Even the calls in defence of the theatrical viability of Senecan tragedy by Max Aub in 1928 remained unsatisfied until the staging of Seneca’s Medea, as we shall explore in Chapter V.\textsuperscript{389} The comparative neglect of the Seneca tragicus would be a long-lasting problem. There would not be a complete translation of Seneca’s full tragic corpus into Spanish until Lorenzo Riber published Seneca’s Tragedias Completas in 1943 for Aguilar, ten years after Medea’s staging in Mérida.\textsuperscript{390}

Menéndez Pelayo’s vindication of Senecan tragedy had its sixtieth anniversary precisely in 1932, when the preparations for Seneca’s Medea took place. The staging of Seneca’s Medea should be seen, in part, as the active response to such a learned outcry. Bonilla y San Martín’s book in particular encompasses many of the terms of the Senecan debate before 1933 and mentions both Sagunto and Mérida, the projected and real venues for Medea, as exemplary Roman theatres (see p. 71).\textsuperscript{391} On the 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933, Spain would celebrate a much neglected aspect of their much lauded ancient Spanish intellectual, moralist, philosopher and

\textsuperscript{387} Bonilla y San Martín (1921: 43-45).
\textsuperscript{388} Bonilla y San Martín (1921: 43, n. 2).
\textsuperscript{390} Del Río Sanz (1992: 91-92).
\textsuperscript{391} Bonilla y San Martín (1921: 46).
guide: ‘No less than twenty centuries has Seneca waited—a lesson for beginners—for the performance of his ‘Medea’, Fernández Almagro would write in 1933.\textsuperscript{392}

Besides the direct engagement with Seneca’s tragic corpus originated in 1872, another, more indirect approach to the vindication of the Seneca \textit{tragicus} took place in the years surrounding the première of \textit{Medea}: his status as Spain’s first dramatist in a most Spanish theatrical tradition. Alardo Prats, writing for \textit{El Sol}, is clear about this when calling Seneca ‘the first genius of our theatre’ in April 1933.\textsuperscript{393} In Prat’s article, Rivas Cherif, \textit{Medea}’s stage director and also a respected intellectual, writer and critic in his own right, defends the same, which he would refine in June 1933:

Seneca, and precisely in \textit{Medea}, accentuates, with the essential characteristics of what we could call \textit{direct action}, that is, with its performance before the audience, the horror that the Greek tragedians offered, only once purged by the narration. This confers on him the unquestionable title of predecessor to Calderón in \textit{El médico de su honra}, to Echegaray and to Valle-Inclán, examples which are literarily antagonistic, but that correspond to each other and relate as soon as you inquire into their national character.

In a historical cycle of Spanish drama—of which \textit{La Celestina} is its first unsurpassable milestone—the first place in our Roman prehistory corresponds to Seneca.\textsuperscript{394}

He would repeat this idea again to \textit{Crónica}.\textsuperscript{395} Juan Chabás, the critic in \textit{Luz}, agrees that the preference for Seneca rather than Euripides should be because of Seneca’s own pedigree as a Spanish playwright.\textsuperscript{396} Juan Herrera went as far as to claim that Seneca’s \textit{Medea} ‘preserves the essential qualities of our literary and dramatic tradition’, in June 1933.\textsuperscript{397} It may be noted that

\textsuperscript{392} \textit{El Sol} (21-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{393} \textit{El Sol} (13-04-1933).
\textsuperscript{394} \textit{El Sol} (14-05-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 155).
\textsuperscript{395} \textit{Crónica} (02-07-1933). Rivas Cherif would defend this also during his Mexican exile; see \textit{El Redondel} (09-07-1933). See also González-Vázquez (2015).
\textsuperscript{396} \textit{Luz} (13-06-1933). The critic in \textit{Sparta} prefers Euripides’ tragedy; see \textit{Sparta} (17-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{397} \textit{Diario de Córdoba} (20-06-1933).
Rivas Cherif, in joining Seneca with Calderón and then with Valle-Inclán and Echegaray, places Seneca within the triad of Spanish literary might and trans-historical legitimation comprising Seneca, the Golden Age and Spain’s modernity. The idea that these ‘correspond to each other and relate as soon as you inquire into their national character’, in Rivas Cherif’s words, is strikingly similar to how Ganivet explained that senequismo ‘reveals itself as soon as one delves slightly into the ideal surface or crust of our nation’.\(^{398}\) This is an example of the pervasiveness of senequismo, which is corrected in favour of Spain’s dramatic and poetic history by Medea’s director himself. Seneca, in 1933, is thus displaced from his purely ancient Roman context and the Spanish moral readings of his works, into an essential and trans-historical Spanish dramatic context. The critic Melchor Fernández Almagro, coincidentally also a commentator to Ángel Ganivet,\(^{399}\) agrees with this reading in his review of the performance of Medea in June 1933:

> The tragedies of Seneca are a powerful link between Spanish and Classical theatre: they help to explain, with so many other elements, the basis of our dramatic inspiration. And in a possible study of contemporary history, Calderón and Seneca would mark two lines of curious comparison. The reference point could be found in this ‘Medea’.\(^{400}\)

Indeed, as Rivas Cherif points out, the first ‘unsurpassable milestone’ of Spanish drama, *La Celestina*—titled *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (c.1500)—proves the pervasive impact of the largely moral, but also tragic, reception of Seneca in Spain since the 13\(^{th}\) century, for it both assimilates many of Seneca’s traits as its own and establishes Seneca as a literary artist and dramatic model for the following century, as Del Río explains:

> Taking the influence of the aggregate of works by Seneca as the assessment criteria, we can safely say that *La Celestina* moves between the medievalising moralization of the apocrypha and the incipient dramatic readings of the tragedies in the Renaissance.\(^{401}\)

\(^{398}\) Ganivet (1897: 6).
\(^{399}\) Fernández Almagro (1925).
\(^{400}\) Fernández Almagro in *El Sol* (21-06-1933).
\(^{401}\) Del Río Sanz (1992: 306).
Rivas Cherif unites Seneca with Calderón de la Barca, specifically in his theatre of horror. Seneca’s presence in 17th-century Spanish drama has already been briefly mentioned when exploring López de Zárate’s and González de Salas’ interest in Seneca. But a general emulation of Seneca is more controversial in other Golden Age Drama, for example in the works by Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca and Rojas Zorrilla, although some scholars have proven its existence in some individual plays.\textsuperscript{402} I strongly agree with Blüher on the need for a deeper study and assessment of the influence Senecan tragedy had on 17th-century Spanish drama, which is still lacking in the bibliography on the subject, nearly forty years after the German scholar’s remark.\textsuperscript{403}

Rivas Cherif mentions Calderón de la Barca’s \textit{El médico de su honra} explicitly as a successor to Seneca’s tragic horror, an idea he would repeat while in prison in 1945 and whose theatrical implications we shall explore in Chapter V (see pp. 261-262).\textsuperscript{404} On-stage killing and dying is seen by Rivas Cherif as one of the fundamental traditions of Spanish national theatre, thus tracing the dramatic genealogy of the Spanish theatre of horror to a Senecan origin.\textsuperscript{405}

Vossler intelligently stressed in his 1932 book \textit{Lope de Vega und sein Zeitalter}, published in Spanish in 1933, that ‘In the tragedies by Seneca, the taste of the Spanish people found an ally’, when writing about 16th-century Spanish tragedy.\textsuperscript{406} Isar thoroughly argues that the model and inspiration for Spain’s Golden Age theatre of horror was not, at least exclusively, Senecan tragedy.\textsuperscript{407} But a close reading of much of the dramatic production of the 16th and 17th century proves otherwise. 16th-century authors, much concerned with this theatrical trend,\textsuperscript{408} mention Seneca explicitly as a model or reference for their composition. Bermúdez’s intention, and his

\textsuperscript{403} Blüher (1983: 328).
\textsuperscript{404} See Rivas Cherif (1991: 111-112).
\textsuperscript{405} On Senecan horror see Motto and Clark (1997) and Staley (2010: 17-23, 96-120).
\textsuperscript{406} Vossler (1933: 238).
\textsuperscript{407} Isar (1958). Serrano Poncela defends also a very superficial Senecan influence; see Serrano Poncela (1965: 387).
\textsuperscript{408} Uscatescu (1965: 129).
perceived good fortune in creating his own ancient-style tragedy, is evidenced by the words of the censor Father Higuera in the prologue to *Nise Lastimosa* and *Nise Laureada* (1577): ‘The author has imitated [...] our Seneca’.\(^{409}\) There are many examples of this genre of tragedy throughout the 16\(^{th}\) century in Juan de la Cueva, Jerónimo Bermudez or Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola. Wickersham Crawford, in 1922, even went as far as to describe de la Cueva’s *Tragedia del Príncipe Tirano* as follows: ‘All of the imitators of Seneca revelled in excesses of this kind, but this play passes the bounds of propriety and credibility’.\(^{410}\) But perhaps the greatest exponent of Spanish theatre of horror, with Senecan influences, is Cristobal de Virués in his *Obras trágicas y líricas* (1609),\(^{411}\) whom Shack understandably censored as following ‘the abortions of Seneca’.\(^{412}\) The use of Senecan tragedies as a model for on-stage murders and horrors is also most certainly present in *La Numancia*, the only extant tragedy by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the most influential Spanish writer in history and one of Unamuno’s favourite authors:\(^{413}\) ‘Cervantes in *Numancia* engages in Senecan horror’, De Armas has noticed.\(^{414}\) The subsequent generation of Spanish dramatists, that of Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca and Rojas Zorrilla continued this Spanish tradition of on-stage murders, convoluted plots, love intrigues and exposed horror.

Somewhat in agreement with Rivas Cherif’s claim, Menéndez Pelayo argued decades earlier that Calderón de la Barca’s *El médico de su honra* should be categorised amongst his tragic dramas, for they are not part of *tragicomedia* and they end in a pitiful way.\(^{415}\) Four of these dramas have the very Senecan themes of jealousy and revenge at their centre, as Menéndez Pelayo points out,\(^{416}\) including *El médico de su honra*, ‘such a perfect play in its style, that, after

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410 Wickersham Crawford (1922: 163).
412 Schack (1885: 453).
El Alcalde de Zalamea, it is perhaps the poet’s best’.\textsuperscript{417} Lope de Vega, who openly recognised Virués as one of his influences,\textsuperscript{418} developed his own tragic horror in his Senecan-inspired El Castigo sin venganza.\textsuperscript{419} In fact, Atkinson, in his dramatic genealogy Seneca-Virués-Lope de Vega, published in Spain only three years after 1933, asserts that Golden Age comedia has tragic, principally Senecan, mediated origins: ‘If classical tragedy has perished at the hands of Virués, from its ashes there arises Phoenix-like modern comedy’.\textsuperscript{420}

However philologically correct or not Rivas Cherif had been in connecting Senecan tragedy with Spanish theatre of horror, it is insightful of him to have done so. Senecan tragic horror was picked up at the dramatic beginnings of Spain’s Golden Age and shaped a Spanish theatre of horror that would extend well into the dramatic production of the most outstanding dramatists of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. In this way, the horror of the Seneca tragicus became, through such a tradition, the first exponent of Spain’s theatre of horror in his own right. The same year in which Rivas Cherif linked Seneca’s tragedies with La Celestina, Calderón and Spain’s theatre of horror, Karl Vossler’s ideas on Seneca and 17\textsuperscript{th}-century drama in his Lope de Vega und sein Zeitalter (1932), appeared in a Spanish translation. His words demonstrate the absorption of Senecan tragedy by Golden Age theatre, thus coinciding with much of the opinion in 1930s Spain, as voiced in this chapter by Rivas Cherif, Wickersham Crawford, Fernández Almagro and Atkinson:

Tragedy by Seneca is not imitated here any longer, as in European Renaissance, just as a dramatic schema, but it is renewed and updated as if a creed. It has been turned into spiritual nationalism and a common national religion.\textsuperscript{421}

\textsuperscript{417} Menéndez Pelayo (1942b: 240).
\textsuperscript{419} See Dixon and Torres (1994). Rivas Cherif himself saw in Lope’s play a version of the Phaedra myth, although pointing towards Euripides’ Hippolytus; see El Redondel (22-02-1959) and Rivas Cherif (1991: 87).
\textsuperscript{420} Atkinson (1936: 130).
\textsuperscript{421} Vossler (1933: 239).
Vossler’s words may read as the dramatic counterpart of Ganivet’s influential theory of Seneca’s assimilation into Spanishness. Vossler, just as Rivas Cherif, redresses, in effect, the imbalance in favour of the Seneca *moralis* which lay at the centre of Spain’s *senequismo*. The importance of the Seneca *moralis* could be, and had been, traced from the origins of Spain in the Reconquista, through the Spanish Renaissance, and into the Counter-Reformation and Spain’s Golden Age, finding its fullest development in the midst of the national reconfiguration surrounding the Disaster of 98. The Seneca *tragicus*, through Vossler’s works and Rivas Cherif’s words, could also be traced from the very origins of Spanish drama in *La Celestina*, followed by 16th-century drama and the theatre of horror and into contemporary theatre and the regeneration of the Spanish stage exemplified by the staging of Seneca’s own *Medea* (see Chapter V). The vindicatory discourse defending the value of Seneca as a dramatist, and his pedigree as the first step in the long and meandering path of Spanish drama, set programmatically, even apologetically, by Rivas Cherif, was indeed successful. The evidence for this comes from the many accounts surrounding the 1933 production of *Medea* in which Seneca is portrayed as the first Spanish intellectual or playwright, with strong echoes of *senequismo*, past receptions and also the vindication of the role of the Seneca *tragicus*:

Here will the humanised myth of the classic tragedy of ‘Medea’ relive, shrieking with the extraordinary sense of humanity of the first genius of our theatre: Seneca.  

b) A poetic and Cordobés Seneca.

The development of the staging of Seneca’s *Medea* brought with it a retrospective aesthetic *apologia* for Seneca the tragedian, the poet, the baroque creator, also defended by Rivas Cherif:

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If it is not by pure chance that Seneca and Góngora are Cordobeses, we must attribute to a native virtue the propensity by one and the other, with so many centuries between them, to a baroque style, to the rhetoric conceptism of their poetry.\[^{423}\]

Seneca tragicus’ vindication as a Spanish and Cordobés baroque poet was popular in Spain.\[^{424}\] It poignantly coincided with Unamuno’s own perception of the debt owed by Spaniards to Seneca, and also Lucan: ‘culteranismo and conceptism’,\[^{425}\] a stylistic similarity also defended by Menéndez Pelayo, who also adds Lucan to the equation.\[^{426}\] Unamuno elsewhere explains that ‘the Cordobés style, between conceptist and Gongorine [Góngora’s style], rhetorical and emphatic, [is] very Spanish. Oh, but how swollen with tragic greatness and spiritual magnanimity!’\[^{427}\].[H]ow Senecan the Cordobeses are’, Fernández Almagro similarly exclaimed in 1933.\[^{428}\] The poetic and geographic connection between Seneca and Córdoba was thus also firm in 1933.

Besides any poetic or linguistic considerations and comparisons between Seneca/Lucan and the baroque poet Luis de Góngora, for which there is no scope here, the pairing of the two by Rivas Cherif expands beyond the literary. Góngora had enjoyed his own literary and cultural vindication in 1927, when a group of young poets, writers and intellectuals, rendered him homage in the third centenary of his death. This would be the founding act of what would be called the Generation of ‘27, to which the poets Alberti, García Lorca, Cernuda and Salinas belonged. It was an act of intellectual and cultural resurrection, a vindication of a Spanish poetic might long ignored and even forgotten. It is therefore an adequate parallel to the resurrection of Seneca the poet, the tragedian, in 1933. The unbroken baroque bond between Seneca and

\[^{423}\]El Sol (14-05-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 155).
\[^{424}\]Chabas in Luz (13-06-1933).
\[^{425}\]‘En torno al casticismo’ in Unamuno (2007: 124). Chabás places Unamuno himself in such a debt, when calling him a ‘baroque poet’; see Luz (13-06-1933).
\[^{426}\]See ‘Conceptismo, gongorismo y culteranismo. Sus precedentes, sus causas y efectos en la literatura española’, in Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 194-196). Menéndez Pelayo believes the most extreme features of Góngora’s poetry to be only superficially similar to Seneca or Lucan; see Menéndez Pelayo (1942d: 280).
\[^{428}\]El Sol (21-06-1933).
Góngora, Rivas Cherif underlined in 1933, I believe, responds to an understanding that Spain’s poetic auctoritas, and perhaps even imperium, unites into one and the same trans-historical celebration, the talents of Seneca, Góngora and, by association, the Generation of ‘27.

The attempt to vindicate Seneca the tragedian, as a long neglected aspect of Seneca in Spain and also as the first Spanish dramatist was indeed successful and convinced many in the press and in Spanish society and culture of his resurrected worth, as La Voz explained in its review of Seneca’s Medea:

A feat has been attempted and carried out with unspeakable success: the vindication as a tragedian of Seneca the Moralist.\textsuperscript{429}

The vindication went beyond learned circles or the work of theatre critics surrounding the performance and tour of Medea. Seneca, the Spanish tragic poet, became in 1933 a stock character of Spanishness. The same way as he had stood as the epitome of a wise and Christian Spaniard since the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, Seneca, in his republican resurrection, reappears as a more passionate, ‘very Spanish, even more, very Andalusian, very Cordobés’,\textsuperscript{430} poetic example of a cosmopolitan Spaniard. It is for this reason that, the Seneca of the Republic was imagined as a true Spanish aficionado attending the truly Spanish bloody spectacle of bullfighting on a summer Sunday evening:

A dramatic silence entered the bullring [...] as if searching for Seneca, who, if we exclude the ovation which was to explode in [...] Mérida, being always a lover of tragedy, himself would have come to the bullfight, wearing his broad Cordobés hat as a good aficionado, in order to see whether, in effect, it had truly been a phenomenon.\textsuperscript{431}

\textsuperscript{429}La Voz (19-06-1933). Also in El Sol (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{430}La Libertad (02-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{431}La Libertad (20-06-1933).
The promotion of Seneca the tragedian lasted longer than the Second Spanish Republic. When a certain regularity was reinstalled in the performances in the Roman Theatre in Mérida in 1953, the play performed was none other than Seneca’s *Phaedra*. The use of Seneca would continue in the stagings of his *Medea* (1955), *Thyestes* (1956) and *Phaedra* (1981) in Mérida. Schwedler’s version of *Medea*, which fuses Euripides’ and Seneca’s tragedies, would be staged in 1959 and 1979 at the Roman Theatre, a fusion repeated in Cabal’s *Medea* (1998) also in Mérida, where Jorge Semprún adapted Seneca’s *Troades* in 2000. Outside of Mérida, Seneca’s own *Medea* has also enjoyed further stagings, such as that directed by Modesto Higueras in 1955 at the María Guerrero Theatre and that directed by Andrés Lima at Madrid’s Teatro de la Abadía (and the Roman Theatre in Mérida) in 2015, to which one must add Alberto Conejero’s *Medea* (2018), again fusing Euripides and Seneca, at the Teatre Lliure, Barcelona. Seneca the tragedian has indeed become a revived example of Spanish stage history after all.

Both the Seneca *moralis* and the Seneca *tragicus* converged in 1933 in the idea of what we could call a balanced Seneca Hispanicus, the first manifestation of a national dramatist, intellectual, moralist and tragedian. This creates certain programmatic intentions. To label Seneca as the first *Spanish* intellectual and dramatist is to establish a founding hero for Spanish culture and thought. In this way, not only Spain appropriated for itself one of the most renowned Roman authors, as it had done before, but it also brought back its cultural foundation to the 1st century A.D., making it, incidentally, as old as Christianity. This balanced Seneca thus became a legitimating tool for claiming the intellectual capacity, pedigree and antiquity of Spanish letters, thought, poetry and theatre. Seneca was recast as the secular patron saint of a nation in the midst of its own national reorientation and reconfiguration during the Republic. He appears as the beacon of Spanish cultural stamina that shines from the primordial origins of Hispania and through the cultural history of Spain in order to illuminate the republican Spain of 1933. In Mérida, Spain performed a public resurrection of Seneca *tragicus* which allowed it to

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rejoin its more prominent half, Seneca *moralis*, and thus bring forth their fusion into Seneca *Hispanicus*.

c) **Unamuno, the Excitator Hispaniae.**

In order for there to be an active resurrection of the Seneca *tragicus* within the Seneca *Hispanicus*, he had to be made comprehensible through a translation that could transmit his poetic power, dramatic pedigree and Spanish essence. The man selected for this job was not just a translator, but the philosopher, dramatist, poet, scholar and republican Miguel de Unamuno. Unamuno’s worth as translator is most emphatically praised by the journalist Fernando Vázquez in *El Sur*:

> The verb of Seneca the Cordobés, blazing with images, with an Andalusian ‘something’, could only be translated by another talent who would not shake before the depths of tragedy or the galleries of the word. For this reason the version of Don Miguel de Unamuno resounded among the august stones of the Roman theatre with nuances of eternity, with living words, not deliberately literary, but warm, having been torn from the bowels of language, by the prophetic hand of the Basque patriarch.\(^{433}\)

But, despite Vázquez’s enthusiasm, the question remains: Why choose Unamuno? Whoever begins to delve into the matter discovers an array of reasons, conscious or unconscious, underlying the choice of Unamuno as the translator, one may even say co-author, of *Medea*. Here we shall focus on three main aspects: Unamuno’s legitimacy as translator of *Medea*, his own theatrical experience, and his identity and role as dramatic descendant of Seneca himself.

Unamuno crucially added his *auctoritas* and *gravitas* to a project which was to expose the spirit and culture of Spain. He enjoyed a leading status as part of the Generation of ‘98, since the

\(^{433}\) *El Sur* (21-06-1933).
publication of *En torno al casticismo* (1895). He had intended to regenerate the nation’s *raison d’être* and understand the essence of Spain, alongside Ganivet. Unamuno would gradually become the national sage and political conscience of Spain, the true ‘excitator Hispaniae’, as Curtius would call him.\(^{434}\)

This prominence had brought him to a six-year exile in 1924,\(^\text{435}\) after criticising the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship (1923-1930), openly sponsored by the then king Alfonso XIII. The republican forces hailed his return in 1930 as a battle won and the omen of a future victory. Unamuno himself announced the proclamation of the Republic in Salamanca in April 1931.\(^\text{436}\) He soon won his seat at the Constituent Parliament, becoming, soon after, President of the Council of Instrucción Pública, a position he would resign on the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) of May 1933.\(^\text{437}\) When Unamuno swore allegiance as MP everyone stood up as a sign of respect.\(^\text{438}\) He was even proposed as President of the Republic in 1931 by a group of intellectuals.\(^\text{439}\) He evidently became an intellectual chief of sorts, despite his refusal to enjoy any official intellectual leadership,\(^\text{440}\) which incited an important international petition for his—unsuccessful—candidature as Nobel laureate in 1934.\(^\text{441}\) His parliamentary work was fierce and combative, sometimes against the government’s proposals. Unamuno received the title of ‘Citizen of Honour’ in 1934.\(^\text{442}\) Due to his republican and intellectual *gravitas*, his thoughts were attentively heard by the President of the Republic in several governmental crises.\(^\text{443}\)

Unamuno was also a philologist and a classicist in his own right. He had been Chair of Greek since 1891 and then Professor of History of the Castilian Language, previously Latin and

\(^{436}\) For an overview of Unamuno’s relationship with the Republic; see Nozick (1966: 379-393).
\(^{438}\) Rabaté and Rabaté (2009: 582).
\(^{439}\) Rabaté and Rabaté (2009: 583); Juaristi (2012: 397).
\(^{440}\) Rabaté and Rabaté (2009: 582).
Castilian Comparative Philology, at the Universidad de Salamanca.\textsuperscript{444} He was awarded honorary doctorates at the universities of Grenoble and Oxford. He wrote ‘La enseñanza del latín en España’ in 1894,\textsuperscript{445} on the teaching of Latin, and had shown a keen interest in teaching Homer and Book VI of the \textit{Iliad} in class.\textsuperscript{446} He had a profound knowledge of both Greek and Roman literature. He mentions Sophocles’ \textit{Oedipus Rex} in his play \textit{El Otro} (Act II, Scene 6) and Aeschylus’ \textit{Seven Against Thebes} and \textit{Persians} as examples of the importance of the masses in theatre.\textsuperscript{447} He also acknowledges Euripides’ \textit{Hippolytus}—and Racine’s \textit{Phèdre}—as the basis for his own retelling of the Phaedra myth in his \textit{Fedra}.\textsuperscript{448} His ideas on Seneca, Lucan and the Spanish vices of \textit{culteranismo} and conceptism have already been considered.\textsuperscript{449}

According to two letters he sent to Azorín and Nin y Frías in May 1912, Unamuno also had intended to write commentaries on Seneca, although there is no specification on the subject or the format of these, which remained unexecuted.\textsuperscript{450} Unamuno possessed enough philological and academic knowledge to undergo the translation of such intricate Latin poetry as that found in Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, as Chabás appreciated after watching \textit{Medea} in Mérida:

\begin{quote}
What richness of rhythm, what energy in every word does the Spanish prose of this Latin tragedy have! With the skill of a writer who knows the depths of his language, with the perception of a poet and a scholar at the same time, Unamuno has known how to give each word its true value.\textsuperscript{451}
\end{quote}

Unamuno was also a novelist, poet, and enthusiastic playwright. His plays did not enjoy much critical and box-office success, except for \textit{El Otro}, which premiered on the 14\textsuperscript{th} of December

\textsuperscript{444} Abellán (1964: 34); Franco (1971: 36); Tusell and García Queipo de Llano (1990: 29), Juaristi (2012: 200-205).
\textsuperscript{445} See Unamuno (2007: 201-224).
\textsuperscript{446} Juaristi (2012: 203-204).
\textsuperscript{449} Unamuno (2007: 124).
\textsuperscript{450} See Unamuno (1958: XVI, 27-28).
\textsuperscript{451} Luz (19-06-1933).
1932. This resulted from their skeletal structure, sparse action, and highly intellectualised content, which makes them a type of dialectical exercise, thus condemning them to a difficult scenic afterlife. Díez-Canedo would call them ‘the extravagances of a philosopher’. Nevertheless, he was ‘a stubborn case of a constant, and not at all successful, dramaturge’, as Lasso de la Vega explains, and all but one of his plays, *El Hermano Juan*, were staged during his lifetime. Rivas Cherif admired his theatrical oeuvre and staged four of his plays, *Fedra* (1918), *Sombras de sueño* (1930), *El Otro* (1932) and *La Venda* (1934), as well as his translation of Seneca’s *Medea* (1933), becoming the stage director who best knew Unamuno’s dramatic work. Perhaps for this reason Rivas Cherif may have pressured for the incorporation of Unamuno to the project.

Unamuno also intended to diagnose, as he had done with other questions regarding Spain, the reasons for its theatrical decadence. Spain’s theatrical crisis was a pulsating concern at the beginning of the 20th century, a concern to which *Medea* is a practical response. Unamuno despised the theatrical abuses Realism produced in Spanish theatre. He believed in honest, poetic theatre which strips action to its bare dramatic bones, what he called ‘*tragedia desnuda*’. This coincides with Gordon Craig’s, Rivas Cherif’s and Copeau’s ideas on theatrical simplicity (Chapter V), as is evidenced in Unamuno’s own words on the Roman Theatre in Mérida:

What a grand stage, which does not need false drop scenes and painted decorations!

There is no stage-craft here.

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452 Lázaro Carreter (1956: 7-10); Franco (1971: 13-14, 24); Gil Fombellida (2003: 159-161).
454 Díez-Canedo (1938: 306).
460 *La Libertad* (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
However successful he was in applying his theatrical ideas to his plays, he did attempt to execute his ‘tragedia desnuda’. He tried to do this with two plays: *Fedra* and *El Otro*, directed by Rivas Cherif in 1918 and 1932, respectively. *Fedra* is a reformulation of tragedy, by its author’s own admission, and a fundamental text to understand Unamuno’s idea of that genre. But *El Otro* must also be categorised as tragic, since Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* is explicitly mentioned in it, acting as a model of introspective and identity-seeking tragedy. Unamuno’s approach shows that he saw ancient tragedy as a platform on which to build a new theatrical aesthetics and a philosophical theatre, as would later Brecht, Anouilh or Sartre. Unamuno intended to explore this path further, as the projected *Prometheus’ Torch* and *Icarus, the flying man*, reveal. This must have made Unamuno an interesting candidate for the role of translator—and co-author—of *Medea*.

Much could be written on the philosophical and dramatic similarities between Senecan tragedy, including *Medea*, and Unamuno’s own dramaturgy. Since the conclusions that we may extract from a lengthy comparative literary analysis would be in many cases mere inferences, deductions or even coincidences, we will not explore them here, but point the reader to the works of scholars who have touched on such connections.
reverberations and earthy flavours’, according to Manuel Azaña.\(^{470}\) Perhaps Unamuno used baroque terms in order to better suit Seneca’s style. He also may have intended to suggest a connection between his translation and the importance of Seneca’s Medea to Columbus’ journey, a connection Unamuno himself makes in Ahora after the performance in Mérida.\(^{471}\) Another possibility may be an intended link to the Senecan influence in Golden Age drama or even to the plays by Lope de Vega, Rojas Zorrilla and Calderón de la Barca on Medea, primarily in Unamuno’s use of baroque nautical terms.\(^{472}\)

This connection with Golden Age Drama, which Azaña acknowledged, provided a further textual link between Spain’s first theatre, embodied by Seneca, Spain’s greatest theatre, Golden Age Theatre, and Spain’s modern theatre, here spearheaded by Unamuno. This palimpsestic text was to be the foundation on which to build a production of renovating theatre (see Chapter V). It would also be the catalyst for the celebration and vindication of all aspects of the Seneca Hispanicus and the intellectual and dramatic continuum begun by him and ending in Unamuno. Unamuno’s translation, and its performance in Mérida, united all the elements implicit in the cultural, intellectual and dramatic continuum it intended to resurrect, as Rivas Cherif explained:

> We wish to make a history of Spanish Theatre, starting with what we could call its prehistory. The choice of Seneca, as first Spanish dramatic author, was made by don Fernando de los Ríos. Indeed, in Seneca there are mysterious traces of what would later become the Spanish gruesomeness in Calderón —with onstage deaths before the audience—and what would also become Córdoba’s poetry school in Góngora. We chose Unamuno as translator for the marmoreal strength of his prose, and his very personal baroque style, and the plasticity of his images, so typical also of Seneca.\(^{473}\)

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\(^{470}\) Azaña (2007: IV, 782).
\(^{471}\) Also published in Domínguez (2008: 121-125).
\(^{472}\) Sala Rose (1996: 181). As examples of Spanish baroque plays featuring Medea, see Lope de Vega’s El Vellozino de Oro (1622), Calderón de la Barca’s El Divino Jason (c.1630) and Los tres mayores prodigios (1636) and Rojas Zorrilla’s Los encantos de Medea (1645). The former three’s connections with Medea and the Argonauts are explained in Baldwin (2018).
\(^{473}\) Crónica (02-07-1933).
3. Hispanitas.

a) Seneca Hispanicus and Unamuno: The continuum.

Given the vindication of the Seneca Hispanicus and Unamuno’s own credentials as philosopher and playwright, it is not surprising that Unamuno is mentioned, or taken, as either sole author or co-author of Medea in many of the sources.\(^{474}\) For example, two advertisements in the newspaper ABC read: ‘Medea, by Seneca and Unamuno’;\(^ {475}\) and the critic of El Sur calls Medea ‘the play by Seneca-Unamuno’.\(^ {476}\) Juan de la Encina went as far as to claim that: ‘[I]t could be said that Seneca wrote his ‘Medea’ for him [Unamuno] to translate it into his marvellous Castilian’.\(^ {477}\) This notion underpins the joke published in Crónica Meridional on the 25\(^{th}\) of June 1933:

By the way, when the performance ended, the audience demanded the presence on stage of Don Miguel de Unamuno, the admirable translator of the very faithful version of the play by Seneca. When the wise academic appeared, a native [sic] that was watching the performance, asked his fellow countryman:

—Hey, you: Who is that?

The other man, pretending to know it all, responded with an air of sufficiency:

—Who else could it be, man? The author of the play: none other than Don Seneca in person!

Unamuno’s perceived authorship or co-authorship of Medea can be partly explained by the sheer weight of Unamuno’s name within Spanish society, culture and academia, or even as a way of publicising the event. But it also establishes an intellectual and dramatic continuum which spans the entirety of Spanish history. In this way, the Seneca Hispanicus, with its moralis and tragicus personae merged into one, hands down the mantle of Spanish cultural tradition and

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\(^{474}\)See for example The Manchester Guardian (15-09-1933) and Gutiérrez (21-10-1933).

\(^{475}\)ABC (08-06-1933, 29-08-1933).

\(^{476}\)El Sur (22-06-1933).

\(^{477}\)El Sol (25-06-1933).
prowess to the leading intellectual of the Second Spanish Republic. The establishment of such a lineage is what makes Seneca, ‘our illustrious Spaniard’ according to La Libertad, relevant in 1933. Unamuno, ‘a classic himself of the great Iberia’, as Fernández Almagro called him in October 1933,\(^{478}\) appears in this discourse as the lawful descendant of Seneca, as both Spanish philosopher and dramaturge.\(^{479}\) The existence and creation of this lineage is expressed in the most revealing of words by Haro:

One of the wisest choices in the happy complexity to which we are referring is the coincidence in such a high artistic endeavour of these two greatest of universal Spaniards: Seneca and Unamuno. Setting aside the characteristic differences of their times, and the twenty centuries that separate them, they are both spirits of total art: they are poets, dramaturges, essayists, epistolographers [sic] and, above all, philosophers and thinkers. And more than philosophers, they are both moralists. [...] 

On the other hand, in his [Unamuno’s] spirit — as in Seneca’s — Spanishness is the true kernel of his universalism. The Spanishness of Unamuno—love and pain for his land, for his native Spain—is no doubt deeper than Seneca’s. But also Lucius Annaeus, in the Silver Age of Imperial Rome, is very Spanish, moreover, very Andalusian, very Cordobés. He already points in his work […] towards a baroque style, which one day would bear the name of Góngora.\(^{480}\)

If Seneca can be linked, or shown to be linked, to Unamuno, the antiquity of Spanish thought and culture is established alongside its importance and reputation, for they are both respected thinkers and men of letters, both nationally and internationally renowned. In this way, the cultural, literary, philosophical and dramatic talent that has ever sprung in Spain flows from Seneca to Unamuno, and also vice versa, establishing an exultation of Spanishness which

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\(^{478}\) Fernández Almagro in El Sol (29-06-1933).

\(^{479}\)See Rivas Cherif in El Sol (11-06-1933); Chabás in Luz (13-06-1933), La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933) and Marín Alcalde in Ahora (21-06-1933). Eduardo Ortega y Gasset went as far as to see Socrates’, Seneca’s and Unamuno’s lives as parallel; see Ortega y Gasset (1958: 203); Zambrano would also point out coincidences between Seneca’s and Unamuno’s deaths; see Zambrano (1994: 70).

\(^{480}\) Haro in La Libertad (02-09-1933).
exceeds the sum of the parts of Seneca Hispanicus combined with Unamuno. In *Medea*, as performed in Mérida in June 1933, the whole of Spain’s historical talent is unearthed, reinstated and resurrected, as is implicit in Fernández Almagro’s words:

This ‘Medea’, spoken by Unamuno in prose of broad rhythm and high decorum, affirms itself in a text that now truly belongs to the literature of our wonderful and multiple Spain.481

This resurrection of Spanish talent was not an isolated piece of republican propaganda or even a grandiose form of theatrical publicity. It was part of a greater vision of the Republic as the catalyst for national reconfiguration, built on the soil of Spain’s essence as manifested in what we could call its ‘progressive continuum’, as this section explains. “[T]he choice of Seneca’s play over Sophocles’ [sic] is a sign of a restorative and patriotic attempt”, Felix Ros claimed in June 1933.482

The republicans identified progressive undercurrents in Spain’s national psyche and historical physiognomy in order to propose a new republican national identity.483 ‘Before the need to fight against the irrationality of the contemporary Spanish society, the intellectuals choose to begin by rationalising the history of Spain’, as Aubert rightly remarks.484 An example was the manifesto published by the Agrupación al Servicio de la República in 1931, only months before the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic.485 One of its signatories, the doctor and MP of the Republic, Gregorio Marañón, would attend Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida (see p. 38). The manifesto called on the Spanish people and its intellectuals to agitate for the Republic as a way of resurrecting the History of Spain and vanquishing the ills of Monarchy:

481 Fernández Almagro in *El Sol* (21-06-1933).
482 *El Día Gráfico* (18-06-1933).
484 Aubert (1993: 75).
485 For the context of this manifesto see Becarud and López Campillo (1978: 24-26), Tusell and García Queipo de Llano (1990: 179-192) and Casanova (2010: 18).
We believe that the Monarchy of Sagunto has to be replaced by a Republic that awakens all Spaniards at once to dynamism and discipline. We call them to the sovereign enterprise of resurrecting the history of Spain, renewing peninsular life in all its dimensions, attracting all abilities, imposing an order of clean and energetic law, giving justice full transparency. This thus demands much of each citizen: work, dexterity, efficiency, formality and the resolution to lift our country up to the highest summit of our times.\footnote{La Tierra (09-02-1931); El Sol (10-02-1931).}

For republicans, nationalism and patriotism would no longer be founded on Spain’s intrinsic Catholicism and lost imperial glory, on its repressive traditions or its reactionary tendencies. It now had to be founded on the works of illustrious Spaniards, on its artistic and intellectual inheritance, on the long line of progressive thought and actions, on the light of reason and on the feats of the community (see pp. 137-175).

Manuel Azaña, Prime Minister of the Republic from 1931 to 1933 and later President of the Republic from 1936 to 1939, followed this idea whole-heartedly, and was one of its most acute developers: \footnote{For a summary of Azaña’s standpoint see Tusell and García Queipo de Llano (1990: 127-147), Boyd (1997: 210-211), Fusi (2000: 251-252) and Juliá (2013).} ‘To isolate Spanishness requires to subtract what is dynastic, what is internationally Catholic, what is Austro-German imperialism’, he would claim in the 1920s.\footnote{Azaña (1997: 90).}

According to Azaña, the Republic had to re-conquer the national identity from the reactionary forces and amend the ills they had created ever since the 16th century, as he would declare the same year of the genesis of Seneca’s Medea, on the 28th of March 1932:

We, the republicans who have created the Republic, what we have come to do is to put a full stop to a monstrous digression in Spanish history, which has cut the normal evolution of the Spanish self, and has placed it with all its might and greatness at the service of a dynasty that is a slave in turn to an imperialist and Catholic ideal [...] For
us, the Republic is therefore, the resumption of a great Spanish tradition, of a liberal tradition, of a popular tradition.\textsuperscript{489}

The Republic thus extracted progressive undercurrents from the nation’s history, establishing them as the national discourse on which to found the new regime. This in turn created an impulse into the future that would bring Spain to its fullest development. Azaña repeated this idea just months before Medea in Mérida, in February 1933:

The Republic, as a national endeavour, is the instrument with which to restore all the civilising powers of the Spanish people, and it is also the resuscitator of the civilising spirit of the Spanish race which yearns, as another Lazarus, for its resurrection.\textsuperscript{490}

One of the clearest explanations of this phenomenon and the way it was intended to be implemented was voiced by De los Ríos, while Spanish Ambassador in the United States of America, in 1937, four years after Medea and in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. In this speech, the necessity to link Republican citizens with the creations of their past responded to the need to resuscitate the cultured, progressive, popular and democratic sense of Spanishness, of which Seneca’s Medea was an example:

We tried to resuscitate in the mind of the countryman the cultural values created by his forbearers. We intended to make him become conscious of his history, awakening within him a sentiment of true Hispanity—and Hispanity, in true terms, means, exactly, a consciousness of the ideals and aspirations of the Spanish people—. That is what we tried to do... by placing the countryman before the great creative works of the Spanish collective conscience.\textsuperscript{491}

\textsuperscript{489}‘La República como forma de ser nacional’ in Azaña (2007: III, 308). Marcelino Domingo had a similar idea in his article for El Liberal (23-09-1933); see Domingo (1936: 37-38).

\textsuperscript{490}El Sol (15-02-1933).

\textsuperscript{491}De los Ríos, ‘The Educational program of the Spanish Republic’ (N.Y., 7th of April, 1937), quoted in Holguin (2003: 58).
Seneca’s Medea must be understood precisely in this way. On the 18th of June 1933, those gathered in Mérida experienced much more than an ancient tragedy, written by a long-ignored Spanish dramatist and translated by Spain’s leading intellectual. They experienced a Republican ritual of the greatest magnitude. Spain would communally watch a creation of their past, its continuation into the present and its exultation within the republican regime, thus projecting present concerns and future ideals onto the stage. Seneca’s Medea became a collective consecration of the progressive continuum that had been lurking within Spain’s cultural history until the Republic had arrived to unearth it and correct its flow. It was a symbol of the resurrection of Hispanitas, the counter-hegemonic discourse that was to shape and inform the Republic and its citizens.492

b) Hispanidad.

I here use the term Hispanitas in order to distinguish the progressive, republican and liberal interpretation of Spain’s history, identity and mission from a broader idea of Hispanity and from the specific concept of Hispanidad. Although the term Hispanidad was firstly used to designate a spiritual belonging to an identity rather than the more genetic or ethnic raza (race)—which can be found with regards to Seneca in this chapter and in the next—it was soon incorporated by the reactionary factions of Spanish society and intelligentsia into their model of national identity.

The concept of Hispanitas demonstrated by Seneca’s Medea, as a trans-historical identity that stretches from antiquity to the twentieth century, is nominally similar to the concept of Romanitas, or Romanità, as used by the contemporary Fascist regime in Italy. However, similarity is only nominal. They are, in fact, conceptual opposites. Hispanitas is a liberal and progressive concept based on secularism, democracy and culture, more aligned with the ideas of

the Third French Republic. Fascist Romanità is an imperialistic and authoritarian concept based on force and conquest, with scant regard paid to republican and democratic sensibilities. They might both be seen as tending towards the establishment of political and cultural hegemony, but from two opposite standpoints (see pp. 176-182).

The main defender of Catholic and traditionalist Hispanidad was the right-wing intellectual Ramiro de Maeztu, one of the principal commentators of the theory of senequismo, as mentioned above. According to Humlebaek, ‘Maeztu wanted to revive the religious values of the Tridentine Council and the Counter-Reformation, thereby excluding the entire body of thought derived from the Enlightenment [...] Catholicism characterises everything Hispanic, and thus everything non-Catholic is anti-Hispanic’.

His seminal book on Hispanidad, Defensa de la Hispanidad (1934), in which his interpretations of senequismo appear, was published just a year after the première of Medea. The concept of Hispanidad would come to signify a concept not only of identity but of belonging to a brethren of Spanish Catholicism, imperial might, Hispano-centrism, anti-liberalism and authoritarianism that united not only Spaniards but also the nations of Latin America. This line of thought would slowly grow, until it became the fundamental creed of Spanish national-Catholicism under Franco’s dictatorship. Hispanitas, as conceived by the creators and commentators of the production of Seneca’s Medea thus stands separately, and even in opposition, to the concept of Hispanidad as developed by Ramiro de Maeztu. And vice versa.

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494 On Romanità see Visser (1992) and Stone (1999).
I am unaware whether Fernando de los Ríos knew of Maeztu’s ideas on Seneca and *senequismo* when he suggested to Unamuno that Seneca’s tragic credentials had to be vindicated. This is chronologically and intellectually viable. Maeztu essayed his ideas on *senequismo* on the 1st of March and 16th of June 1932, when they appeared in the reactionary, Catholic, monarchist and conservative newspaper *Acción Española*,498 created by a group inspired by Charles Maurras’ Action Française.499 Maeztu centres his ideas exclusively on Seneca morality, and more specifically on its Christian compatibility. Therefore, the republican tracing and use of Seneca through Spanish history, down to the production of *Medea*, in the creation of what has here been called Seneca Hispanicus, stands as a counter-narrative of Spanishness to that of *Hispanidad*. An identity I have here termed, in contrast, *Hispanitas*.

c) *Hispanitas.*

*Hispanitas* is broadly based on trans-historical Spanish culture, arts, humanism, secularism and, as we shall see in the next chapter, anti-tyranny, liberalism and democratic citizenship. A version of this conception of Hispanity had been defended by Unamuno. Incidentally, Unamuno’s vision of Spain had been in frank opposition to Maeztu’s own, at least since Maeztu’s support for the Dictatorship and Unamuno’s exile for criticising it.500 Unamuno had proposed substituting the ‘Fiesta de la Raza’ (‘The celebration of race’) for the ‘Fiesta de la Lengua’ (‘The celebration of language’) when the former was instituted in 1919 as a national holiday.501 This conception would be summarised by Azaña in his critique of Ganivet’s *Idearium Español*, re-published in 1930: ‘We Spaniards are not a race’.502 Unamuno again defended his idea, criticising Christian, imperialist, elitist or racist readings of the national celebration, in line with the rightist concept of *Hispanidad*, precisely on the 12th of October 1933:

498 *Acción Española* (01-03-1932, 16-06-1933).
The celebration of the spiritual *raza* should not, cannot have a racist meaning in the material sense... nor an ecclesiastic meaning—of this or that Church—and even less a political meaning. It is necessary to discard from this celebration any imperialism other than that of the spiritual *raza* incarnated in the language. A language of Whites, and Indians, and Blacks, and Mestizos; a language of Christians, Catholics and non-Catholics, and of non-Christians, and Atheists; a language of people who live under the most diverse political regimes.\(^{503}\)

Unamuno’s words both provoke and respond to the ideas and intentions of the broader republican project, just months after Seneca’s *Medea*. The substitution of *race for language* as a connector between all Hispanic nations demonstrates the shift from a unity concept based on the ethnos, later on a creed, to one based on a shared culture. If culture was to unite the Hispanic peoples, it is understandable that it would be used to unite Spanish history, as would happen in the linking of the Seneca Hispanicus precisely with Unamuno. His words also point towards a notion of popular ownership of this culture and of a shared identity. The popular, democratising drive of the Republic was unquestionable, as proven by the need to redress an elitist monarchical history in favour of the progressive, popular and democratic continuum of Spanish History, as Azaña defended so vehemently. Finally, Unamuno’s article also seizes Spain’s cultural identity and signifier from the Catholic Church and Monarchy and relocates it under secularism and liberal democratic debate. It is in this line of the theory of Spanishness that I place the concept of *Hispanitas* which lies at the centre of the intellectual and national conception of the production of Seneca’s *Medea*.

As shown, the intellectual importance of the lineage that runs from Seneca to Unamuno, created in 1933, as a demonstration of *Hispanitas* cannot be underestimated. This idea is explicitly formulated by the famed and influential Spanish historian, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz. The republican importance of Sánchez-Albornoz must not be overlooked. He was a member of

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Azaña’s Acción Republicana party, Ministro de Estado in 1933 and Prime Minister of the Republic in exile. His development of an intellectual and essential continuum that flows through Spanish history is formally similar to Ganivet’s idea of the essential substrata of the nation. Its content coincides with the defence of a progressive continuum, voiced by many republican leaders, including Azaña, Fernando de los Ríos or Marcelino Domingo, even if Sánchez-Albornoz’s proposition is rather more sombre and less prone to their general propagandistic excitement and ideological binarism.

Sánchez-Albornoz, an unapologetic defender of senequismo against Ámerico Castro, in his magnum opus España: Un enigma histórico (1956) defends the existence of essential characteristics that establish a trans-historical homo hispanus, much in line with the prosequequist Menéndez Pidal.504 According to Sánchez-Albornoz, the homo hispanus can be traced from its manifestation in Seneca to its most recent, Unamuno, and occasionally José Ortega y Gasset. He adds Ibn Hazm, as the link that saves the gap created by Al-Andalus.505 Despite Sánchez-Albornoz’s formulation being published twenty years after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the similarities with what has been demonstrated in this chapter in the words written by Ganivet, Menéndez Pelayo, Vossler, Menéndez Pidal, Rivas Cherif, Fernández Almagro or Unamuno, make Sánchez-Albornoz’s words the clearest and most concise expression of the establishment of Hispanitas as the Spanish intellectual continuum as here discussed. A good example is to be found in his book Españoles ante la historia (1958):

Seneca, for example, never felt he was Spanish and even wrote occasionally against the great Spanish national hero, Viriathus. But having been born in Córdoba, his Andalusian lineage affected his temperamental heritage and the forging of his character. Mommsen, Menéndez Pelayo, Gaston Boissier and other contemporary scholars of great credit have already concretely linked some aspects of Seneca’s works with the

504 ‘The facts of History do not repeat themselves, but the man that develops History is always the same’, Menéndez Pidal (1947: ix).
Spanish roots of his family. Nowadays it is possible to discover in him new and newer features of his vital and psychological Spanishness; I have highlighted them when studying Spain’s historical enigma. There is even the possibility of suspecting that the nuances he engraved into the stoic doctrine are due to his Spanishness. And it is therefore licit to begin the magnificent series of great Spanish thinkers with him, which ends, for now, with Unamuno and Ortega.506

Conclusion: The Resurrected Spain of Seneca Hispanicus.

The Minister’s comment to Unamuno in December 1932 unleashed a number of undercurrents and consequences of historical and national magnitude. Seneca’s Medea actively responded to the received wisdom of senequismo as established by Ángel Ganivet and Seneca’s American prophecy. It proposed a redressing of the imbalance against Seneca’s tragic potency by pursuing a production of his Medea and by placing him as father to a dramatic and poetic genealogy that encompassed Golden Age theatre, Gongorine poetry, the Generation of ‘27 and Unamuno himself. This created a balanced understanding of Seneca as Seneca Hispanicus.

The performance of Seneca’s Medea in 1933 thus became the exultation of Spain’s cultural might, of its senequismo, of its Senecan dramatic creed, of its intellectual and dramatic genealogy, of its alpha, Seneca, and its omega, Unamuno. It would bring forward the resurrection of Hispanitas, which conformed the theoretical basis of the Second Spanish Republic in its defence of culture, theatre, citizenship, secularism and civic rights. This resurrection of Hispanitas and its implications for contemporary republican Spain through the trans-historical celebration of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida is best expressed precisely by Unamuno himself, when shortly after the première at the Roman Theatre he wrote a long article in Ahora, published on the 22nd of June 1933:

For the storks of Mérida that observe in circles the fields, what has changed in Spain? There are around Mérida, in Iberian fields, battles as those that once dragged the pagan caesarean civilisation, that of Seneca the Cordobés, to ruins. Ruins? In them our civil spirits continue to nest.[…]

And the theatre in Mérida, under Spain’s open sky, has been unburied—there is still so much of the Hispano-Roman tradition to un-bury!—thanks, above all, to the meritorious Méliida, and today to the sun. It [the Roman Theatre] speaks to us of a secular past of greatness. Everything that has been made to last forever is restored once again, in one way or another. Only the ruins that were built as such perish […] In this theatre of Mérida, unburied under the sun, the tragedy ‘Medea’ by the Cordobés Lucius Annaeus Seneca has been performed. I un-buried her from her baroque Latin to bring her, without glosses or cuts, into the prose of the clear Romance language of Castilian, which has also meant restoring ruins. […] With my version I intended to make the very sky of Córdoba, Seneca’s outbursts of conceptism and culteranismo, reverberate under the Hispanic sky of Mérida, but in the language that sprouted from his own. […] Over the stage of ancient stones, under the sky in mid-sunset, a stork slowly hovered, the same stork as twenty centuries ago. […]

And what about the popular, secular, audience—illiterate, not uncultured—, the audience from the fields and the streets? It all must have sounded like music to them. It must have felt as if the ruins of ancient traditions were buried under the land of the communal soul. The function had an almost liturgical solemnity, similar to a civil and pagan mass? Did they not understand that rash gruesomeness of Medea’s passion? Did they not understand Seneca’s mythological connections, whom some dreamers have wanted to treat as the prophet that had foreseen the discovery of America in a passage of his Medea? That same audience does not understand the Christian mythology of the mass sung in Latin either, but it reverberates in the ruins of a credence it carries in the depths of its soul, which with the liturgical chant is restored.[…]
As for the tragedy of Medea I can say nothing here and now about the passion of the terrible exiled sorceress—witch—, who, before breaking away from her children, vengefully, sacrifices them to an infernal rancour. There is in that tremendous passion, which was so well understood by the Cordobés Seneca, teacher of Nero, much of the tremendous passion of the most typical tragedies in the history of our Spain.
III. Republica nunc sum: The building of a Republic.

A single cry has crowned the performance:
Long live the Spanish Republic! (La Voz).\(^{507}\)

So strong was the republican sentiment at the première of Seneca’s *Medea* on the 18th of June 1933 in Mérida, attended by the Prime Minister of the Republic, Manuel Azaña himself, that an anonymous man shouted out: ‘Long live the republican art!’\(^{508}\) Given all its republican echoes and national ceremonial grandeur (see pp. 36-39), this chapter analyses how Seneca’s *Medea* stemmed from, and responded to, the republican regime change in general and specifically to the cultural agenda and policy of the Republic’s constituent period (April 1931-November 1933). I shall first look at how the new regime was ideologically shaped by the intended role of culture in the implementation of educational reform and the reinforcement, restructuring and dissemination of culture within Spain, with a special emphasis on theatre (1). Secondly, we shall explore how Seneca’s *Medea* is central to the Republic’s pursuit of a Spanish National Theatre, national unity and ethical improvement through aesthetic means (2). Finally, we shall look at how the association of Seneca’s *Medea* with the Second Spanish Republic was contested by voices contrary to the new regime (3). This will clarify the role played by the production of Seneca’s *Medea* within the agenda of regime consolidation, educational dissemination, promotion of culture and theatrical renovation, as pursued by the first government of the Second Spanish Republic.


The Republic’s counter-hegemonic vision came to guide Spain’s future away from its traditionalist, Catholic, monarchical and authoritarian path and into democracy, secularism, civil rights, culture and modernity, from *Hispanidad* to *Hispanitas*, as seen.\(^{509}\) Culture, understood in its broadest sense, spanning from schools to libraries, theatres, music halls or museums, would

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\(^{508}\) Monleón (1985: 40) and Sánchez Matas (1991: 65, n.8).

\(^{509}\) See Huertas Vázquez (1988: 14, 18-21) and Holguín (2003).
become the ideological and propagandistic battlefield on which the Republic would be consolidated, legitimated and victorious, as Marcelino Domingo, the first Minister of Instrucción Pública, would explain in 1934:

The instauration of democracy can be through violence, but its consolidation can only be through culture. Where culture is lacking, the democratic system is perverted, it becomes sterile, disfigured or falls, not due to pressure, but to internal consumption.\textsuperscript{510}

Culture was thus tightly identified by republicans with the Republic. The staging of Seneca’s Medea was both republican ritual and practice, as this chapter demonstrates. With it, as with many other projects and actions, the Republic came to redress the Monarchy’s neglect of the nation, as El Sur stated so clearly on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of June 1933:

The change of position with regards to this duty [the protection of culture] can be easily observed in the change from the Monarchy to a Republic. The last Spanish king chose the colony of Emerita Augusta, the Roman capital of the Peninsula’s west, to set up a butcher’s business. The Republic brought Margarita Xirgu and Enrique Borrás so they could set up a tragedy by Seneca, forgotten by the select few and unknown by the populace.

a) Republic of Intellectuals.

One of the extraordinary phenomena of the regime change was the active participation of distinctive intellectuals. An important section of the 1931 Constituent Parliament was formed by them.\textsuperscript{511} It was a Parliament, as Aubert mentions, ‘not even Plato would have dreamt of’.\textsuperscript{512}

These were men and—only three—women who had been participants in the national discussion of the problems of Spain ever since the decisive Disaster of 98 (see p. 82). Their commitment to reform was founded on a long experience of discussion and reflection on what ought to be

\textsuperscript{510} Domingo (1934: 159).
\textsuperscript{512} Aubert (1993: 58).
changed and proposed for the creation of a modern, democratic and free Spain. Fernando de los Ríos’ words, in Parliament on the 23rd of March 1932, serve as an acute summary of the principal reasons for the Republic’s commitment to cultural development and promotion:

And since Spain, in a latent manner, had been living, since 1898, in an ascensional crisis, which the men of the old regime did not see, its downfall and the arrival of this regime took place. And, in virtue of such a historical coincidence that has conditioned its birth, it [the Republic] has the following duty: to keep promoting what gave it an origin [culture] and lift Spain, so that it may climb to the heights that it must and can culturally climb up to. 513

Not all agreed with the active governmental participation of intellectuals. Gonzalo de Reparaz, in May 1933, complained about the inadequacy of intellectuals as diplomats.514 Interestingly, he uses Seneca as an example. Seneca was an ‘intellectual of the highest magnitude in the conquering Latinity and disturber of it with his inherited Iberism; professional virtuous (stoic), at the same time as he was an opulent banker, specialist in colonial businesses, in which his colossal fortune granted him great influence’, Reparaz explains. He was a capitalist, and, as such, he used the State for his own interest in expanding capitalist colonialism, as demonstrated by Seneca’s involvement in Boudicca’s 61 A.D. revolt in Britannia: ‘His greatest business was the exploitation of Britannia’, he tells us. This reading is probably based, either directly or indirectly, on Dio Cassius (LXII, 2).515 In Reparaz’s anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist reading, Rome’s militarist capitalism finished with Seneca and his misplaced talents. This would eliminate Rome itself eventually. ‘Rome was so. So are her daughters’, Reparaz declares. The lesson for the Spanish Republic is clear: do not entrust your fate to intellectuals. However anachronistic or incorrect Reparaz might have been—Seneca was a shrewd consul to Nero and

513 Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes de la Republica Española (23-3-1932, p. 4707). From now on this will be referred to as DSCCRE.
514 El Heraldo de Madrid (11-05-1933).
515 See Dio Cassius (1924: 82-83).
an active politician in his own right—this exemplifies the illustrative use of Seneca in contemporary Spain.

Many of the intellectuals who participated in the arrival and consolidation of the Republic had openly averred for decades that Spain’s problems of poverty, low productivity and isolation were based on ignorance and illiteracy:516 ‘the Spanish problem is a pedagogical problem’, Ortega y Gasset sentenced already in 1910.517 Therefore the solution had to be, forcibly, educational. This coincided, or was compatible with, many of the ideas on education defended by all the political groups that had opposed the Monarchy and aided, either actively or passively—as the anarchists had—in inaugurating the Republic.518

The first challenge the young Republic had to face was the 32% illiteracy rate it had inherited from the Dictatorship.519 The percentage was even greater in poorer areas, like Extremadura, the region that encircles Mérida, where it reached 49% in 1930, more than three times the percentage in Madrid, with a comparatively modest 14%.520 To this, the Republic had to add a sizeable population of unschooled children, reaching 80% in certain areas, according to the first Ministro de Instrucción Pública.521

To address such worrying statistics primary schooling was expanded and reformed throughout Spain. The idea was to create a secular educational system based on the experimentation with and experience of knowledge, with no distinctions of class or gender. After all, ‘School must convert the subjects of the Bourbon monarchy into citizens of the Spanish Republic’, Rodolfo

521 Domingo (1934: 158).
Llopis, director of Primary Schooling, claimed. The new republican school would be ‘the beginning of a selection that shall enable the development of intelligence to the summits of knowledge and power’ reads the 1931 decree on the training of teachers. The Second Spanish Republic needed to create its republican aristocracy, a concept used by Marcelino Domingo in the etymological sense of the word: rule by the best. This aristocracy would replace the monarchical oligarchy and help in the construction of the Republic:

The Spaniard, in cultivation of his own spirit, will be what he can and should be, and with the spiritual ascent of each Spaniard, Spain will rise historically, finally becoming what it has not been yet and what it is internally. Spain will be itself for the first time.

Schools and students were indeed present at the performance in Mérida. Juana Ontañón and Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco led excursions of their students to Mérida. The Xirgu-Borràs Company invited students from the Instituto de Jerez and from the Architecture School in Madrid (Figure 34). There was even a petition from the Instituto Nacional de Segunda Enseñanza in Badajoz, asking to be allotted a number of free seats for its students, and students arrived in Mérida from schools in Cáceres. According to Rivas Cherif a total of 11,000 students and workers had received free tickets to see Seneca’s Medea in 1933. The critic and stage director Alejandro Miquis agrees with the vision of a desired democratic aristocracy for the Republic in his review of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida:

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523 Gaceta de Madrid (30-09-1931).
525 Domingo (1932: 25).
526 La Voz (19-06-1933); Crónica (02-07-1933).
527 ‘Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. Sección 15. Fomento de las Bellas Artes. 1933’ (14-06-1933), in AGA, (05) 001.021, libro 42 top.32.101-00.103.
528 Región (19-06-1933).
529 Luc (22-09-1933); La Voz (23-09-1933); Crónica (05-11-1933). The Mayor of Mérida allegedly funded 50% of third class tickets for members of workers’ societies; see La Libertad (Badajoz) (22-06-1933).
But those who have a low concept, purely infantile, of the Republic, could think that performances of the type that has taken place now in Mérida are aristocratic festivals, but, if so, these must be an artistic aristocratism, to which the Republic must elevate all citizens.\footnote{Nuevo Mundo (30-06-33).}

The arrival of the Republic was living and celebratory proof of Medea’s own words in Seneca: ‘Unjust reigns never last forever’ (Sen. Med. 196).\footnote{See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 49).} Indeed, the reign of Alfonso XIII did not last forever. Perhaps such a background and the anti-tyrannical connotations of Medea’s words was what lurked behind Díaz Pérez describing Creusa as a ‘despotic princess’, in his review of the performance in Mérida.\footnote{La Voz (Córdoba) (21-06-1933).} Many had voiced wishes and convictions in the direction of Medea’s anti-tyrannical statement before the arrival of the Republic. Perhaps the most famous would be that written by José Ortega y Gasset in 1930, which would become one of the political battle-cries presaging the arrival of the Republic. In imitation of Cato the Elder’s—controversial— ‘Carthago delenda est’, Ortega y Gasset would write in November 1930: ‘Delenda est monarchia’.\footnote{El Sol (15-11-1930). For a brief context see Tusell and García Queipo de Llano (1990: 104-115) and Casanova (2010: 14).}

Two men in the audience, Unamuno and Rodrigo Soriano, had been exiled together for criticising the Monarchy and the Dictatorship. Creon’s banishment of the protesting and outspoken Medea must have impacted on them and the rest of the audience. After all, her strong will and verbal capacity, besides her witchcraft and murderous skills, of course, is what Creon fears, as the old regime in Spain feared free speech directed against it: ‘Just or not the king’s power you must obey’, says Creon (Sen. Med. 195).\footnote{See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 49).} That free speech is a concept to be found in Seneca’s Medea is, of course, debatable, but many passages could have been interpreted as such, given that Medea is able to confront authority face-to-face and is punished specifically for doing so:
CREON.[...] But she faces up to me fiercely; she strikes against my orders menacingly. Servants, let her not touch me or approach me. Make her be quiet and let her learn once and for all to bear authority. Leave swiftly and soon, horrible foul beast. Leave! (Sen. Med. 186-191).535

‘Great, imperishable [is] the memory of Mérida. [It is] The honour of art, the first milestone of a new national culture’, the inexhaustible republican Rodrigo Soriano enthusiastically claimed after watching Seneca’s Medea in Mérida.536 Indeed, the production of Seneca’s Medea came to respond to, develop and expand many of the structures, methods and goals of the new regime’s promotion of culture and theatre. The break from the old regime and the role culture played in this was most revealingly explained by Fernando de los Ríos at the première of Seneca’s Medea:

Mister de los Ríos believes that this cultural expansion, which the Monarchy never essayed, is the people’s best conquest. [...] I come, he says, to study the audience, I will extract from what I see their teachings, and this will prove to us whether we have advanced in our intention.537

b) Cultural dissemination.

The Republic created complements to primary schooling, in order to accelerate the growth in general and technical knowledge and compensate for the frugal basic education previous generations had received. The main method was the establishment of public libraries.538 Over two hundred libraries with three to five hundred volumes were established by the end of

536 Soriano in El Heraldo de Madrid (20-06-1933).
537 Región (19-06-1933).
They were often settled at local schools, with the intention of making them a centre of social activity. Complementary schooling was to aid in creating the pillars of a new nation, of a new Spain, as the reputed pedagogue and art historian, Manuel Bartolomé Cossío said in 1931:

Only when every Spaniard not only knows how to read—which is not enough—but is hungry for reading, enjoying themselves and yes, having fun, will there be a new Spain. That is why the Republic has begun to distribute books everywhere.

Libraries enjoyed great popularity in places. Juan Vicens tells us that by 17.15, a quarter of an hour after it opened, the library in Mérida was fully crowded. Due to the high demand, books in Mérida, where Seneca’s Medea was staged, were never on loan and users had to wait until someone left to take their place, ‘without knowing if they will have to read a book on Arithmetic or on the History of Spain’.

Many libraries sadly met with conservative or reactionary opposition, some even suffering various degrees of boycotting. This increased after the accession of the centre-right in 1933 and found its zenith after the outbreak of the Civil War, when librarians and library committee members were killed and the books burnt. This would be the end of an endeavour that wished to—and was on the path to—eradicate illiteracy and poor education.

A handicap was the isolation, both geographical and educational, of poverty-stricken rural areas. These often lacked basic modern commodities, such as electricity or running water, and harboured illnesses and problems long-eradicated in the cities. The principal republican tool for

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541 Patronato de las Misiones Pedagógicas (1934: 15), referenced as PMP from now onwards.
542 Vicens (2002: 45).
543 Vicens (2002: 46).
breaching cultural isolation was the Misiones Pedagógicas (Pedagogical Missions), ‘the optimal fruit, almost unique, of the endeavours of republican education and culture’, according to Juan Chabás.\(^{546}\) They were created in May 1931,\(^{547}\) to address ‘the painful and unquestionable existence of the abyss which in our spiritual life, even more than in our economic life, exists in our country between the city and the hamlet’, according to its president, Manuel Bartolomé Cossío.\(^{548}\)

This itinerant cultural centre, ‘a school of life and culture’, as Cossío would call it,\(^{549}\) was formed by groups of volunteers.\(^{550}\) When they arrived in a village, they told stories, showed movies, exhibited copies of masterpieces from the Prado Museum, gave lectures on hygiene and agriculture and played regional music recordings. 3,151 small libraries were established by Misiones in these villages by December 1933.\(^{551}\) They also instructed the villagers on their constitutional rights and the nature of the Republic and taught them about glorious national feats, with special attention to those which had a collective nature, ‘so people can become collaborators in the national progress and aid in the task of incorporating Spain within the group of most advanced countries’, as its foundational decree states.\(^{552}\) Misiones offered ‘a conversation about our rights and duties as citizens [...] for the people, that is, you, are the origin of all the powers’, Cossío himself asserted.\(^{553}\) The Misiones Pedagógicas thus intended to guarantee that all the citizens of the Republic enjoyed the same rights, opportunities and access to national culture and modernity, as Cossío explains:

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\(^{547}\) *Gaceta de Madrid* (30-05-1931); PMP (1934: 153-156).

\(^{548}\) Cossío in PMP (1934: ix).


\(^{552}\) See PMP (1934: 154) and Huertas Vázquez (1988: 129).

\(^{553}\) PMP (1934: 14).
There are no motives not to demand, for reasons of social justice, that at least a flash of the abundant spiritual lights that the cities enjoy so easily and comfortably, may arrive to the last corner of any hut, where obscurity has its seat.\textsuperscript{554}

Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, in contrast, was an ancient tragedy. It was not adapted to rural audiences and lacked a pedagogical introduction. It was professional, not amateur. Its funding came from an \textit{ad hoc} decree. It was not part of a systematic project lasting years with a clear objective. A body meant to administer it was not formed. However republican its context, intentions and funding, \textit{Medea}, at first glance, does not seem capable of forming part of the Republic’s sustained cultural and educational efforts.

Yet \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} and \textit{Sparta} inform their readers: ‘This extraordinary representation is part of the artistic endeavours that the Republic intends to develop in order to spread classical culture’.\textsuperscript{555} That this was a formal governmental intention is unknown to me. Nevertheless, the creation of the institutional academic journal \textit{Emerita}, whose first issue appeared in 1933, introduced by a complaint about the state of Classical Philology in Spain at the time, penned by its founder, Menéndez Pidal,\textsuperscript{556} the establishment of a Classical Studies Section at the Centro de Estudios Históricos in Madrid and an academic cruise around the Mediterranean in the summer of 1933 may point in this direction.\textsuperscript{557} What is here interesting is that ‘to spread classical culture’ was the alleged intention.

The publicity poster for the 1933 performance, places Seneca’s \textit{Medea} within a ‘Cycle of cultural expansion’. Honouring this intention, it was not premiered in the cultural centres of Madrid or Brcelona. It was premiered in Mérida, in Extremadura, as explicitly mentioned in its funding decree alongside Sagunto, a town whose difficult socio-economic circumstances might

\textsuperscript{554} PMP (1934: ix).
\textsuperscript{555} \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (10-04-1933); \textit{Sparta} (15-04-1933).
\textsuperscript{556} \textit{Emerita: Boletín de Lingüística y Filología Clásica} (1933). See also Varela (1993: 239).
\textsuperscript{557} See Alonso del Real, Marias and Granell (1934).
have been the reason to cancel the performance of Medea there. It is undoubtedly true that the choice of Mérida may respond to Xirgu’s already existing preference (see p.65), and that it had further historical and cultural significance. But these two aspects are compatible with the socio-economic isolation Extremadura suffered and, therefore, with the coincidence that staging Medea in Mérida had with the Republic’s own cultural and educational intentions. In the same way that schools promoted secular and civic education, libraries brought knowledge, literature and technical formation to children and adults, and the Misiones Pedagógicas exposed rural citizens to ‘diffuse culture’, so also did Seneca’s Medea bring a theatrical production of international standard and a vindication of republican Hispanitas to isolated Extremadura. The people of Extremadura, as full citizens of the Second Spanish Republic, had every right to enjoy and participate in it, even making Mérida a cultural centre in its own right, as the Extremaduran newspaper Región proudly stated:

As a whole, the celebration in Mérida is an honour for Extremadura, and places it at a truly fortunate level of culture.

The staging of Seneca’s Medea also went a step further in breaching the cultural and geographical gap. It went beyond the unidirectional cultural flow of the Misiones Pedagógicas or the libraries, which sent culture from the cultural centres to rural areas. In attracting many learned people from the cities to Mérida, Seneca’s Medea created a bidirectional cultural flow between the centres of culture and rural areas, which followed the spirit of uniting the citizens of Spain, rural and urban, through culture. We must not forget that the film of Seneca’s Medea was also shown in cinemas, including in Ciudad Real, and that its performance was broadcast by Unión Radio, thus spreading the performance even further (see p. 55). The rural citizens in

558 Gaceta de Madrid (22-05-1933). See also El Sol (24-05-1933, 07-07-1933); La Voz (23-05-1933, 27-07-1933); Luz (01-07-1933, 27-07-1933); La Libertad (02-07-1933, 28-07-1933); ABC (05-07-1933, 06-07-1933); Gracia y Justicia (15-07-1933); El Siglo Futuro (28-07-1933). The Ministry’s registry alludes to the need for construction in Sagunto as a reason to discard it; see ‘Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes. Sección 15. Fomento de las Bellas Artes. 1933’, in AGA, (05) 001.021, libro 42 top.32.101-00.103.

559 Región (19-06-1933).
Mérida would enjoy a play of great theatrical calibre and the learned tourists from the cities could discover not only one of Spain’s most neglected regions, but also much of the rural countryside on their way. This is clearly voiced by the renowned critic Melchor Fernández Almagro in his review of Seneca’s *Medea*. Note that in the following words he uses the terms *learning, instructive or pedagogy* and echoes the idea of *Hispanitas* and of the resurrection of the Seneca Hispanicus (see Chapter II):

If performed in Madrid [...] we would have missed the lesson of an instructive displacement. Physical discomforts aside, what an incomparable pedagogy the bus offers! [...] We have checked of course the usual landscape ingredients [...]. But we have also seen the spirit of Spain in the ghost of the conquistadores, that awaited us—before ‘Medea’—in the dark land of Extremadura, mostly in Trujillo, made of granite and ivy; and in Mérida, of course, as Roman as it is Christian; a little Arabic as well. So purely Spanish. An altar was beating here, a Visigothic pillar there, we do not know what reminiscences of Moors we found in this or that Andalusian-style patio. In age-old Mérida, Seneca appeared to us, not as one of those relics that instil respect or curiosity, but as a source of current emotion, as one of the moral honours of our race.560

c) *Itinerant theatre.*

The main efforts in subsidised theatre projects were also to be framed within the broader tendency of complementary cultural schooling, already under Marcelino Domingo. Theatre was a further means of exposing the nation to culture, and therefore breach the cultural gap between cities and rural areas, promoting a sense of republican citizenship.

This is seen in the creation of the Teatro del Pueblo (Theatre of the People), as an integral pedagogical complement to the Misiones Pedagógicas. In four years, the itinerant Teatro del

Pueblo gave nearly three hundred performances. It staged mainly short comedic works from the Spanish Golden Age, and its second director, Alejandro Casona, also adapted an episode from *Don Quijote: Sancho Panza en la Ínsula*. The Teatro del Pueblo would become a complementary tool in the republican endeavour of national, democratic and civic unity and education, as the famed critic Díez-Canedo explained: ‘This is not theatre, it is true; it is popular education by means of theatre. The purpose is to create an audience for the future’.

Many leading intellectuals such as Unamuno, Antonio Machado, Menéndez Pidal and even Lenormand himself watched and admired the Teatro del Pueblo’s work. Due to the difficulties of travelling to some remote places, local Teatros del Pueblo were created after 1933 in several provinces. As a cheap and easy alternative, the Misiones Pedagógicas also created a Puppet Theatre, which first performed in October 1933. Also, some of the plays performed by the Teatro del Pueblo were performed at Rivas Cherif’s own Teatro Escuela del Arte. It is self-evident that the project of the Teatro del Pueblo was a success in both consolidating and complementing the efforts made by the Misiones Pedagógicas and in convincing many renowned republicans, intellectuals and theatre makers—including some of the people responsible for *Medea*’s staging—of its intrinsic worth.

The other project of similar characteristics but of higher aesthetic ambition was Federico García Lorca’s La Barraca. Also an itinerant theatre company, it too staged Golden Age plays. It first performed on the 10th of July 1932, at Burgo de Osma. It received a governmental grant of 100,000 pesetas in February 1932, and a further 50,000 in October 1934. Many leading

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563 Díez-Canedo (1938: 316).
564 See Rey Faraldos (1992: 156-158).
565 Rey Faraldos (1992: 159).
566 Rey Faraldos (1992: 159-161).
569 *Gaceta de Madrid* (14-10-1934).
intellectuals and artists collaborated with La Barraca and its permanent team was formed by a
group of university students.\textsuperscript{570} It also had similar educational and cultural purposes to those of
the Teatro del Pueblo.\textsuperscript{571} In addition, La Barraca intended to reform theatre as a whole, which
Lorca described in an interview as ‘a theatre made by swine and for swine’.\textsuperscript{572} This purpose
would be made effective, in a similar line to the Misiones Pedagógicas, by returning to the
people its theatre as they once knew it.\textsuperscript{573} With La Barraca, which performed in a total of 64
towns,\textsuperscript{574} Lorca would bring theatre and its moral teachings to the very centre of popular life, far
from swinish bourgeois theatres, as he himself explained in March 1932:

We believe we can do our part in our beloved Republic’s great ideal of educating the
people, by restoring their own theatre. We shall bring Good and Evil, God and Faith to
the villages of Spain […], we shall make them perform their roles in the ancient Roman
theatre in Mérida, in la Alhambra, in the public squares of Spain, which are the centre of
popular life.\textsuperscript{575}

Although Lorca ultimately did not perform in the Roman Theatre in Mérida, his close friends
and colleagues Margarita Xirgu and Rivas Cherif did stage Medea there in 1933. Perhaps
Lorca’s words, and their timing, demonstrate an ongoing conversation about the interest in, or
the convenience, implications and viability of staging a play in the Roman Theatre. There is
simply no conclusive evidence. But the coincidence is somewhat telling. That Lorca would
name the Roman Theatre as one of the most important public spaces, a ‘centre of popular life’,
on which to expose a theatre of the people to the people, demonstrates that the production of
Seneca’s Medea should also be read as part of the phenomenon evidenced by the Teatro del

\textsuperscript{570} Diez-Canedo (1938: 315); Byrd (1975); Sáenz de la Calzada in Byrd (1984: 114-117); Sáenz de la
Calzada (1976); Aguilera Sastre (2002: 236); Holguin (2003: 117-118); Dougherty and Anderson (2012:
306-307).

\textsuperscript{571} See Lorca in El Sol (02-12-1931), quoted in Aguilera Sastre (2002: 236) and García Lorca (1996:
389).

\textsuperscript{572} La Mañana de León (August 1933) quoted in Calvo Serraller, González García and Rocha (1975: 35).

\textsuperscript{573} Calvo Serraller, González García and Rocha (1975: 30); Holguin (2003: 116).

\textsuperscript{574} Sáenz de la Calzada in Byrd (1984: 127); Holguin (2003: 134).

\textsuperscript{575} Lorca to Mildred Adams, in García Lorca (1996: III, 390)
Pueblo and La Barraca, as the correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* in Madrid did after the performances at the Royal Palace:

The success which has attended the visits of the travelling student players in their performances of Spanish classical dramas in remote villages has been fully equalled in the interest shown in this performance of Unamuno’s ‘Medea’ by the town workers.  

2. Theatre, the national religion.

a) A National Theatre.

Besides the Teatro del Pueblo and La Barraca, the Republic’s commitment to the stage was most directly seen in the creation of the National Council for Music and Lyric Theatre in July 1931. It was an attempt at protecting an ailing sector of an already precarious theatrical scene, which was sadly not fully realised due to internal organisational and funding problems, aggravated after the accession of the centre-right government in November 1933.

This National Council was only a partial response to the broader demand for a National Theatre that had arisen already in the 1920s. When the budget for Instrucción Pública was being defended in Parliament, on the 23rd of March 1932, by the second Ministro de Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, he lamented that Spanish dramatic theatre had not been added to State protection. On the 24th of March, the MP Rey Mora, whose plea to protect the theatre the Minister had acknowledged, urged Fernando de los Ríos, once more, in this direction:

If the Spanish State does not allocate in its budget an amount to remedy the misery in which it lies, if the Spanish State does not officially support our dramatic theatre,

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579 On the history of the Spanish National Theatre see Aguilera Sastre (2002).
Spanish theatre will have to close it all. […] Not only does the Spanish State not allocate any money for the dramatic theatre, but it increases, in addition, in five per cent […] the contribution of these theatres. […] Minister, the allocation of spending to finance the dramatic theatre is more urgent than supporting the lyric theatre. […] The Honourable Member said one afternoon […] that theatre created better citizens than the greatest of textbooks. This is the time, Minister, to demonstrate it.\textsuperscript{581}

In his reply, the Minister acknowledged such a precarious situation, alongside the need, and his intention, to create a broader protection for all the national theatre:

Believe it when I say that even though there is not a budget allocation at this time to this end, my efforts will not diminish, be it in my insistence on requiring a special treatment for the Spanish dramatic theatre, as it deserves, from the Finance Minister, or because I am able to find, at the appropriate moment, the way to create a national dramatic theatre, as an institution guarded by the State, in a similar way as the Lyric Theatre emerges today.\textsuperscript{582}

This commitment seems to have been a broader ministerial, and therefore governmental, desire, since his predecessor Domingo added dramatic theatre to the unfulfilled projects of his time in Instrucción Pública.\textsuperscript{583} Although such a National Theatre did not find its completion by 1933, de los Ríos’ assurances that efforts had been made and were going to be made in that direction are intriguing. It is unclear what these efforts were specifically, but I am inclined to suspect they are linked to Seneca’s Medea.\textsuperscript{584}

Seneca’s Medea was publicly funded with 50,000 pesetas and backed by the republican government, with Fernando de los Ríos as promoter (see p. 69). In comparison, La Barraca,

\textsuperscript{581} DSCCRE (24-04-1932, p. 4756-4757).
\textsuperscript{582} DSCCRE (24-04-1932, p. 4758).
\textsuperscript{583} Domingo (1934: 170).
\textsuperscript{584} I believe this link is what is alluded to in Sparta (06-05-1933).
with a vast itinerant programme and multiple productions, received from the government 150,000 pesetas in two instalments by October 1934 (see pp. 151-152), only three times as much as the single production of Seneca’s Medea. In turn, the Teatro del Pueblo spent a total of 71,717 pesetas between 1931 and 1933.\(^{585}\) Medea’s 50,000 pesetas were half the amount of money the influential theatre critic and stage director Alejandro Miquis had demanded to subsidise Spanish dramatic theatre, matching the amount allocated to the National Lyric Theatre.\(^{586}\) Medea’s funding decree mentions a total spending of 90,000 pesetas, ten thousand less than Miquis demanded or was first given to La Barraca or to the National Lyric Theatre. The remaining grant was destined for Joaquín Varela’s ‘Experimental Company’ and to Ricardo Calvo for a season of Romantic and Classic Spanish Theatre. Seneca’s Medea was therefore funded with more than 50% of the total budget allocated under Fernando de los Ríos to the explicit ‘renovation of the national theatre’, as the decree reads.\(^{587}\)

The Teatro Español was, at the time of the Minister’s remarks, under concession to the Xirgu-Borràs Company, the producers of Seneca’s Medea. The MP Rey Mora had complained about the taxes charged to an already ailing industry, as did many before him, including the critic and stage director Ricardo Baeza in 1927.\(^{588}\) Coincidentally, the Teatro Español was made exempt from paying taxes on the 22\(^{nd}\) of March 1932, a day before the defence of the budget.\(^{589}\)

The Teatro del Pueblo and La Barraca were not part of a systematic creation of an official National Theatre, as Aguilera Sastre rightly points out.\(^{590}\) But these two projects were partially concerned with the idea of a State-supported national theatre, as Rivas Cherif explains.\(^{591}\) They

\(^{585}\) See PMP (1934: 147).
\(^{587}\) Gaceta de Madrid (22-05-1933). Other republican theatrical funding was destined to institutions, such as the National Lyric Theatre or the María Guerrero Theatre, or varied programmes for major celebrations.
\(^{591}\) Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158). See also Sánchez Matas (1991: 68) and González-Vázquez (2015).
are also both mentioned alongside Seneca’s *Medea* as part of a broader effort destined to renovate national theatre, in *Medea*’s funding decree: ‘In conjunction with the action realised by the Misiones Pedagógicas and La Barraca, the Ministry intends to internally and plastically rejuvenate the Spanish stage’.  

The dates of the genesis of Seneca’s *Medea* are also revealing of its central position in the project of a National Theatre. The Minister originally spoke about the possibility of staging a tragedy in Mérida with Xirgu at the première of Goethe’s *Clavigo*, on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March 1932, the day the Teatro Español would become exempt from paying taxes (see pp. 65-66). The parliamentary debate on the Ministry’s budget in which de los Ríos assured the chamber of his intentions to create a National Dramatic Theatre, took place only two days later, on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of March. At a banquet to publicly present the National Lyric Theatre, on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of April 1932, the Minister assured the playwright Eduardo Marquina, who had complained about the lack of protection for Spanish dramatic theatre, that efforts would be made.  

Three months after the banquet, on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of July 1932, Fernando de los Ríos spoke to *El Sol* about the Republic’s project to see ‘the creation of a national dramatic theatre, even using to this end the classical stages at Mérida and Sagunto for Greek and Roman tragedy’. Five months after the interview, he commented on the neglect Seneca had suffered as a dramatist to Unamuno in December 1932, precisely at the Teatro Español (see p. 65). The timing of these five steps reveals a suggestive causal connection between the project of staging Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida and the efforts made by the Minister with regards to an eventual creation of a National Theatre.

The interview with *El Sol* the Minister gave in July 1932 offers even more clues in this direction. The Minister explicitly mentions Greek and Roman tragedy to be staged in Mérida and Sagunto, in connection with the creation of a National Theatre. *Medea* would finally be staged in Mérida only. The idea of staging a play in the Roman Theatre in Mérida was very probably discussed in the March 1932 meeting with Xirgu. Furthermore, *Medea* would be later

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592 *Gaceta de Madrid* (22-05-1933).
593 Aguilera Sastre (2002: 244-245).
also programmed to be staged in Sagunto according to its funding decree. The place in which to potentially perform *Medea* was therefore already clear in the Minister’s mind ten months before it was officially confirmed by decree on the 22nd of May 1933. It is also notable that the Minister would mention Roman tragedy, whose only extant example is Seneca, five months before the Minister discussed with Unamuno the necessity of vindicating Seneca as a dramatist. The Minister probably had Seneca and Mérida in mind since March 1932 and all through his assurances that governmental protection was imminent. Seneca’s *Medea* would be the realisation of such assurances. The Minister’s words in March 1933 confirm this, after he mentions, in the same interview, his efforts to create a National Theatre. Theatrical renovation, revitalisation of tragedy and national aesthetic improvement, all ideas behind Fernando de los Ríos’ ministerial agenda, are united by Seneca’s *Medea* in the Minister’s answer:

> The intention is to stimulate the renovation of the Spanish stage, to give assistance in order to make certain novelties: the vitalisation of classic tragedy —it is Unamuno, who, through a direct translation of Seneca’s *Medea*, will allow us to organise spectacles which are to have great resonance in our aesthetic world.\(^{594}\)

It is thus not surprising that the satirical opposition newspaper *Gracia y Justicia* would call *Medea*, ‘mister Fernando de los Ríos’ masterpiece!’\(^{595}\) The newspaper *La Voz*, in its critique of the première of *Medea* in Mérida, believed that the 18th of June 1933 was a day of theatrical celebration, ‘which the Republic will have to mark in the celebrations of the resurrection of the National Theatre’.\(^{596}\) *Sparta* acknowledged the importance of Seneca’s *Medea* as a rehearsal for a future National Theatre, although it wished to see more done in its full development, revealing the importance of the Xirgu-Borràs Company in the whole endeavour:

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594 *El Heraldo de Madrid* (30-03-1933).
595 *Gracia y Justicia* (10-06-1933). Arrarás, in his slanderous *Memorias Intimas de Azaña*, counts *Medea* as one of the whims of Fernando de los Ríos as Minister; see Arrarás (1939: 124).
The performance of “Medea” deserves praise. This must be repeated. It is a work of culture. What may not be so fair is that only the initiatives of certain people deserve acceptance. That certain artists receive everything while others nothing is a principle of injustice and inequality. But Mérida’s act should not be isolated. It brings prestige. It is good propaganda.  

Seneca’s Medea opened the 1933-1934 season at the Teatro Español, which was to showcase a selection of classic and contemporary pieces in the Spanish dramatic tradition. Two authors were Golden Age dramatists, Calderón and Rojas Zorrilla, a popular choice for the age and in republican circles, as shown. We also find works by Casona, director of the Teatro del Pueblo, and Unamuno. Although Yerma by Lorca would not be staged until December 1934, the intention was to stage the play by the director of La Barraca in this season. Seneca’s Medea thus stood alongside much of the aesthetic and theatrical preferences of the Republic. This national season also fitted the assumed purpose of a National Theatre. There would be one institution, the Teatro Español, aided financially by the State through tax-exemption and the funding of Medea, which would support and exhibit works by national playwrights old and new, in order to show Spain’s theatrical pedigree and stamina. It was the realisation that ‘The [Teatro] Español has served as the National Theatre’ as the renowned critic Enrique Diez-Canedo would claim at the end of the 1930s. The national season executed at the Teatro Español by the Xirgu-Borrás company, spearheaded by Seneca’s Medea in Mérida and Madrid, might have been a rehearsal for a broader National Theatre project. In fact, Rivas Cherif’s words to Luz in August 1933 as artistic director of the Teatro Español strongly suggest this reading:

597 Sparta (08-07-1933)
598 Luz (05-04-1933); La Voz (06-04-1933); Crónica (02-07-1933). See also Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 184-185).
599 Crónica (05-11-1933); Luz (22-09-1933).
601 On Xirgu’s opinion about the objectives of a National Theatre see Alberdi (1998: 124-125).
If all this programme, so overflowing with fortunate and excellent initiatives, is fulfilled, and there is no reason to doubt that this will be so, our municipal theatre will be this year, with all its dignity, the true Teatro Español [Spanish Theatre].

Less than six months after Seneca’s Medea, the María Guerrero Theatre was put under state control by decree in December 1933. ‘The government laid the real foundation for the creation of a true National Theatre, although it did not give it this name’, according to Aguilera Sastre. Rivas Cherif, Medea’s stage director, was appointed governmental delegate, the de facto director, on the 5th of December 1933. He had already been chosen as artistic director of the National Lyric Theatre until his resignation in October 1932, and as deputy director of the National Conservatoire in May 1933. Not surprisingly he was the one ‘who probably presented most clearly and precisely the terms of the debate’ on the creation of a National Theatre, according to Aguilera Sastre. Rivas Cherif would continue as delegate in the María Guerrero Theatre until 1935, being replaced by the impresario Luis París. Rivas Cherif’s dreams of developing a National Theatre were therefore frustrated, and he had to leave both the María Guerrero Theatre and the Teatro Español, due to mounting political pressure, after the accession of the centre-right in November 1933. Nevertheless, Rivas Cherif had become the person most closely resembling a director of Spain’s National Theatre by 1933, precisely in the aftermath of his own staging of Seneca’s Medea, as artistic director of the Teatro Español and delegate at the María Guerrero Theatre.

Despite Medea’s important role in the endeavour, the desired National Theatre of the Second Spanish Republic would regrettably remain unrealised. There was a timid attempt to join

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602 Luz (22-09-1933), See also Rivas Cherif (1991: 67).
603 Gaceta de Madrid (05-12-1933).
606 See Aguilera Sastre (2002: 244-247) and García Ruiz (2010: 45).
dramatic and lyric theatre under the centre-right government, which in fact made all theatrical efforts wilt.\textsuperscript{610} In the Civil War, the republican government finally created the Central Theatre Council, which had as councillors, unsurprisingly, two members of the team at the Teatro Español and creators of \textit{Medea}, Xirgu and Rivas Cherif.\textsuperscript{611} The 1933 production of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} lay at the centre of many cultural and political efforts made by the first republican government to establish a protected Spanish National Theatre.

b) \textbf{Theatre and the new regime.}

The theatrical decadence of the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century had been associated with the overall national decadence suffered at the time.\textsuperscript{612} ‘It is necessary for our governments to realise the transcendence of theatre within the cultural and social life of the country’, Ricardo Baeza wrote in 1927.\textsuperscript{613} This meant that the dramatic avant-garde, and theatre in general, could aid in realising many of the progressive and reformist demands within Spanish society. This was one of the reasons and goals underlying the republican promotion of theatre.

Luis Araquistáín (an influential socialist, intellectual and theatre connoisseur) distinguished between comedy and tragedy as genres that channelled the energy of opposite political regimes in his \textit{La batalla teatral} (1930). In his broader critique of bourgeois comedy as the catalyst of the old regime’s decadence, he signals Golden Age drama and tragedy as the genres of a new society, of a new regime.\textsuperscript{614} This is not dissimilar to the call for a \textit{tragedia desnuda} Unamuno made already in 1918 (see pp. 119-120). That Araquistáín would associate drama and tragedy with the new, later republican, regime may reveal some of the underlying reasons for choosing

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\textsuperscript{613} El Sol (22-01-1927), quoted in Aguilera Sastre (2002: 196).
\textsuperscript{614} Sender also exposes a similar reading, although his solution comes from the establishment of a revolutionary, political and documentary theatre as that of Piscator; see Sender (1931).
\end{flushright}
Seneca’s *Medea* as a play to showcase the Second Spanish Republic, as emerges from Chabás’ words in May 1933:

It is worth highlighting now the value of this [show] as an exemplary sample of the policy of the current Minister of Instrucción Pública towards the greater prestige of theatrical art. Surely the performances of ‘Medea’ will be the beginning of a series of similar shows that will give the art of classical theatre in Spain the importance and hierarchy that it does not have now, which it achieves in any cultured country.

That tragedy is a deeper, more enriching and reflective genre, better suited for the humanistic and intellectual Second Spanish Republic, is what ultimately transpires in an article of *El Socialista* in May 1933. The socialist publication believes that *Medea* at once condenses Seneca’s Spanish predilection for artistic illustrations of intellectual ideas, following Fernando de los Ríos’ theory of Spanish ‘ethics through aesthetics’ explained below, with the spirit of a republican regime of arts and letters:

Drama in Seneca is his philosophy. There are few things of such profound action and of such dramatic value as senequist philosophy itself. It has been said of the philosopher from Córdoba that he had sensed Christ. Naturally, Christians have said this. What is obvious is that Seneca derives his doctrine from human nature itself. The exaltation of man purifying himself in pain, is nothing but Seneca. There is no reason to look for analogies. The human essence becomes virtue; but by worshiping all the sources of life, without rejecting any. This is tragedy. But is ‘Medea’ like this? ‘Medea’ is a detail of the philosopher, and a problem raised in the midst of life, with full grandiosity.

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615 Araquistáin (1930: 26).
616 Luz (15-05-1933).
617 *El Socialista* (24-05-1933).
The second Minister of Instrucción Pública, Fernando de los Ríos, focused on the next step in the development of the cultural reforms, namely higher education and aesthetic improvement. The Minister developed the means to reach Marcelino Domingo’s republican aristocracy (aristarchy as de los Ríos terms it) beyond basic education. He had developed this idea since 1925: ‘It is in sensitivity, even more than in knowledge, where the root of culture is to be found, in our judgment; hence the insuperable value of aesthetics and the admirable function of artists in a republic’. Fernando de los Ríos identifies the use of aesthetics to reach ethical knowledge as a specifically Spanish mechanism, and therefore a necessary tool in creating a republican society. The Minister would express this idea in early March 1932, a crucial month for the genesis of the production of Seneca’s Medea:

I believe that there is in Spain, as there was in Greece, a great ability to reach ethics through aesthetics. Because of this, I believe it is our duty to care for that pure spring of emotions that has such transcendence in individual life and in our collective life. [...] The Spanish Republic has the intention of bringing relevance to this sense of our History; it has the intention of channelling, of strengthening the value of those two emotions that condition all the history of our culture, but without letting that historical value eventually diminish or decline in the slightest the creative potency, the thirst for rejuvenation our country feels.

c) Republican unity.

The staging of Seneca’s Medea was not only breaching the cultural gap between the city and the rural areas, but also returning to an intrinsically Spanish intra-historical audience a play by an

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618 *El Sol* (24-07-1926); see de los Ríos (1997: IV, 292).
619 *El Socialista* (22-12-1925); see de los Ríos (1997: IV, 391).
621 *El Socialista* (01-03-1932). The Minister would repeat this idea precisely in the interview in which he first mentioned the possibility of using Mérida or Sagunto for the benefit of a National Theatre; see *El Sol* (24-07-1933).
intrinsic Spanish dramaturge, Seneca (see pp. 98-115). Soriano lyrically informs us of the impact Seneca’s *Medea* had on the rural audience:

>[The] people did not wear togas, nor sandals, or slave cloaks, or plebeian tunics; but its heart vibrated as in the days of Rome before the fury of Medea […] The people, unaware of history, of classicism, of academic pedantry, melded its soul yesterday in the amphitheatre of Mérida [sic] with the popular soul of Rome, with the Roman people; it shared its eternal pains, its fury, its redeeming yearnings, with the Roman actors.⁶²²

This romantic vision of the people as unadulterated audience and essence of Spain is best seen in the words of Luis Sáenz de la Calzada, member of La Barraca:

The rural folk had a profound respect for our theatre; obscurely within the roots of their primary nervous connections the links between art and religion were perhaps bound together. They attended the performances of La Barraca as if they were in mass and they realised that what we said on stage was directed to them, to them and to their hands full of calluses and their tired muscles.⁶²³

The Misiones Pedagógicas also insisted that the rural folk was an audience akin to the original audience of the Golden Age plays they performed:

It is directed to an audience analogous in taste, sensibility, emotional reaction and language, to the audience of the old corralas, the humble people of villages and hamlets.⁶²⁴

The similarities between Rodrigo’s enthusiasm, Sáenz de la Calzada’s observation, the Teatro del Pueblos’ own and Unamuno’s words on the rural folk in attendance in Mérida (see pp. 134-

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⁶²² Soriano in *El Heraldo de Madrid* (20-06-1933).
⁶²³ Sáenz de la Calzada (1976: 24-25).
⁶²⁴ PMP (1934: 94).
136), are striking. ‘The depths of their souls’ which Unamuno underlined,\textsuperscript{625} and ‘the roots of their primary nervous connections’ in Sáenz de la Calzada’s words, are what makes the rural folk the \textit{longue durée} of Spanish culture, as Holguín describes it.\textsuperscript{626} Indeed, many theatre reformers believed that the uncultured peoples of Spain were the ideal audience of a new theatre, unadulterated by conventional drama,\textsuperscript{627} as did Chabás, Rivas Cherif or Prat with regards to Seneca’s \textit{Medea}.\textsuperscript{628} This discourse is directly connected with its republican formulation by Azaña, who saw, in March 1932, in the humble people of Spain a ‘treasure of prudence, of serenity, of good political philosophy, of profound knowledge about life’.\textsuperscript{629}

This trans-historical unity of Spanish culture, of the original creation with its original audience is connected with the development of the progressive cultural continuum in \textit{Hispanitas}, as explained in the previous chapter (see pp. 122-133). Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida brought forward all these elements, as had the Teatro del Pueblo and La Barraca, to create a trans-historical communion between the unaltered creations of Spanish history and its intra-historical unadulterated audience, in order to create a sense of belonging to a greater national and historical community. After all, according to Fernández Almagro, ‘the Cordobés wrote a tragic poem that any Spaniard of today feels deeply inside himself’.\textsuperscript{630} This idea is most adamantly defended by \textit{El Socialista}, echoing De los Ríos theory of ‘ethics through aesthetics’:

The performance of ‘Medea’, aside from its artistic value, but precisely because of it, has the enormous transcendence of returning Seneca to us. Returning him to us in his purity and integrity. This is what we owe to Unamuno today. The convincing value of this classical performance, with the success of Xirgu and Borrás, lies in the possibility

\textsuperscript{625} Unamuno in \textit{Ahora} (22-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{626} Holguín (2003: 111).
\textsuperscript{630} Fernández Almagro in \textit{El Sol} (21-06-1933).
that the general public can understand Seneca perfectly. Challenge achieved. Its value is that we can recognise ourselves: find our moral value at the bottom of our character, and deduce from human emotion, from our own, Spanish [emotion], the orientation of our behaviour and the truth of our path.  

Classical Spanish theatre played a central role in establishing national republican unity. They searched in old forms the way of re-establishing that unity and of putting the nation again in contact with its past, therefore settling the basis for the construction of its future’, Holguin explains. This intention was shared by contemporary European ancient drama festivals, as Michelakis points out. This unifying intention is defended by El Sol in a short article on La Barraca six months after the première of Medea:

Theatre is, without doubt, one of the best ways to give unity to a mass, to a people. A theatrical performance, worthy of such a name, contributes more, and to a different extent, to the creation of a common consciousness than many rallies.

In this pursuit of republican civic unity, in ‘the creation of a common consciousness’, the production of Seneca’s Medea is revealed not only as ideologically and programmatically republican, but also, in a way, formally republican, as the newspaper Región from Cáceres, Extremadura, rather enthusiastically observed:

The view of the seats was truly moving. Having the popular element been mixed with the middle and higher classes, one could observe the great fraternity— such is the

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631 El Socialista (20-06-1933).
634 Michelakis (2010a: 150).
purpose of the Republic—amongst all the elements that conform municipal life. [...] 

[T]his republican display [Seneca’s Medea] has constituted a true civic conquest.636

Contemporary avant-garde theatre pursued a similar end by breaking the separation between stage and audience established by the proscenium arch. This, both conceptually and physically, opened theatre to the assembled mass of the audience. This performative activation of the audience was to mirror many of the political ideas of its time. As Fischer-Lichte explores, Reinhardt’s Theatre of Five Thousand and Evreinov’s production of The Storming of the Winter’s Palace (1920) demonstrate this,637 in two ways which, merged, are lurking behind the political, and also theatrical, intentions of staging Seneca’s Medea.

Reinhardt’s work at the Grosse Schauspielhaus would be described in 1919 as a theatre that gathered an audience ‘that came of all classes’ establishing a ‘people’s assembly’ as ‘theatre for everyone’.638 Coincidently, de los Ríos sent Rivas Cherif to Berlin to meet Reinhardt in March 1933.639 The instigator was the then Spanish Ambassador in Germany, Luis de Araquistáin, defender of tragedy as the genre of the new regime, as seen above. Araquistáin thought it appropriate to produce an example of theatre of masses in republican Spain. Reinhardt unfortunately declined the invitation. Nevertheless, to assemble and unify all citizens of the Republic in an act of communal theatre was undoubtedly part of the intentions of a broader theatrical agenda and was behind staging Seneca’s Medea in 1933, as the words by Región, above, exemplify.

Fischer-Lichte argues that The Storming of the Winter’s Palace (1920) in Petrograd served to establish political unity by reliving a foundational event of Soviet Russia in the precise place of

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636 Región (19-06-1933).
its occurrence.\textsuperscript{640} To relive the revolution helps to keep the revolution alive, seems to be the intention, or the effect, of this production. Similarly, the performance of the Spaniard Seneca’s 

Medea at one of Spain’s oldest Roman places, Mérida, in a republican context, establishes a reliving of trans-historical Hispanitas with the intention, or the result, of breathing life into the republican nation through its republican citizens of all classes.

Interestingly, bullfighting and bullrings played a role in this communal conception of theatre for the creators of Seneca’s Medea, coinciding with the popular connections established by the press (see pp. 63-64 and 113-114).\textsuperscript{641} Xirgu herself expressly wanted to promote ‘performances which, like the fiesta of the bullfight, would congregate large multitudes and move them. Day by day she was convinced that theatre did not have to be an art exclusively for minorities, but also popular’, according to Guansé.\textsuperscript{642} This idea would reignite in Xirgu when she saw the Roman Theatre in Mérida: ‘Her old enthusiasm for Greek tragedies stirred inside her, and the delight she had entrusted herself with at the bullrings was reborn, to be deliriously applauded by an audience transported by beauty’, Guansé explains.\textsuperscript{643} She was finally able to perform Seneca’s Medea in a bullring in Bogotá, Colombia, in December 1936 (Figure 70). Her desire is intimately related to the spiritual communion Rivas Cherif believed the essence of theatre was: ‘Theatre is a fiesta of the spirit; a fiesta that must need the concurrence of an audience. All the more participative [the audience is] in it, the more [it is] in communication with the stage and the venue’.\textsuperscript{644} That the term fiesta is also traditionally used to describe bullfights must not go here unnoticed. Rivas Cherif acknowledged the collective power of the bullring as a space and alluded to Seneca’s Medea as an attempt to recreate it in 1945:

\textsuperscript{640} Fischer-Lichte (2000: 86). A similar example is the performance of The Mystery of Freed Labour (1920), with Spartacus’ revolt as the first stage, before the Moscow Stock Exchange; see Hall (2013: 305-306).

\textsuperscript{641} This is also a vision expressed by the contemporary writer Ramón J. Sender; see Sender (1931: 15-29).

\textsuperscript{642} Guansé (1963: 44). See also Rodrigo (1974: 121-122).

\textsuperscript{643} Guansé (1963: 66).

\textsuperscript{644} Rivas Cherif (1991: 331).
A theatre with the multitudinous virtue of a bullring has not been achieved in our modern times (nothing is added by the attempt of yesterday, however consoling it may be, like my Alcalde [de Zalamea] in the Monumental [bullring] in Madrid or the Medea in Mérida) except in bullfights, in football matches or around a boxing ring.645

Roman Theatres have the space of half an amphitheatre/bullring and also break the division created by the proscenium arch. Medea’s audience in Mérida was visually aware of sharing the same space, and could easily see and feel each other’s reactions, whether they were members of the intelligentsia, the government or the people of Extremadura. A most Dionysian union was created, in the Nietzschean formulation: ‘Now the slave is a free man, now all the inflexible and hostile divisions which necessity, caprice, or ‘impudent fashion’ have established between men collapse’.646 Nothing could less resemble the bourgeois idea of an evening at the theatre, with its decorum, melodrama and separated seats.

The themes and plots of Golden Age plays were at times closely tied with church dogma and monarchical ideals, much defended and appreciated by the Right at the time of the Republic.647 This of course posed a serious problem for the educational and civic cultural agenda of the Republic, and its intention of resurrecting republican Hispanitas. How could the republican project reconcile Church and Monarchy with a regime that wished to disassociate itself from both? The answer was at times simple: to choose shorter plays with more popular themes, such as many entremeses, or create adaptations, as Casona did with Sancho Panza en la ínsula. But in other cases the answer needed more mediation. Many plays were adapted in order to dilute or eliminate Catholic and monarchical references, but without losing their liturgical characteristics, much praised by many intellectuals, including Lorca.648

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The most prominent case of this second option was Lorca’s staging of Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna* for La Barraca.\(^{649}\) All references to the implication of the Catholic Monarchs in the resolution of the conflict between a community and its ruler were eliminated. The play’s end was thus read as a victory of the community over its oppressor, a useful story for the republican ideal and its projection to the rural folk of Spain. Golden Age theatre, once selected and adapted, therefore served the ideals of the new regime, stripped of the old burdens of mitre and crown. It would exemplify true Hispanitas. The theatre of old Spain—even if once distilled—kept the seed of the new Spanish Republic, as Byrd remarks:

> The combination of the classical with the popular, the old with the contemporary, succeeded in magnetising both the rural and urban audience. The drama’s original theme of efficient democracy had been respected, but then, in the play, the social democracy of the Second Spanish Republic was exalted. That is why the Catholic Monarchs did not appear in this version of *Fuenteovejuna*.\(^{650}\)

Seneca’s *Medea* had one important advantage in this respect. *Medea* had no Catholic connections at all. Any Christian readings of Seneca that had permeated Spanish history had either been secularised, combated or dismissed completely in the development of the Seneca Hispanicus we discussed in the previous chapter (see Chapter II). This meant that no adaptations or avoidances were needed in staging Seneca’s tragedy. This advantage was acknowledged by *La Nación*, a newspaper opposed to the production: ‘Seneca returns to the literary tastes of a country [Spain] when this country is being de-Christianised and seeks in pagan humanism its salvation, which it will never find’.\(^{651}\) *Medea*’s secularism was in fact rather relevant to the republican context and served as one of the many flanks on which the right-wing press attacked the production (see pp. 194-212). Furthermore, *Medea*’s anti-tyrannical undertones were in tune with the sentiments of the republican project. These two

\(^{650}\) Byrd (1984: 15).
\(^{651}\) *La Nación* (19-09-1933).
aspects, secularism and anti-tyranny, were important credentials Seneca’s Medea could add to the republican project.

The secular and republican occupation of public spaces through theatre, evidenced by La Barraca, the Teatro del Pueblo or Seneca’s Medea, stands in direct contrast to the decline in religious public festivities, after it was decreed they needed an official permit.652 As Lannon, rather energetically, put it: ‘A battle for the streets, for public spaces, was being waged’.653 Most strikingly, in 1933 not a single procession took place during the most important and traditional Holy Week in Spain, that of Seville.654 This occurred only two months before the secular and republican cultural event of Seneca’s Medea took place in the neighbouring region of Extremadura. This secular, republican and theatrical public occupation would symbolically be repeated in 1934, when Seneca’s Medea was performed on the steps of the Palacio de Anaya in Salamanca, Unamuno’s intellectual home, which stands opposite to the Cathedral (Figure 69).655

To this we must add the performance at the Palacio Nacional, once the Royal Palace, in Madrid in September 1931 (see p. 72). The production of Seneca’s Medea physically occupied the home and seat of power of the Spanish Bourbon Monarchy, with the attendance of the President of the Republic and two socialist ministers. Moreover, the performance of Seneca’s Medea ended with the burning of King Creon’s palace, staged before the palace from which King Alfonso XIII had been ousted only two years earlier. The choice of Sagunto also had anti-monarchical connotations. If the performance had finally taken place there, Seneca’s Medea would have been performed where the coup d’état that installed Alfonso XII, Alfonso XIII’s father, on the Spanish throne took place in 1874.656 Medea could have been able to claim that ‘Unjust reigns never last forever’ (Sen. Med. 196) in the same place in which almost sixty years previously General Martínez Campos had exclaimed: ‘Long live Alfonso XII!’ , thereby ending

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655 For the disputes between Unamuno and Bishop Camara of Salamanca see Juaristi (2012: 265-266, 269-276).
656 See Jackson (1972: 5).
the First Spanish Republic. Seneca’s Medea thus served the Republic in attempting to conquer not only minds, but also space, from the domain of the dethroned Spanish Monarchy.

Bilbatua distinguished a ‘theatre for the people’, institutionally directed, and a ‘theatre by the people’, as created from the masses. Seneca’s Medea unquestionably stands in the first category. It is not, in any way, ‘theatre by the people’. But it was intended to be much more. It was meant to physically bring the cultural elite to the people. It was also meant to create, alongside other cultural projects, a means by which the people could become the elite, the aristocracy, of the Republic. It trans-historically connected the people of Spain with the creation of its first dramatist. It was meant to create a democratic unity that would shape a path of republican Hispanitas for the nation. Therefore, the prepositions used to describe the production of Seneca’s Medea, in its intentions and consequences, should perhaps be a few more than the two used by Bilbatua. If we are to understand the word people in its broadest polysemic sense, the production of Seneca’s Medea should be seen as an effort by the Second Spanish Republic to create a theatre for the people, towards the people, of the people, with the people, about the people and beyond the people. Chabás reached a similar conclusion:

True theatre of the people, made neither by it nor for it, but achieved and lived in an open, spontaneous and direct collaboration of creators and audience.


Given the centrality and relevance of Seneca’s Medea to the Republic’s agenda, it is understandable that it would be used as a fertile ground on which to criticise or praise the government or express political interpretations of the production. Much of the praise for the production and its republican intentions and results has already been extensively quoted and

657 Bilbatúa (1976: 28, 60).
658 Luz (19-06-1933).
discussed throughout this chapter. Let us here explore those voices in opposition to the production and to the regime as a whole.

In broad terms, apart from the opposition of anarchists, the Second Spanish Republic met with two trends in the right-wing opposition, which increasingly intended to ultimately overthrow it: on the one side, a Catholic and/or traditionalist movement, with a broad spectrum that ranged from the survivors of the old regime to carlistas, and on the other, a revolutionary philo-fascist movement, Falange Española. These two trends would be the main political capital of Franco’s regime during and after the Spanish Civil War.

a) An ancient brotherhood: Romanità and Hispanitas.

Spain’s main philo-fascist group was Falange Española, led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the Dictator. Although small in 1933, its public presentation took place the day after Seneca’s Medea was performed in the Teatro Español, on the 29th of October 1933, at the Teatro de la Comedia, which is still to be found in the same street as the Teatro Español, in Calle del Príncipe in Madrid. Falange appeared in the autumn of a year that had seen Hitler reach the Chancellery and the first major fascist publication in Spain, El Fascio, suspended by the republican government after its first issue. This is but one example of how Seneca’s Medea stands at the chronological—and spatial—epicentre of the political development of the Second Spanish Republic and Europe.

Probably the leading ideologue and intellectual of Falange Española was Ernesto Giménez Caballero. He had been one of the participants in the enormous and outstanding intellectual and artistic explosion of the first third of the twentieth century, as a prolific writer and thinker

661 On Giménez Caballero see Foard (1975) and Payne (1999: 51-54).
on history, art, the avant-garde and politics. He felt admiration for Benito Mussolini and believed in the need for an internationalisation of the fascist movement, against the Republic, in accordance with Mussolini’s own foreign policy.\footnote{On Giménez Caballero and Fascist Italy see Foard (1975: 10-13), Saz (1986: 97-131) and Payne (1998: 103-104).} Giménez Caballero would be one of the people in charge of elaborating Spain’s version of fascism, which although contentious in its definition and varied in its ideological outlook, can broadly be defined as the aggressive defence of Spanish nationalism, Catholicism and National Syndicalism.\footnote{On Falange Española see Saz (1986: 97-145), Payne (1993: 175-176; 1999: 70-114), Riley (2010: 101-102) and Casanova (2010: 79-82).} In his defence of his conception of Hispanity, not too dissimilar from Maetzu’s \textit{Hispanidad}, he admired Unamuno and Ganivet, the two main thinkers on the essence of Spain (see Chapter II).\footnote{\textit{El Socialista} would complain of the appropriation of Ganivet by the Right in \textit{El Socialista} (20-06-1933). On this see Garrido Ardila (2007: 165-192).} It is from this background and in the aftermath of the staging and tour of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} that Giménez Caballero would write the article ‘Seneca or the stoic foundations of fascism’ in Falange Española’s magazine \textit{F.E.} on the 25th of January 1934.

The relevance of this article for much of what has been discussed so far and will be further discussed is paramount. The leading intellectual of Spanish fascism wrote about the connections between Seneca and the movement of Il Duce, in the aftermath of Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, born from the core beliefs of the Republic and its liberal and socialist protagonists. This proves the extent to which Seneca and his tragedy became unquestionably relevant to the ideological discourse and political practice in Spain during the first years of the 1930s. We will be focusing on the Christian aspects of this article in the next chapter (see pp. 207-208), but let us here succinctly analyse in what way it responds to the political and ideological readings of Seneca’s \textit{Medea}.

Giménez Caballero is a refined student of practically all the long-existing tradition of Seneca’s reception in Spain as the epitome of Spanishness (see pp. 81-98). He interprets the Senecan tradition in Spain as the evidence of Spain’s innate compatibility with, even propensity towards, ‘a movement that today is called ‘fascist’, but that for us is as old as our Christian senequismo’, he explains. In addition, Seneca’s double identity as Spanish and Roman makes him a perfect
link between Spain and Italy. Both nations are united in their intimate worldview by such a recognised common intellectual ancestor as Lucius Annaeus Seneca.\textsuperscript{665} Giménez Caballero establishes the principles of anti-democracy, virtue, resilience, strength and will as those engendered by Seneca, and essential to the Roman character, later refined by fascism and embodied by Mussolini:

Fascism, like senequismo, ‘puodo stile di vito’ is, in its depths, the eternal style of Rome. This is the conception that, after Seneca, would be called Christian, and today, fascist, that is, \textit{life} is a \textit{militia}. [...] Rome conceives this through its most brilliant children (Seneca, Loyola, Mussolini), as combat, as virtue, as faith, as fatigue. This is why one can consider Fascism, a new doctrine for Spain, as an old wisdom to which Spain gave its best fruits; as the old secret, today newer than ever, that the great Cordobés Lucius Annaeus Seneca once mustered in Rome, in the first years of the era of the Christ.\textsuperscript{666}

This article is also a firm attempt at disassociating and reclaiming Seneca from the recent identification of the Seneca Hispanicus with \textit{Hispanitas} (see pp. 98-136). In his argument, two main lines in the reception and reading of Seneca throughout the ages are established: Christian and liberal. The first is exemplified in his Christian behaviour as a charitable confessor in his \textit{Consolationes}, ‘the most Christian book written before Christianity’, according to Giménez Caballero. Seneca’s compatibility with Christianity can also be seen in his belief in an austere, quasi-Franciscan, life, rejecting all worldly pleasures, distractions and pains. This is the Seneca of the fathers of the Church and The Council of Trent, and also that of Lipsius, Quevedo and Giménez Caballero himself. The liberal reading of Seneca, according to the fascist intellectual, is based on Seneca’s idea of individual virtue and in the development of the ideal man as embodied by the sage. To Giménez Caballero, this is the Seneca of the Renaissance, Erasmus,

\textsuperscript{665} For his views of Romanity see also Giménez Caballero in \textit{F.E.} (11-01-1934, 18-01-1933, 25-01-1934).
\textsuperscript{666} \textit{F.E.} (25-01-1934). Giménez Caballero expresses a similar idea in his \textit{La Nueva Catolicidad} (1933); see Giménez Caballero (1933: 86).
Kant and the precursor of Nietzsche’s Übermensch in his development of the stoic sage. Fascism, allegedly, synthesises both lines, making Spain innately driven towards fascism, and therefore inherently fascist: ‘I affirm that Fascism has a broad stoic base in general, and, specifically, a senequist one’. For Giménez Caballero, fascism has purged one of the key qualities of the liberal Seneca: individualism. This would lead to the equation of the individual with God, and therefore to pessimism and suicide, a most un-fascist sentiment. This individualistic Seneca is the one taken on board by the Second Spanish Republic as a truly liberal system in staging Seneca’s Medea (see pp. 207-208).

Giménez Caballero’s ideas on Seneca, his fascist reading and criticism of the Republic, must be seen as an intense, perhaps extreme, product of a broader Fascist agenda. The superficial similarities between Hispanitas and Romanità (see pp. 128-129) were what the fascist regime, through its Ambassador Raffaele Guariglia, tried to exploit in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933. Guariglia’s intention is symbolically demonstrated by the gift sent by the Mayor of Rome as a sign of fraternity with the Roman Mérida: a laurel branch accompanied by a message that ended with ‘latinamente saluta’. Italian Fascism saw the performance of Seneca’s Medea as an opportunity to demonstrate the brotherhood Ancient Culture had established between Spain and Italy. The aim was to tighten rather complicated diplomatic relations, aimed at moving Spain away from French influence and towards Italian international interests, even if 1933 proved to be a year of improved diplomacy.

Guariglia’s exact speech in Mérida is difficult to reconstruct. However, we can infer that he spoke of fraternity among Spain and Italy, of Romanitas, of Imperium and Roman culture, all to create an affinity between fascist Romanità and republican Hispanitas. We know, from the Italian newspaper La Stampa, in its 21st of June 1933 issue, that Guariglia defended the true Roman origins of Mérida and the scarce Arab impact on the colony, thus sidelining the main

668 La Stampa (21-06-1933).
cultural break in the continuation between Roman Antiquity and contemporary Spain, Al-Andalus—incidentally the link used by Sánchez-Albornoz to establish the continuation of Hispanitas (see pp. 122-133). Guariglia even went as far as to remind all present that even Córdoba, where the famous mosque stands, was originally a Roman colony. In Guariglia’s discourse, not only Mérida, but Seneca’s own birthplace is originally and essentially Roman. Prime Minister Azaña responded diplomatically to the Ambassador by avoiding the contentious issue of a shared origin and past, and focusing on the future, claiming to agree, ‘not only regarding the past, but also regarding the necessary fraternity of the two nations in the future’, La Stampa reports.⁶⁷⁰ Azaña’s reluctance to agree with the Ambassador is manifest in his satirical diary entrance of the following day:

There appeared the stern Mr. Guariglia, carrier of a branch of laurel offered by the Mayor of Rome to the illustrious Emerita Augusta. Guariglia gave a speech, using the Impero, Roman culture and other entities, in the fascist mode. I replied by avoiding the difficulty of not accepting the fascist theme and being kind to the ‘fraterna’ Italia. In short, we were all Romanised, all Latins and very happy.⁶⁷¹

The Romanisation of Spain, thoroughly sought by the Italians, was consciously and successfully averted by the Spanish Republic in June 1933. But Seneca’s Medea could have signified the cultural fraternity amongst the two nations, and the two national concepts, after all. As was mentioned in the first chapter, the Xirgu-Borràs Company received an invitation from Luigi Pirandello, president of the Theatre Inspection, to perform in Italy in 1935. According to Rivas Cherif, the place planned for such performances, or at least Medea, was the Roman Forum itself (see pp. 76-77).⁶⁷² However, the outbreak of the Italo-Abyssinian War in 1935 frustrated its

⁶⁷⁰La Stampa (21-06-1933).
executed, ‘despite the Italian Government’s desire to not postpone it’, Rivas Cherif explains.673

Even so, the suspension of the trip may have had a political or diplomatic reason lurking behind.

We know that Manuel Azaña, although no longer in government, had himself been invited to Italy in 1935 to meet Mussolini. The invitation seems to have been a reaction to Azaña’s comment that he felt more akin to a Roman from Tarragona than an African from Ethiopia.674

The Italian Ambassador, Orazio Pedrazzi, responded by praising, in a meeting with Rivas Cherif, Azaña’s friend and brother-in-law, the Spanish Republic for its similarities to the Fascist revolution because they both ‘meant for him the rupture from a past of mediocrity’.675 Azaña refused the invitation: ‘The least they would say is... what do I know!, that I had sold myself to Mussolini’, Rivas Cherif reports.676 The fascist ambassador, once more, sought to unite the Latin fraternity unsuccessfully.

Mussolini’s regime lost the opportunity for a great propagandistic event, one in which the greatest cultural product of republican *Hispanitas* would be performed not only on a Roman but on a truly fascist stage: the Via dell’Impero, created and inaugurated by Mussolini only in 1932, ran beside the Forum, which culminated in the Altare della Patria, completed under Mussolini in 1925; this in turn stands precisely in the Piazza Venezia, the location of the famous Palazzo Venezia, from where Mussolini harangued the nation. All this was to happen in a year when Italy’s own ancient festival of Syracuse had been put under the direction of the Fascist Ministry of Propaganda.677 Whether by fate, political reluctance or ideological antipathy, the fascist regime in Italy was finally unable to link its concept of Romanità with the republican *Hispanitas* through the performance of Seneca’s *Medea*, be it in Mérida or Rome itself.

b) The opposition press.

The reaction to the identification of Seneca’s Medea, republican Hispanitas and the Republic is also to be found in the newspapers of the Catholic and traditionalist opposition, which had broken from the Republic and the government already in 1931 (see pp. 201-202). Although these newspapers are a rich source for the link between Seneca’s Medea the Republic’s agenda on Women’s Rights and secularism, we will discuss these in the next chapter and now focus primarily on issues regarding ideology, the Republic’s national cultural agenda and Medea’s identification with the regime.

In the opposition newspapers, Seneca’s Medea is often classed as political propaganda.678 Gutiérrez judges Medea as a good republican name for a newborn girl in the Republic.679 Juan de Acre in Decimos wrote that Medea was a ‘tragedy of good auspices for a parliamentary government’.680 Gracia y Justicia asked itself: ‘Where has Cipriano [Rivas Cherif] learnt that at classical tragedies they played the Himno de Riego [Spain’s republican National Anthem]?’.681 In direct contrast to Miquis’ praise of the ‘artistic aristocracy’ that events like Seneca’s Medea would create, as quoted above, La Nación condemns the production as oligarchic:

That oligarchic spectacle in Mérida (a Senecan tragedy meant for a Government and its friends) is now to be extended to the many: To all those who paid for a chair in the Plaza de la Armería in Madrid, and now in Barcelona. We assume that Seneca’s ‘Medea’ will then be exported to the rest of Spain to play her game throughout it.682

678 Gracia y Justicia (10-06-1933, 24-06-1933); El Siglo Futuro (20-06-1933); Decimos (22-06-1933).
679 Gutiérrez (16-09-1933).
680 Decimos (22-06-1933).
681 Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).
682 La Nación (19-09-1933). The anarchist-sympathising newspaper La Tierra agrees; see La Tierra (19-06-1933).
The Socialist Party is one of the consistent targets in the opposition press: ‘we are sure that he [Seneca] will not be resurrected by the musical tinkling of the 50,000 pesetas that will be spent in his honour, given that he was not a socialist’, Gracia y Justicia informs. In this newspaper, Rivas Cherif—fictionally—explained: ‘If there is time left, a company from the Roman Casa del Pueblo will stage the proletarian play: ‘Oh how well our comrades, now ex-ministers, live!’’, in a clear allusion to the local social centres of Spanish socialism, the Casas del Pueblo. In addition, despite all her malign powers, Medea ‘would nowadays not be good enough to be even the nurse of Socialism in Spain’, according to Decimos. This same newspaper, ironically, applauds the government, which ‘since that unforgettable day in Mérida, we admire more than if we were socialists’.

The opposition press specifically mentions Medea’s integration in, or similarities with, the Republican cultural programme. Gracia y Justicia even jokes about how, if Alejandro Lerroux, the future head of the centre-right government, were to win the 1933 elections, Medea—at the time in mid-tour—or La Barraca would be in danger. Its cost, poverty in rural areas, panem et circenses, anti-Christianity are some of the criticisms thrown at the production, in an identical way as they had been thrown at other cultural projects and at the republican endeavour as a whole.

That is the tragedy of the regime. […] Let’s see if with the performances of the itinerant theatre invented by Mister de los Ríos [La Barraca], and with the performances of Medea, the hunger of the people is mitigated, who might even say: ‘We do not eat, but we have more fun!’

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683 Gracia y Justicia (27-05-1933).
684 Gracia y Justicia (10-06-1933).
685 Decimos (22-06-1933).
686 Decimos (22-06-1933).
687 El Siglo Futuro (30-05-1933, 20-06-1933, 02-09-1933); El Imparcial (24-05-1933); Gracia y Justicia (10-06-1933, 05-08-1933, 16-09-1933).
688 Gracia y Justicia (16-09-1933). This indeed became the case; see Holguin (2003: 134).
690 El Siglo Futuro (20-06-1933).

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Indeed, the most important criticism was the costly nature of the production and its inconvenience in the situation rural Spain faced.\textsuperscript{691} Medea, a tragedy evidently inferior to those seen daily by all Spaniards’, we can read in \textit{Gracia y Justicia}.\textsuperscript{692} The same idea is repeated in a cartoon in \textit{ABC} in which two Romans agree that \textit{Medea}’s tragedy is the 50,000 pesetas it had cost (Figure 43).\textsuperscript{693} In a cartoon in \textit{Gracia y Justicia}, a rural woman speaks in a marked rural accent to an actor, wearing the same costume as Borràs in \textit{Medea} (Figure 39). She complains that theirs is the true tragedy taking place.\textsuperscript{694} Also, many deemed it unnecessary to bring culture to people who were not only illiterate, but uncultured and hungry (Figure 40),\textsuperscript{695} including the liberal newspaper \textit{El Imparcial}: ‘Culture and luxury [...] difficultly agree in a Republic of workers. Of workers that need to read and write as a first step and nurture their stomachs with furious urgency’.\textsuperscript{696}

Seneca’s \textit{Medea} was paid for ‘with the permission of the competent authority but without the permission of the taxpayer’ according to \textit{Gracia y Justicia}.\textsuperscript{697} ‘It was suggested whether it was Tesoro [Treasury] the author, but that author is not very well-known’, we find in \textit{Gutiérrez}.\textsuperscript{698} The cost appears in these sources as a concealed poisoned dart with which to attack the government. The grant for \textit{Medea} was also a reason for the protests the Xirgu-Borràs Company suffered in Plasencia, Extremadura, days before the performance in Mérida at the hands of Catholic protesters (see p. 209).\textsuperscript{699} The satirical newspaper \textit{Gracia y Justicia} tackles this issue extensively:

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{El Imparcial} (24-05-1933); \textit{Gracia y Justicia} (10-06-1933, 09-09-1933, 21-10-1933, 27-05-1933); \textit{El Siglo Futuro} (19-06-1933, 20-06-1933, 23-05-1933, 30-05-1933); \textit{Pensamiento Alavés} (20-06-1933); \textit{La Cruz} (22-06-1933); \textit{Revista de Gandía} (24-06-1933); \textit{Gutiérrez} (01-07-1933, 21-10-1933); \textit{El Defensor de Cuenca} (30-09-1933). The anarchist-sympathising newspaper \textit{La Tierra} agreed; see \textit{La Tierra} (24-06-1933, 07-07-1933, 12-07-1933, 02-09-1933, 14-11-1933, 15-11-1933).
\item \textit{Gracia y Justicia} (24-06-1933).
\item \textit{ABC} (22-06-1933). See also Sánchez Matas (1991: 61).
\item \textit{Gracia y Justicia} (24-06-1933).
\item \textit{El Siglo Futuro} (19-06-1933, 20-06-1933); \textit{Decimos} (22-06-1933); \textit{Gracia y Justicia} (24-06-1933).
\item \textit{El Imparcial} (24-05-1933).
\item \textit{Gracia y Justicia} (10-06-1933).
\item \textit{Gutiérrez} (21-10-1933).
\item \textit{Luc} (16-06-1933); \textit{La Noche} (19-06-1933); \textit{El Día Gráfico} (20-06-1933).
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
The thing is that, since people are dying of hunger, the workers are out of work and the extremists have smashed up the acorns from Extremadura so that the pigs are stuffed. Along comes mister Fernando de los Ríos, a bearded clever clogs, who punches his forehead, demands the merry presence of Cipriano Rivas Cherif and forks out 50,000 pesetas for him to solve this situation by producing de visu the tragedy of Muñoz Séneca [word-play with the name of the playwright Muñoz Seca], with music by Pérez Casas, in Mérida’s and Mélida’s fanciful and Roman Circus.700

Prime Minister Azaña often appears at the centre of much of the criticism the opposition press deploys. His alleged thirst for power is a common theme. ‘Azaña claims that he would have also set fire to everything if they take his power away from him’, Gracia y Justicia explains,701 clearly alluding to the recent governmental crisis, resolved on the 13th of June 1933.702 Azaña is even portrayed as Medea herself in a cartoon, alongside the future Prime Minister, Alejandro Lerroux, as Jason, who tries to placate Azaña/Medea’s fury, while someone runs away with a plank that reads ‘Funding’ (Figure 41).

There is a persistent interest in categorising Azaña as a Roman emperor in the opposition newspapers, amongst other allusions.703 Gracia y Justicia tells us that Azaña ‘performed the role of Caligula wonderfully’.704 The satirical newspaper Gutiérrez begins its critique of Medea, written as a bullfight review, by asking forgiveness for such boldness, apostrophizing ‘oh Caesar Democraticus!; oh populus azañisticus!’, thus alluding to Azaña’s supposed caesarean power.705 It adds that Azaña and his ministers were seated ‘like Roman emperors’ in this ‘democratic celebration’. The adjective caesarean even appears in the liberal newspaper El

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700 Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).
701 Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).
703 El Imparcial (24-05-1933); Gracia y Justicia (10-06-1933, 30-09-1933, 16-09-1933, 25-11-1933); Decimos (22-06-1933); Gutiérrez (24-06-1933). The anarchist-sympathising newspaper La Tierra agreed; see La Tierra (12-10-1933).
704 Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).
705 Gutiérrez (24-06-1933).
Imparcial.\textsuperscript{706} This portrayal of Azaña as despotic Roman emperor would become a stock rhetorical trope for the Right, as is evidenced in his paring with Domitian in the slanderous \textit{Memorias Intimas de Azaña}, by Joaquín Arrarás, appeared at the end of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{707}

In the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of June 1933 issue of the Extremadura newspaper \textit{Decimos}, we find a clever and insightful counter-appropriation of Roman Antiquity: the Pisonian Conspiracy becomes a suggestive historical mirror for contemporary republican political tensions, and thus Azaña is transformed into Nero, the true Roman ‘actor-emperor’, according to Littlewood.\textsuperscript{708} Through veiled juxtaposition, staging and casting, \textit{Decimos} is able to suggest many of the intrigues, tensions, manoeuvres and dynamics within a governmental group that had solved an important crisis only a few days before the show in Mérida.\textsuperscript{709}

According to \textit{Decimos}, the republican committee first ‘directs itself immediately to the hotel to rest and later adopts a certain air of Romans which would suit very well the marvellous spectacle that Spain was going to offer the world, by resuscitating the unequalled splendours of Ancient Rome’. ‘Precisely, after having a refreshment […] the men of the Republic began to characterise themselves perfectly’, \textit{Decimos} informs. The first to appear is Azaña, who ‘came out totally transformed into a Claudius Caesar Nero, an unequal ruler and supreme artist even though History, who is at times a gossip, lays into him’. The play continues:

And then, in the afternoon, the cortege set off preceded by the proconsul [Azaña], seeming even more dashing and haughtier than the Divine Emperor, whose role he performed better than Borrás himself, standing on a chariot with the robes of a triumphator.

\textsuperscript{706}\textit{El Imparcial} (24-05-1933).
\textsuperscript{707} See Arrarás (1939: 37).
\textsuperscript{708} Littlewood (2015: 164).
After Azaña/Nero, we hear of all the other characters fleshed out in this play: ‘The people believed Teodomiro Menéndez to be Tigellinus; they mistook Cipriano [Rivas Cherif] for Sporus and when it came to De los Ríos, there wasn’t a single person who wouldn’t believe he was not Vestinus himself. And in this way, Barnés, Antonio de la Villa, Nelken and Antonio Canales seemed to be Scaevinus, Tullius Senecio, Pontius Piro, Verva etc. etc.’ If one reads Tacitus’ *Annals* XV, one can recognise all the names as personalities involved either in planning or repressing the Pisonian Conspiracy, except for three: Sporus, Pontius Piro and Verva. The latter two are difficult to recognise and could be mere misspellings. Sporus, although not involved in the Pisonian Conspiracy, was a real person in the reign of Nero. He was a freedman whom Nero had castrated and married (Cass. Dio LXII, 28 and LXIII, 12-13; Suet. *Ner.* 28, 46, 48, 49) because he resembled his late wife, Poppea Sabina, according to Cassius Dio. I do not believe that the insinuation here is that Rivas Cherif was in anyway Azaña’s castrated spouse, although this may have been suggestive to more learned readers who also knew of the close relationship between Azaña and Rivas Cherif. I believe instead that the joke and reason behind Rivas Cherif’s characterisation as Sporus is his fancied resemblance to Nero’s wife, since Rivas Cherif was in fact Azaña’s brother-in-law. This is in line with many other jokes and criticisms made towards Cipriano Rivas Cherif in our sources.710

It is obvious that by cleverly juxtaposing the governmental committee in Mérida to those involved in the Pisonian Conspiracy to kill Nero, *Decimos* is highlighting the intricate political tensions and dynamics, both in favour and against each other, within such a committee. If Seneca’s *Medea* was to revive ancient Roman practice, this practice was Roman both on and off stage. If Unamuno was the Republic’s Seneca, Azaña was its Nero,711 and its republican politicians its Roman conspirators. This is very clearly seen in a cartoon published in *Gracia y Justicia* that shows all the governmental ministers dressed in ancient clothing and each up to different degrees of mischief (Figure 44).712

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710 *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933); *Gutiérrez* (24-06-1933).
711 The anarchist José García Pradas makes a similar comparison in *La Tierra* (12-10-1933).
712 *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933).
As seen, the performance and production of Seneca’s *Medea* is characterised in the opposition press as a costly act of propaganda by a caesarean system, its conspiring imperial government and its despotic leader. The republican connections and readings of the production were best expressed by *Gracia y Justicia* on the 24th of June 1933:

Since he [Jason] is a caveman and a monarchist, he abandons her to marry the king of Corinth’s daughter […] Medea, who is an upright woman, worthy of belonging to the Needle Union, becomes desperate […] shortly after, the news arrives to Medea by radio that the bride […] died by poison and when she saw her five-year plan discovered, she cuts her children’s throats and escapes through the air in an enchanted chariot. […] It is understandable […] that these things are enjoyed by people nowadays, who are capable, like Medea, of eating children raw.\(^{713}\)

**Conclusion: A rebirth of the native spirit.**

Seneca, and the performance of *Medea*, played a fundamental part in the ideological, political and programmatic intentions of the Second Spanish Republic, as developed by its first government (1931-1933). Seneca’s *Medea* enjoyed a privileged status among the Republic’s educational and cultural agenda, intended to replace the ideology of the old regime with its own cultural hegemony. Alongside schooling, libraries and the Misiones Pedagógicas, Seneca’s *Medea* served as a vehicle for the redressing of the educational and cultural injustices of the past, and unite the cultural centres and rural regions in a harmonious bidirectional manner. Its production was central to the republican desideratum and effort of establishing a National Theatre. It participated in the broader theatrical intention to create a national unity between the Republic and its citizens by establishing a trans-historical communion of republican *Hispanitas*. Finally, Seneca’s *Medea* was the beacon of a broader project by which citizens might elevate

\(^{713}\) *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933).
their individual and collective code of ethics through the experience of aesthetic creations. This, in turn, created an ideological arena within which all competing tendencies could defend their own cause, including liberals, socialists, fascists, Catholic conservatives or traditionalists.

Seneca’s Medea cannot be in any way disassociated from the Second Spanish Republic’s project during its first two years of existence, either ideologically, programmatically or politically. The staging of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933 must be read as republican manifesto, ritual, practice and consolidation. This is most clearly and enthusiastically expressed by the socialist journalist and director of El Sur, Fernando Vázquez in his own review of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida:

> For one, the Republic has considered profound political and economic problems, which will undoubtedly bring a new silhouette to our society. But it is not this which now interests us, but its aesthetic spirit, which serves, more than anything else, as a mirror of the times and its people. In the cultural programme of the Republic, extraordinary endeavours appear, such as founding twenty or thirty thousand schools in a quinquennium. There are, nevertheless, less visible aspects, which will shine their lights in the long term. These are the schooling and university missions, the itinerant museums and scenic equipments, the classical performances. Thanks to Fernando de los Ríos, an Erasmist, who is a man of the Renaissance, the Republic pours on the stiff soul of the people subtle nourishing saps, propitious for a rebirth. In the performance of Seneca’s ‘Medea’, celebrated last Sunday in the Roman Theatre of Mérida, we have sensed enough to return to the originality of the native spirit. Only with festivities of this category, which, however much they cost, every State is obliged to pay, [every State] which is concerned with its ‘style’. Ever since immortal Athens, will the people find in its own tradition, salutary waters that may cleanse the historical being of impurities.\(^{714}\)

\(^{714}\)El Sur (21-06-1933).
IV. Medea and the social revolution.

The prison is demolished. It’s something. It’s a lot.
But now, on the site, we have to plant the orchard (María Lejarraga). 715

The arrival of the Second Spanish Republic offered an opportunity for initiating integral socio-political reforms. Education and Culture, Women’s Rights, Agrarian Reform, Militarism, Territory, Labour and Secularism were the seven main areas in which the Republic had to demonstrate practical capacities beyond an inspiring rhetoric. These areas were primarily addressed in the first two years of its existence, between April 1931 and the centre-right’s electoral victory in November 1933. These are to be considered as the years of republican nation-building, which would later be amended or revitalised by subsequent governments, and which founded many of the aspirations, claims, troubles and grievances to later permeate the Spanish Civil War.

In what way did the audience at Mérida, and those in its subsequent tour, establish connections or comparisons between Seneca’s Medea and the fundamental political and social changes the Spanish nation was undergoing? The focus will be here on how contemporary Spain reflected itself in Medea as a socio-political mirror, in which different social groups could visualise their own interests, concerns and hopes, however clear or distorted these may have appeared.

All seven areas of reform can be seen as echoed in some way in the performance, the text of Seneca’s Medea or even its Roman origins or location in Mérida. For example, Agrarian Reform appears connected to Seneca’s Medea in the opposition press when Mérida is mentioned as having been a Roman town, Emerita Augusta, whose land was granted to retired Roman soldiers, in Gracia y Justicia: ‘So that means that the Agrarian Reform is a Roman thing?’, the newspaper asks. 716 Elsewhere in the same issue one can read: ‘the Agrarian Reform is Azaña’s best work after Medea and La Corona’, the latter being a play written by Azaña in

715 Martínez Sierra (1931: 170).
716 Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933). See also Gracia y Justicia (02-09-1933).
reality. It is not necessary to redocument here how Seneca’s *Medea* became emblematic of the broad reform on Education and Culture under the Republic (see pp. 137-175). One could also read the performance of Seneca’s *Medea* in Barcelona, and the attendance of the President de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Francesc Macià, as part of an interest in uniting every region of Spain under the mantle of republican culture and citizenship. Even Labour reform is connected to *Medea* in the opposition press, as the customary mention of socialists or Medea’s own potential membership of the Needle Union demonstrated in the previous chapter. The anarchist poet Felix Paredes went as far as to compare Medea’s burning of the palace and the killing of her own children with the repression of anarchists in Casas Viejas, which tragically ended with several of them killed, some even being burned in a hut, earlier that year:

Sensibility has not yet been entirely lost, except among governments. Among what misunderstanding gave in calling ‘the plebe’, the feeling deepens and vibrates. To that ‘plebe’ of the ignorant, to that ‘people’ of the learned, Medea will be offered in all her mythological cruelty alongside her fire, another fire like ‘that of a little while ago’, in a painfully reminiscent glorification of flames.

Two further areas of reform are most relevant to the performance of Seneca’s *Medea*: Secularism and Women’s Rights. The pagan, therefore non-Christian, nature of Seneca’s *Medea* was central in choosing this tragedy (see pp. 81-136, 165-175). Jason’s atheistic, despairing outcry ‘Leave for the deep spaces of the high firmament to testify, wherever you roam, that there are no gods!’ (Sen. *Med.* 1026-1027) was pronounced in 1933, a year that saw the non-celebration of Holy Week in Seville, the enactment of the law regulating the Church’s rights

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717 *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933).
718 From the 10th to the 12th of January 1933, confrontations between the Civil Guard and anarchists resulted in the deaths of two Civil Guards, one Guardia de Asalto, nineteen men, two women and one child. Eight of the twenty two civilians died when either escaping from or taking refuge in a hut which was burnt on the command of captain Manuel Rojas. See Brenan (1985: 247-248); Casanova (2010: 60-62); Cabrera (2006: 60-61).
719 *La Tierra* (13-04-1933). See also *La Tierra* (12-10-1933) for a portrayal of Azaña as a Nero burning Casas Viejas.
and duties and a papal encyclical condemning it. As a result, Seneca’s Medea acquired added meaning in what has been called the Religious Question in the Second Spanish Republic, the focus of the first section in this chapter.

The second section will assess the connections between Medea, as character, myth and Senecan tragic heroine, and the civic constitutional triumphs of Spanish feminism, mainly Female Suffrage and divorce. The themes of Medea’s tragic story helped the society of the Second Spanish Republic think through questions around femininity, female empowerment, marriage, maternity and infanticide.

1. Medea’s pagan and anti-Christian spirit.

The close and intricate relationship between the Bourbon Monarchy, the Dictatorship, and the Spanish Catholic Church was almost unchallengeable before the arrival of the Second Spanish Republic.721 King Alfonso XIII had consecrated the Spanish Nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1919. Many in the Spanish ecclesiastical hierarchy had strong links with the old regime and the monarch personally.722 The Catholic Church had also executed control on education and public morals for decades. It enjoyed links with the economic elite, the aristocracy and the media, as with the Asociación Nacional Católica de Propagandistas, founded in 1909 and presided over by Angel Herrera Oria. Herrera Oria would go on to direct El Debate, the newspaper responsible for much of the political controversy surrounding Seneca’s Medea in 1933 (see pp. 62-63). The centrality of the Catholic Church and Faith in the old regime is demonstrated in its founding Constitution of 1876:

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Art. 11. The Roman Catholic Apostolic religion is that of the State. The Nation is obliged to maintain [Catholic] worship and its ministers. No one will be persecuted in the Spanish territory for their religious opinions or for the exercise of their respective worship, except against the due respect to Christian morality. However, ceremonies and public demonstrations will not be allowed other than those of the State religion.

The change from Monarchy to Republic also implied a transformation from a confessional to a secular State, which forcefully precipitated a change in the relationship between State and Church. The provisional government of the Republic declared religious freedom in its transitional Juridical Statute, setting the tone for the departure from the old regime and the Concordat of 1851. The secular State also entailed freedom of conscience and the greater validity of science, knowledge and culture, over creed, dogma or Church teaching. This must be seen as another variant of the ideological tension and conflict between the two broad conceptions of Spanishness: secular Hispanicitas and Catholic Hispanidad (see pp. 122-136, 165-175). The result of this intended ontological shift of the Spanish nation would be finely described by the fascist revisionist of Seneca, Ernesto Giménez Caballero (see pp. 176-179), in 1932: ‘The Republic came to substitute the Catholic religion for the religion of culture’.

Despite the secular intentions of the republicans and the reticence of many clerics, Church and State established a good rapport in the Republic early days. The Church, with the Apostolic Nuncio in Spain, Federico Tedeschini, at its head, maintained a cordial attitude towards the new regime. They wished to ingratiate itself with the republicans in order to soften the imminent blow of State and Church separation. The head of the provisional government and later President, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, a declared Catholic, served as the ideal interlocutor and token of republican amicability towards the Church. However, the cordiality was soon shaken in May

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724 Giménez Caballero (1932: 235).
1931 by a set of riots that led to the burning of numerous churches and the looting of Church property.\textsuperscript{726}

Given this context, in this section we shall first explore how Medea’s burning of the royal palace was interpreted by the opposition press as mimicking republican burnings of churches and Nero’s persecution of Christians. Secondly, we shall look at how the Republic’s political and legislative consolidation of secularism was conceived by many Catholics as a religious persecution befitting Seneca’s pagan and atheistic Medea. And thirdly, we shall explore how the social impact of the confrontation between Catholics and republicans went so far as to incite a journalist to propose that a performance of the martyrdom of Mérida’s own Catholic martyr would be the correct way to counter the performance of Seneca’s pagan Medea.

\textbf{a) Medea’s republican sin and the Neronian persecution.}

On the 10\textsuperscript{th} of May 1931 in the centre of Madrid, passers-by heard the Royal March being played from a monarchist meeting. This sparked protests in the streets that resulted in deaths and escalated rapidly across the country to burnings and lootings of churches. By the 15\textsuperscript{th} of May, with the situation finally under control, about a hundred Church buildings, including the Bishop’s Palace in Málaga, had been burnt. The cost, in Madrid alone, amounted to five million dollars, according to Sánchez in 1964.\textsuperscript{727} Despite efforts by the Minister of Interior, Miguel Maura, to convince his cabinet colleagues to deploy the Civil Guard, the government had reacted slowly. The Nuncio Tedeschini informed the Vatican on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of May: ‘One cannot say certainly that the Government has provoked the incendiary movement, but it is easy to demonstrate that it has done nothing to stop it’.\textsuperscript{728} The burnings of May 1931 would become, in retrospect, the Republic’s ‘Original Sin’ for the Catholic press and later propaganda. To


\textsuperscript{727} 5 million dollars, according to Sánchez (1964: 95).

\textsuperscript{728} Translated and quoted in Trybus (2014: 22).
Catholics, this would retrospectively be taken ‘as the event that changed ‘the course of the Republic’’, as Casanova points out.\textsuperscript{729}

The riots reveal the perceived connection between Crown and Mitre in the eyes of many Spaniards. This is reflected in the actions of the Spanish Primate, Cardinal Segura, who had shown himself to be either resistant to the regime change or totally opposed to it. His pastoral of the 1\textsuperscript{st} of May 1931 had exposed his deep reservations against the new regime and praised the dethroned Alfonso XIII, ‘who throughout his reign has kept the old tradition of faith and piety of his ancestors’, the text reads.\textsuperscript{730} Segura was asked to leave the country in May 1931. He did so only to return in June and be formally expelled. Later, Segura would resign his ecclesiastical office, with the complicity of the Vatican, who also saw in him a threat to their diplomatic efforts. Segura’s expulsion seemed a victory for the Republic’s assertion of power: ‘Not even Philip II succeeded in removing a primate’, Fernando de los Ríos noted.\textsuperscript{731} It is clear from the actions of some in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and on the extreme Left that, at the extremes of each side, it was hard to defend conciliatory measures.

The Republic thus became synonymous with atheism, anti-Catholicism and religious arson, according to Catholic groups. This was the true nature of the Republic’s intended secularism, anticlericalism and religious freedom. Medea was a pagan/atheistic tragedy (although routine references are made to the gods, the overall thought-world is Stoic, and this is emphasised by Jason’s concluding lament). That it was chosen by the Republic made it only natural, in the eyes of Catholic opposition, that Medea’s greatest coup de théâtre would be the burning of the royal palace. The Republic’s atheism and resulting arson was thus encapsulated in and performed by the Colchian sorceress, the true republican anti-Catholic, as \textit{Gracia y Justicia} ironically implied in June 1933:

\textsuperscript{729} Casanova (2010: 26). See also Callahan (2000: 281-282).
\textsuperscript{731} De los Ríos in \textit{ABC} (01-10-1931), translated and quoted in Sánchez (1964: 122).
Mister Cipri [Rivas Cherif] is the devil. All the noted changes are his idea, he who also sacrifices all for the idea. Do you know what he has also come up with? That Medea’s infernal chariot may resemble a convent in flames. Of course this may seem like ultraism, but the man who is cultivating the ‘plus’, of course must also cultivate the ‘ultra’. 732

The secularisation of the State necessitated a legislative corpus established first by a set of decrees, later by the Constitution and finally by the Law of Denominations and Congregations of June 1933. According to Trybus, an internal report of the Vatican’s Office of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs on the 1st of June 1931 stated:

The provisional Government, composed almost entirely of sectarians, continues its advance against the rights of the Church without stopping in its path. 733

‘The Constituent Cortes that met in Madrid in July 1931 was a predominantly anticlerical body. In fact, anticlericalism was the only policy that all deputies of the majority coalition had in common’, according to Sánchez. 734 Although this is somewhat reductive and generalising, it does point towards the political isolation of pro-Catholic politicians, also bound together as they were by religion. 735 The parliamentary discussions on the secular articles were the context for one of the most famous and transcendent speeches of the Republic’s history, given by Manuel Azaña on the 13th of October 1931. Although speaking as a member of his own party, Acción Republicana, his speech sealed the republicans’ commitment to secularisation and secured Azaña’s position as a republican leader. This speech is also a fine example of the republican shift of the nation’s ontological compass from Catholic Hispanidad to secular Hispanitas. The whole speech is worth considering, but its is important here to quote the passages which are most relevant to our discussion in this chapter and in others:

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732 Gracia y Justicia (10-06-1933).
734 Sánchez (1964: 110).
735 Sánchez (1964: 111).
The premise of this problem, today political, I formulate in this way: Spain has ceased to be Catholic. The consequent political problem is to organize the State in such a way that it may accommodate itself to this new and historic phase of the Spanish people.[…] [I]n Spain, despite our diminished mental activity [sic], since the last century, Catholicism has ceased to be the expression and guide of Spanish thought. That there are millions of believers in Spain, I do not discuss with you; but what makes up the religious essence of a country, a people and a society, is not the numerical sum of beliefs or believers, but the creative effort of its mind, the direction that its culture follows.[…]

These are, my honourable friends, the reasons we have, at least, modestly, the ones I have, to claim them as a right, in order to collaborate with the historical demand of transforming the Spanish State, in accordance with this new modality of the national spirit.736

The secular articles of the Constitution were passed by a large majority.737 In direct contrast to article 11 of the 1876 Constitution quoted above, Article 3 read: ‘The Spanish State does not have an official religion’. Article 26 regulated religious liberty and freedom of conscience, a total lack of State responsibility towards the Church and the dissolution of any order that had a vow of obedience to ‘a different authority than the legitimate authority of the State’, directly alluding to the Society of Jesus. In addition, it projected the future extinction of public funding for the Catholic Church and a specific law on the relationship between Church and State. Finally, the article notes the future possibility of nationalising Church property.

This drastic rupture in Spain’s prior religious status quo brought shockwaves to Spanish Catholicism. The political response was considerable and profound.\textsuperscript{738} Catholic MPs walked out of the Chamber. The Republic’s soon-to-be President, Alcalá Zamora resigned his position as Prime Minister, which was then taken by Azaña. The Minister of Interior, Miguel Maura, a practising Catholic and a member of Alcalá Zamora’s party, also resigned his post. There was no official protest from the Vatican. However, political and social Catholicism placed itself in confrontation with the Constitution and the Republic.\textsuperscript{739} The Catholic MP José María Gil Robles, the most prominent leader of the Right and Ángel Herrera Oria’s protégée,\textsuperscript{740} warned Parliament:

> Today, Catholic Spain stands face to face with the Constitution. Today, a nucleus of Deputies who wanted to come in a peaceful manner is placed apart from your activities. You declare war on them. You will be responsible for the spiritual war that will be unleashed in Spain. We abjure all responsibility to the hands of a Chamber that has voted for a Constitution of persecution, and to the hands of a Government, that from the front of the blue bench, rather, from the seats of a minority to which the head of the Government belongs, pronounced words of peace. We would still like to embrace these. But we fear that it is too late.\textsuperscript{741}

In the eyes of Catholics, the approved constitutional articles were the Republic’s insistence on persecution by legal means. This was the ‘seed of discord’, as Gil Robles would later call it.\textsuperscript{742} The Republic had committed ‘a true social deicide’, according to the Nuncio in a letter to the Vatican from July 1931.\textsuperscript{743} The republicans, unintentionally, ‘were providing the reaction with a

\textsuperscript{741} DSCCRE (13-10-1931, p. 1713).
\textsuperscript{742} See Casanova (2010: 68).
\textsuperscript{743} Translated and quoted in Trybus (2014: 29).
rallying cry which it badly needed’, as Gerald Brenan explains. The opposition’s attack on Seneca’s *Medea*, backed by a government that had purposely sought to persecute Catholicism, takes up the rallying cry. This is why the minister ultimately responsible for Seneca’s *Medea* would be called ‘Fernando, the non-Catholic’ by *Decimos*, in a pastiche on the papally bestowed epithet of Isabella of Castile’s husband, Ferdinand II of Aragon, ‘Fernando, the Catholic’. The Republic’s alleged persecution of God’s Church in a most Catholic country, that of the Catholic Monarchs, is the reason why the Republic is compared, in religious matters but also in others, to Nero’s reign and his persecution of the Christians.

For many Catholics, above all the extremist Catholic and monarchist newspaper *El Siglo Futuro*, the connection between the Republic’s attitude towards the Church and Nero’s treatment of the Christians had been established ever since the burnings of May 1931. The Republic’s Original Sin was reminiscent of the Church’s besieged beginnings, and the Minister of Interior, Miguel Maura, became a resurrected Nero. The suggestion made by *El Socialista*, that the burnings had perhaps been undertaken by Catholics to discredit the Republic, was described by *El Siglo Futuro* as follows:

It’s Nero’s old, discredited, crooked school, never forgotten by those that deny Catholics their right to live (*non licet vos esse*). The Christians have burnt Rome. The infamous calumny is today once more repeated.

We have seen that in opposition reviews of Seneca’s *Medea*, Nero was often used as a Roman avatar of Prime Minister Azaña, who was also called ‘caesarist’ (see pp. 186-189). A further

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745 *Decimos* (22-06-1933). De los Ríos had already been called ‘Fernando, the anti-Catholic’; see *El Cruzado Español* (November/December-1931).
747 *La Época* (06-04-1933); *El Siglo Futuro* (05-07-1933); *Renacer* (29-10-1933).
748 *El Siglo Futuro* (22-08-1931, 28-08-1931, 11-11-1931).
750 *El Imparcial* (24-05-1933); *Gracia y Justicia* (10-06-1933, 16-09-1933, 30-09-1933, 25-11-1933); *Decimos* (22-06-1933); Gutiérrez (24-06-1933).
element could cast the republican leader who claimed that Spain had ‘ceased to be Catholic’, as the last Julio-Claudian Emperor: the persecution of Christians. It seemed to Catholics that Azaña also fiddled while Spain burned. In the summer of 1933, Azaña’s status as the governmental head of the Republic, in the aftermath of the law that regulated Church orders and congregations, only aided in transforming him into a Roman emperor lusting after Christian blood. Seneca’s Medea was a display of atheism and anti-Christianity not only in its content, but also because its past and present context took place under two men responsible for past and present religious persecution, Nero and Azaña:

[Medea] evokes the old times of Seneca the Cordobés, when to flatter the people of Rome, the public authorities agreed to the cry of the plebs: panem et circenses. And Christians to the beasts. The Republic, of pagan and anti-Christian spirit, has moved back to the time of those Caesars. The State is now caesarist. The banquets are set up. Instead of Caligula’s boats, cars with radios come and go on the roads. Catholicism is persecuted once again, and the Christian temples are thrown to the incendiary beasts. And ‘circenses’ are dedicated to the people, but with no ‘panem’. 751

b) The seed of discord.

Many Catholics would have agreed that this ‘pagan and anti-Christian spirit’ reached its peak in the Law of Denominations and Congregations of June 1933. 752 That the Republic had the intention of following its constitutional plans had already been made clear. 753 The dissolution of the Society of Jesus in Spain took place in February 1932. 754 That same month the Divorce Law was approved (see below). Clerical salaries were ended in Spring 1932; it was decided that all State funding for the Church would be ended by November 1933, just months after Seneca’s

751 El Siglo Futuro (20-06-1933).
754 For the dissolution of the Society of Jesus see Sánchez (1964: 137-141).
Medea. This further alienated Catholics from the Republic. El Debate was suspended due to its protest campaign. The Catholic coalition CEDA, led by Gil Robles, was born in February 1933 to defend Catholicism, combat republican sectarianism and revise the Constitution.

The Law of Denominations and Congregations was the confirmation of not only the separation of State and Church, but the submission of the latter to the laws, jurisdiction and control of the former. It also established the end of all religious schooling on the 31st of December 1933. The public sphere and all national matters were entirely subjected to State power. This time the Church reacted openly to the impositions of the law, even though plans for a formal protest from the Vatican had existed ever since 1932. Pope Pius XI published his encyclical Dilectissima Nobis on the 3rd of June 1933, the very day the law was published and two weeks before the première of Seneca’s Medea. The Pope openly mentioned the attacks on the Church, from the burning of churches to the legislation on divorce. Full-frontal confrontation with the Republic was now sanctioned and promoted by the Vicar of Christ himself:

We will not stop here to repeat how gravely wrong it is to affirm that the separation is lawful and good in itself, especially in a Nation that is almost totally Catholic. […] It is particularly disgusting to see such an exclusion of God and of the Church from the life of the Spanish Nation, in which the Church always and deservedly has had the most important and most beneficently active part, in laws, in schools and in all other private and public institutions. For if such an attempt results in irreparable damage to the Christian conscience of the country, especially of the youth to whom they wish to educate without religion, and of the family, desecrated in its most sacred principles; no less damage will fall on the same civil authority […]

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559 Trybus (2014: 43-44).
We recommend again and strongly to all Catholics in Spain, leaving aside laments and recriminations, and subordinating to the common good of Fatherland and Religion any other ideal, that they all unite, disciplined, for the defence of the Faith and to ward off the dangers that threaten civil society itself.

In a special way We invite all the faithful to join Acción Católica, so many times by Us recommended. It, even without constituting a party, furthermore, which must be outside and above all political parties, will serve to form the conscience of Catholics, enlightening and strengthening it in the defence of the faith against all kinds of snares.\footnote{El Debate (04-06-1933).}

It is in the aftermath of this crisis that Seneca’s Medea was performed and the Catholic response to it published. The production also served as the catalyst for two opposing ideological visions of the country and secularism, that of the socialist newspaper El Socialista, and that of the Spanish fascist intellectual Ernesto Giménez Caballero. The following standpoints are part of the broader ideological dispute surrounding Seneca’s Medea I discussed in the previous chapter. Let us here focus on their views on religion and the Spanish nation.

\textit{El Socialista}, in three editorials in May and June 1933,\footnote{El Socialista (24-05-1933, 31-05-1933, 20-06-1933).} attacks any previous associations of Seneca with Christianity (Chapter II), to a far greater level than any other of our republican sources. This must be understood as the result of secular reforms and a strong intention to secularise Seneca himself. It is for this reason that it vindicates Seneca’s tragic credentials, as was the general norm amongst republicans. The vindication of Seneca \textit{tragicus} shifts the ideological weight away from Seneca \textit{moralis}, from the oppressive history of Catholic Spain. It places it firmly on Seneca Hispanicus, associated with republican \textit{Hispanitas}, a secular Weltanschauung incorporating progressive democratic practice (see pp. 98-136). This is what the Republic is ultimately intending to do by using Seneca for its own historical legitimation. El
Socialista thus reinforces, highlights, appropriates and intensifies this process, as we see in the editorial published after the première of Seneca’s Medea:

In the Spanish people, Christianity was never ‘the religion of love,’ but it always proved that it was ‘the religion of pain.’ [...] The convincing value of this classical performance, with the success of Xirgu and Borrás, lies in the possibility that the general public can understand Seneca perfectly. Challenge achieved. Its value is that we can recognise ourselves: find our moral value at the bottom of our character, and deduce from human emotion, from our own, Spanish [emotion], the orientation of our behaviour and the truth of our path. With this comes the conscience that we do not owe either our character nor our philosophy to the Catholic Church, and therefore, it is not Spanish, either, that we must owe it submission.⁷⁶²

In contrast, Ernesto Giménez Caballero wrote his own understanding of Seneca as a Spanish precursor of fascism in F.E. on the 25th of January 1934, after the victory of the centre-right in November 1933 (see pp. 176-179). According to the fascist intellectual, the virtuous Seneca of fascism is the Catholic and stoic Seneca, that is, Seneca the philosopher. The negative Seneca of the liberal Republic is the pagan, individualistic and destructive Seneca, which, by inference, is rather more in tune with Seneca the tragedian. Giménez Caballero therefore intends to negate the Seneca Hispanicus established by the Republic and the production of Seneca’s Medea, and, in turn, to extol the Seneca moralis, as the example of Spain’s inherent fascism. In doing so, he summarises, in the following words, the view and resentment of all the Catholic campaigners throughout the first two years of the Republic, as directed by Manuel Azaña:

Recently, with the triumph of the most complete ‘liberalism’ in Spanish history, in the republican government of Azaña (1931-1933), the return to Seneca has been reproduced, as if seeking humanistic, anti-Christian support. The performance of the

⁷⁶² El Socialista (20-06-1933).
tragedy ‘Medea’, translated by Unamuno, in the Roman amphitheatre of Mérida and before the Royal Palace of Madrid, has been very significant. ‘Medea’ was the resentment that burns palaces, temples, that murders and bewitches with inextinguishable tenacity, like a maenad or a natural force. That is to say: a little like the pagan, secular, barbarous and anti-Catholic Spain that Azaña dreamed of establishing. 763

c) Republican Chrismation.

Secularisation was also a social phenomenon. The Church was losing support among many, primarily in the urban proletariat, but in other sections of the population too; 764 ‘the present apostasy of the popular masses cannot be more extended or more profound’, canon Arboleya stated in October 1933. 765 Dissent between practising Catholics and anti-clerical or non-Christian sections of the population was indeed important. Some wished for a more consensual approach to the problem, like Arboleya, who defended the papal teachings on Social Catholicism. 766 Others were more extreme and aggressive, as the church burnings of May 1931 prove. Catholic groups also resorted to more frontal techniques of protest and pressure. Social conflict was indeed ripe and Seneca’s Medea stood in its midst, as Gonzalo de Reparaz’s words reveal:

The current anar chic chapter has cracked our Greco-Latin-Jewish layer [sic], splitting it in two. On the one hand in Mérida, [we have] the Greco-Romans (the innovative pretenders adore Olympus, glorifying Seneca and the Spain which was a slave of Rome). On the other, Judaizers (traditionalist pretenders) add the torrent of their own tears to the waters of the renewed Deluge, asking the Lord (a Lord more ferocious than Medea) to cease the scourge with which He punishes them for failing to celebrate the

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763 F.E. (25-01-1934).
765 Arboleya (1934: 4).
Corpus Christi procession. And, deep down, under the stage in which the tragedy is performed, anarchy completes a nascent social revolution, typically Berber, that is, without an ordering element.\textsuperscript{767}

Just days before the \textit{première} of \textit{Medea} in Mérida, the Xirgu-Borràs Company had been accused of impiety by protesters in Plasencia, also in Extremadura. The protesters denounced that they had ‘worked on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in Madrid, while no artistic team worked on those days in the theatres of Spain’.\textsuperscript{768} According to Rabanal Brito, Catholics threatened to repeat the protest at the performance of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida.\textsuperscript{769} This association of the Xirgu-Borràs Company with atheism or anti-clericalism was not new, and is in fact, one of the best examples of such social tensions as lived during the first years of the Republic.

Catholic groups had intended to boycott the stagings of Rafael Alberti’s \textit{Fermín Galán} (1931) at the Teatro Español, and Pérez de Ayala’s \textit{A.M.D.G.} (1931) directed by Rivas Cherif. The religious controversy in \textit{Fermín Galán} was the appearance of the armed Virgin Mary, urging the people to join the republican uprising of 1930 that would become the heroic origin of the Republic.\textsuperscript{770} The protesters, understandably, could not tolerate the usurpation of the Mother of God for the cause of a republic that, in their eyes, had persecuted the believers and institutions of the Mother Church. Although Pérez de Ayala’s \textit{A.M.D.G.} was not a production by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, it was directed by its stage director, Cipriano Rivas Cherif.\textsuperscript{771} Catholics at the \textit{première} wished to boycott a play that severely criticised the Jesuits, thus seen as blasphemous by the protesters. In both cases, the police intervened and several people were arrested.

\textsuperscript{767} \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (24-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{768} Luz (16-06-1933). The Mayor of Mérida linked this protest to the criticism appeared in El Debate, as seen above, according to La Libertad (Badajoz) (21-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{769} Rabanal Brito in La Libertad (Badajoz) (15-06-1933).
Although Xirgu was a regularly practising Catholic, the association of the Xirgu-Borràs Company with two polemical, if not sacrilegious, plays with republican connotations was enough for a Catholic woman to insult Xirgu in the Retiro Park in Madrid in 1932.\footnote{Mundo Femenino, (June 1932). See Rodrigo (1988: 142), Delgado (2003: 37) and Foguet i Boreu (2010: 176).} This is part of the background that explains Catholic protests in Plasencia and later criticism of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida. Medea’s main actress had played a republican and revolutionary Virgin Mary and its stage director had directed an anti-Jesuit theatrical critique. This must not be underestimated, and it is most certainly what lies behind El Siglo Futuro’s description of the Xirgu-Borràs Company as ‘secular’ in its information on Seneca’s Medea.\footnote{El Siglo Futuro (19-06-1933).} The religious tension surrounding the Xirgu-Borràs Company is illustrated by a letter sent by Rivas Cherif to the renowned Catholic republican politician Ángel Ossorio y Gallardo, on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of June 1932:

By the way, two days ago I had the occasion to witness in Zaragoza a homage of vivacious sympathy to Margarita Xirgu. It was organized as a farewell by all the republican societies and socialist groups, as a reparation for the intransigent attitude of so-called Catholic ladies of notorious impropriety. They continue in an anonymous condemnation [...] inviting good Catholics to ignore the spectacles of an actress who is Catalan and who performs the works of Azaña and takes me (adapter of Pérez de Ayala in his A.M.D.G., according to the anonymous letter) as artistic director. The farewell to Margarita was impressive [...] The very republican flowers placed as her centrepiece and on the stage were taken the next day to the chamber of la Pilarica [the popular name for the Virgin of El Pilar].\footnote{Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, PS-Madrid (808,83).}

This street-level religious conflict was aggravated by the republican occupation of public spaces with theatre and the gradual disappearance of religious public acts (see p. 173). It is therefore understandable that the writer under the pseudonym Mirabal would imagine, in El Siglo Futuro, a Catholic counter-performance to Seneca’s Medea: the truly Spanish Catholic staging in
Mérida of the martyrdom of Saint Eulalia, victim of Diocletian. This—rather ironically—contrasted with the enthusiasm with which the priest of the Saint Eulalia parish in Mérida had received Seneca’s Medea (see p. 36). During Franco’s regime Mirabal’s dream would become true, and the play Eulalia, written and directed by José María Saussol, was performed in Mérida in April 1964.\footnote{Sánchez Matas (1991: 100-101).} Mirabal’s denunciation reads as follows:

Contemplating the sepulchre of Saint Cecilia, I remember a Spanish martyr of her age and time: Saint Eulalia of Mérida. That Roman city, which still maintains the arches of its aqueduct; which keeps the arch of Trajan—the emperor who gave Spain to Rome—intact and the portico of the temple of Diana, and its famous amphitheatre, a marvel for archaeologists. There a Government of the Republic of 1931 has had the humour of evoking hours of cultural paganism, performing ‘Medea’. And perhaps there will be someone who will one day move the people there—who were not moved by the Hellenic tragedy—by evoking in a Passion play the heroism of Saint Eulalia before the Praetor, in that same circus of what was once called ‘Emerita Augusta’.\footnote{El Siglo Futuro (17-10-1933)}

\textbf{Eulalia’s victory over Medea.}

The staging of Seneca’s Medea on the 18th of June 1933 took place amidst a tense confrontation between the Republic and Catholics. This is the reason why the pagan, atheist and republican implications of the performance and text of Seneca’s Medea were deployed as a means by which the opposition press could attack the Republic’s own apparent anti-Christian sentiments and atheist tendencies. Seneca’s Medea was explicitly placed at the centre of a politico-religious battle that would soon have its effect in the elections of November 1933: the Catholic right, the CEDA, would become the most voted coalition. The centre-right government would suspend the effects of much of the previous government’s religious legislation.\footnote{See Payne (1984: 164-165; 1993: 184-185) and Casanova (2010: 41).} The project of
secularisation came to a halt. It seems that, in November 1933, the child martyr Saint Eulalia of Mérida had indeed won the battle for the soul of the Spanish nation against the pagan Medea.


Many of the demands of decades of Spanish feminism were also addressed within the Republic’s constituent period (1931-1933). The première of Seneca’s Medea stood chronologically in the midst of the republican reform on Women’s Rights. The Constitution, with its legalisation of Female Suffrage and divorce, was approved on the 9th of December 1931, eighteen months before the performance of Medea. Three months later, the Divorce Law was approved on the 25th of February 1932. Only four months and a day after the performance at Mérida—and only twenty one days after its performance at the Teatro Español in Madrid—women could vote freely in a general election for the first time in Spanish History on the 19th of November 1933.

The journalistic and bibliographic sources used in this thesis are comparatively silent about Medea regarding Women’s Rights and the movement’s socio-political demands. Spain did not apparently see in the figure of Medea the tool for reflection Britain had had since the 1840s,778 even though many Spanish feminists had tight links with international feminists, including British. This is striking given proven Medea’s usefulness elsewhere,779 above all in her tragic incarnations, as a platform for discussion of issues such as female political, public and private power, economic and legal marital dependence, marriage, divorce, adultery, motherhood and the custody and welfare of children; all themes central to the Spanish Women’s Movement. It seems revealing that such issues, so strongly and at times hysterically discussed during the Republic’s inception, were not linked to Medea until the 1933 performance of Seneca’s tragedy, and then only timidly and mostly by the press opposed to the government.

779 See, for example, Bartel and Simon (2010).
There is no proof that the 1933 production, text or performance of Seneca’s *Medea* responded to a clear feminist agenda in any way. Plenty of speculation could be made on whether Xirgu, an independent, powerful, successful and comparatively wealthy woman in favour of divorce, chose *Medea* from a feminist perspective. But this is, given the sources and information currently available, mere speculation. The attendance of the combative feminist and socialist Margarita Nelken may also add a further feminist veneer to the performance. But Nelken may have attended only as the regional MP for Badajoz, the province Mérida belonged to. Nevertheless, Medea’s own feminist potential and the feminist connotations both Xirgu and Nelken brought to the performance, did not go unnoticed, as *Gracia y Justicia’s* ironic criticism of female empowerment proves:

So, here we are, surrounded by Margaritas—Margarita Nelken, Margarita Xirgu—, all willing to break our chests as soon as Jason appears and wants to have a go at Medea.\(^{780}\)

Here I shall first briefly explore the evolution of the Women’s Movement in Spain, with special attention given to Margarita Nelken, in order to assess how Medea contested established stereotypes of Spanish perceived femininity (1). After this, I shall focus on two central aspects of feminism during the Republic, also essential to Medea’s story and her Senecan portrayal: firstly, female empowerment, through suffrage and divorce (2) and secondly, motherhood and infanticide (3). Through these steps, we shall be able to clearly assess how the 1933 production of Seneca’s *Medea* could have responded to, or impacted on, many of the aims, interests and battles of the Women’s Movement in Spain.

\(^{780}\) *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933).
a) The most womanly of all women: feminism and femininity.

Organised groups with unequivocal feminist agendas did not appear in Spain until the decade of the 1910s.\footnote{On Spanish feminism and women before and during the early 20th century see Fagoaga (1985: 11-192), González Calbet (1988: 51-56), Nash (1995: 7-42), Domingo (2004: 65-83), Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 39-110) and Caballé (2013: 137-230).} This may have responded to several and complicated historical and social reasons.\footnote{See Fagoaga (1985: 65), Nash (1995: 10, 19-20), Martínez Gutiérrez (1997: 27-28), Domingo (2004: 73) and Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 41).} In 1918 we find the most important organised group, the Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas (National Association of Spanish Women), or ANME.\footnote{Fagoaga (1985: 127-138); Nash (1995: 40); Lannon (2011: 277); Caballé (2013: 174-176).} During its lifetime (1918-1936), ANME would defend Female Suffrage, divorce, equal penalties for adultery, equal rights for legitimate and illegitimate children, participation in juries, full citizen rights, punishment for domestic abuse and drunkenness as a reason for divorce, to mention only a few. This organisation was behind the creation of the Juventud Universitaria Feminista (Feminist University Youth) in 1920.\footnote{Fagoaga (1985: 143-152); Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 93-95).} Both the ANME and the JUF would jointly become the main block in the Women’s Movement in Spain, demanding major socio-political reforms.

With a more left-leaning stand we find also the Unión de Mujeres de España (Spanish Women’s Union), lead by María Lejárraga, also socialist MP after November 1933,\footnote{Fagoaga (1985: 139-141).} and the Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas (Spanish Women’s Crusade), captained by the notorious Carmen de Burgos.\footnote{Fagoaga (1985: 109, 152-155); Nash (1995: 34, 40).} The latter was very active, primarily on Female Suffrage, as a collaborator with the International Women Suffrage Alliance.

International collaboration was central to Spanish feminism. Spain’s neutrality made it a propitious location for the 1919 Congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance, which, however, finally took place in Geneva instead.\footnote{Fagoaga (1985: 158-163); Caballé (2013: 172).} Spain did host the XII Congress of the
International Federation of University Women in 1928, with the JUF as the host organisation.\textsuperscript{788} Five renowned women, among them the 1931 MPs Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor, founded the Spanish section of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation.\textsuperscript{789} The members also created female organisations to defend international peace.\textsuperscript{790} As a response, Catholic social agents began to create a counter-feminist style of feminism.\textsuperscript{791} This conservative feminism, compliant with the status quo on gender, had already begun at the turn of the century surrounding Catalan nationalism.\textsuperscript{792} Catholic counter-feminism had interestingly defended Female Suffrage since 1918, when a campaign was spearheaded by the Catholic right-wing newspaper \textit{El Debate}:\textsuperscript{793} ‘such a political innovation would be very beneficial to the cause of the Right in Spain’, the newspaper declared.\textsuperscript{794} Although woman’s active political implication ‘would separate her from her sacred ministry in the home’.\textsuperscript{795} Catholic counter-feminism’s strongest platform was Acción Católica de la Mujer (Women’s Catholic Action), created in 1919,\textsuperscript{796} the sister organisation of Acción Católica, sponsored by Pius XI in his \textit{Dilectissima Nobis} (June 1933). By 1929, this group counted a hundred and eighteen thousand members.\textsuperscript{797} Margarita Nelken clearly believed that it was, in 1919, ‘the best enemy of everything that may mean evolution and progress in Spain’.\textsuperscript{798} The Women’s Movement created two cultural institutions that would aid in the dissemination of their ideas. One was the International Female Hall of Residence, the Residencia de Señoritas, in which the future MP Victoria Kent had been a resident.\textsuperscript{799} It was a thriving cultural centre,

\textsuperscript{788} Fagoaga (1985: 166); Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 90).
\textsuperscript{793} Fagoaga (1985: 123, 174-175, 180); García Escudero (1983: 257-258); Lannon (2011: 279).
\textsuperscript{794} Quoted in Fagoaga (1985: 174).
\textsuperscript{795} Quoted in Fagoaga (1985: 174).
\textsuperscript{797} Fagoaga (1985: 178); Caballé (2013: 180).
\textsuperscript{798} Nelken (2012: 169).
although its director, María de Maeztu, a recognised feminist and intellectual herself, wished it to be ‘neither an intellectual casino nor a suffragist school’.  

The exclusively female Lyceum Club in Madrid was created in 1926 and by 1930 counted on more than five hundred members. Some of its funding came from the experimental theatre group El Mirlo Blanco, whose artistic director was Cipriano Rivas Cherif, director of Seneca’s *Medea.* The Lyceum Club would be home to the feminist elite, including the first three female MPs of the Second Spanish Republic: the future champion of female suffrage Clara Campoamor, the combative Nelken and the future Director General of Prisons, Victoria Kent. It became the cradle for much of the future development of Spanish feminism, female thinkers and politicians.

One of its members, Nelken, attended the premiere of Seneca’s *Medea* on the 18th of June 1933 (see pp. 38 and 58). She was a fierce feminist, art critic, artist and journalist. She would be the only woman to be elected in the Republic’s three elections of 1931, 1933 and 1936. She was independent in her personal life and the author of some shocking actions for her times, such as registering her first child as Magdalena Nelken, thus not acknowledging the father. She distinguished between socially created aspects of female identity and those natural to women. She paid special attention to motherhood, which she understood to be pivotal to a woman’s existence and identity, although she opposed many of the religious and social readings of contemporary motherhood and female sexuality. She directed the female Cigar-roller’s strike in Madrid, and was active in socialist groups and press. In accordance with many on the Left, she

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publicly opposed Female Suffrage, mainly on the grounds of clerical influence on female voters.\textsuperscript{804}

Her condition as a well-connected Spanish intellectual and politician made her understandably prone to use Seneca as a rhetorical tool. She praised Seneca’s mother Helvia as the first example in a centuries-long line of capable Spanish women. In Nelken’s eyes, it seemed that Seneca was, in part, Spain’s first intellectual because Helvia, of autonomous intellectual standing, had been his mother.\textsuperscript{805} She argued this in November 1932, months before Seneca’s Medea, in the prologue to her compendium of the Medicine Nobel laureate, Doctor Ramon y Cajal’s ideas on women:

In order to stop the keepers of tradition [...] from their decidedly contrary gesture, we have, of course, incomparable advocates: from that Helvia, to whom her son, Seneca the Philosopher, dedicated ‘De Consolatione in Helviam’ [sic], in a gesture of gratitude to the very learned intelligence that had so extensively contributed to form his, down to Doña Emilia Pardo Bazán, in whom a critic as inexorable as Clarín fervently saw ‘a [male] sage’.\textsuperscript{806}

Nelken was also a supporter of revolutionary socialist ideals. She was denounced as instigator of the revolt of Castilblanco, Extremadura, on the last day of 1931, resulting in four Civil Guards being killed by a group of agricultural workers, as a response to the death of one of their own.\textsuperscript{807} She was also an active participant in the Revolution of 1934, which forced her subsequent exile to the USSR. Because of her revolutionary stamina, two republican battalions bore her name during the Civil War, in Madrid and Extremadura, and she publicly pleaded with


\textsuperscript{805} For a similar idea see Nelken (1930: 27).

\textsuperscript{806} Nelken in Ramón y Cajal (1999: 8).

the citizens of Madrid to resist the insurgent army. As shown, her mere presence at the 1933 performance of Medea brought with it many feminist and socialist connotations which, although perhaps only peripheral or circumstantial, were undoubtedly understood as significant by many.

Despite the gradual momentum that the Women’s Movement gathered in these decades, the condition of women was certainly dire and restrictive. In 1930, female illiteracy stood at 47.5%, whilst male illiteracy was 36.9%.\(^808\) Women required a formal authorisation from their husband or father to comply with the most basic administrative actions.\(^809\) Female submission was enshrined in law.\(^810\) The husband was also representative and administrator of all property. Adultery for women was defined as sexual intercourse with any man other than her husband, and carried a two to six year sentence, while that for men was only constituted by cohabitation with a concubine. Custody of children lay with the father, and widows could lose it if they remarried.\(^811\) Female participation in the labour market was generally deemed unacceptable and women suffered open opposition in the workplace even from fellow workers and unions.\(^812\) To this, we must add one of the strongest obstacles to the emancipation of women and their participation in public decision-making: their perceived role. Nash explains this very clearly and succinctly:

> The predominant discourse on women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was based on the ideology of domesticity, evoking a female prototype of the perfecta casada (perfect married lady), whose primordial gender role was that of caring for home and family. Women were depicted as ángeles del hogar (angels of the hearth), angelic nurturers who sustained the family.\(^813\)

\(^{808}\) Nash (1995: 19); Caballé (2013: 192).
\(^{809}\) Caballé (2013: 153).
\(^{813}\) Nash (1995: 10-11).
Some of these issues did not improve with the arrival of the Republic. The most prominent example of this was article 23 of the Constitutional Project which read: ‘The equality of rights of both sexes is recognised in principle’. The qualifying formula in principle outraged Clara Campoamor, who, after much discussion and opposition—among others, with Victoria Kent—, managed to eliminate it from the final constitutional text.⁸¹⁴ Yet the husband’s right to the administration of his wife’s income and business was once more upheld in the 1931 Law of Labour Contracts.⁸¹⁵ Contrary to what Gracia y Justicia suggested, under the Republic, Jason could indeed still ‘have a go at Medea’.⁸¹⁶

This discriminatory attitude seeps through an article on Euripides’ (not Seneca’s) Medea by the journalist Luis de Oteyza, in August 1931.⁸¹⁷ It was in fact a reprint of the chapter on Medea in his own Las mujeres de la literatura (1917), republished in 1930.⁸¹⁸ According to Oteyza, Medea ‘is not a goddess or a heroine, but a woman. A bad woman? The adjective can be discussed; but the noun admits no discussion’. In Oteyza’s opinion, Medea is worse than many evil men. What defines her as a woman are three traits allegedly common to all women: love, jealousy and vindictiveness.⁸¹⁹ These traits would be also at the centre of C.E.’s description of Medea after watching Seneca’s Medea in Barcelona in 1933.⁸²⁰ However much Oteyza apologised, his definition logically turns all women into bad women:

In the history —long and wide, I admit, ladies—of male cruelties there is no one who comes close to the ferocity with which that woman carries out her revenge. Nero, Tamerlane and the Kaiser together, whom I present as bloodthirsty monsters, are a paragon of clement sweetness compared to Medea.

⁸¹⁶ Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).
⁸¹⁷ Muchas Gracias (22-08-1931).
⁸¹⁸ Oteyza (1917: 57-62).
⁸¹⁹ For a similar representation of Medea as an example of women’s jealousy see also ABC (08-10-1933).
⁸²⁰ La Noche (15-09-1933).
Oh the revenge that this enraged citizen takes! But, you must see with how much hypocrisy she plots it and with what skill she prepares it, all to come out undamaged by her fortune. This deserves to be observed, for it proves how, while her loving passion, her furious jealousy and her vindictive desire do disturb Medea’s own soul, they do not upset her to the point of making her forget to care for her body. And this is another sign of the femininity of the character created by Euripides, because it is known that women dominate, much better than men, the difficult science of having it both ways. [...] 

Medea, loving, jealous and vengeful, is the most womanly of all women. She brings together the three main features of the female personality! I say this without the intention of offending you, respected and dear female readers.

On the 18th of June 1933, Medea, the strongest example of a bad woman, appeared on stage in Spain: ‘She is the first woman to have the most perfect complex of the fatality of evil’, Alardo Prats explained in April 1933. Medea, in Seneca’s tragedy, confronts male public and private power against Creon and Jason. ‘Subordination is a pleasure’ had been the Viscountess of San Enrique’s motto in 1929. In contrast, Medea is unquestionably the insubordinate opposite of the ‘angel of the hearth’. She is not submissive to her husband. She is his castigator. She is the destroyer of the home, the defender of her rights and actions and the perpetrator of the ultimate female crime, that of infanticide. She annihilated what the advanced feminist and socialist Maria Cambrils would see in 1925 as the slavery of domesticity, marriage and maternity imposed on Spanish women. Seneca’s whole tragedy is shaped around Medea’s reversion to a state of maidenhood in which, by erasing her acquired status as mother and wife, she regains her original independence. In 1933, Medea stood for the ultimate female ‘other’ and subverted Spanish gender expectations, which were displayed less than a month earlier by the celebration

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821 El Sol (13-04-1933).
of the Miss Europe contest in Madrid.\textsuperscript{825} Aside from Medea’s understandably abhorrent act of infanticide, which I shall later explore, all other features of female power and independence she demonstrates had been defended by many Spanish feminists and incorporated into law by June 1933. It is not unimaginable that many female members of the audience, including Nelken, would have heard many of their aspirations voiced in Medea’s following words:

\begin{quote}
NURSE. The Colchians left you; no loyalty remains in your husband; of such greatness you have nothing left.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
MEDEA. I still have Medea, and here you see the sea, lands, iron, fire, gods and lightning (Sen. Med. 164-167).\textsuperscript{826}
\end{quote}

\textbf{b) Medea and female empowerment.}

The Republic pursued an agenda of Women’s Rights primarily with regards to Female Suffrage and divorce in order to apply its vision of republican democratic and active citizenship to all citizens, including female. By 1931, the demand for Female Suffrage had a history of over half a century. Unfruitful parliamentary discussions on the matter had taken place periodically since 1877.\textsuperscript{827} In 1924, under the Dictatorship, restricted Female Suffrage in municipal elections was granted, and in 1927, thirteen women were selected as members of the consultative National Assembly whose Constitutional Project granted Universal Suffrage (article 55).\textsuperscript{828} But women were never able to exercise that right under the Dictatorship.

\textsuperscript{825}See El Siglo Futuro (23-05-1933). Xirgu had already performed roles of subversive femaleness in Wilde’s Salome (1910), Lorca’s Mariana Pineda (1927) or Azaña’s La Corona, thus adding to the potency of Medea’s provocative power in 1933; see Delgado (2003: 47, 60).
\textsuperscript{826}See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 46).
The arrival of the Republic became a beacon of hope for those who had long fought for Female Suffrage.\textsuperscript{829} Women’s political ability was acknowledged and female passive suffrage granted for the Constituent Elections of June 1931.\textsuperscript{830} This meant that, for the first time in Spanish History, two women were democratically elected as MPs, the radical Campoamor and the radical-socialist Kent. Nelken would later also join them as a member of the Socialist Party. But although these women had been elected, they could not yet be electors. In the Constituent Parliament, the right-wing and the Socialist Party stood in favour of Female Suffrage, but some republican parties were reticent. They feared the influence of husbands and the clergy on female votes. But they could not reject something the Dictator had intended to grant. The bitter fight for Female Suffrage would reveal many of the most profound prejudices against women, not only in male politicians, but also in female.

Female Suffrage had passed the Constitutional Commission, of which Campoamor was a member, unscathed.\textsuperscript{831} In the discussions on the totality of the Constitutional Project, the radical Álvarez Buylla opposed it as a dangerous element for the Republic.\textsuperscript{832} Campoamor’s response became the first time a female MP, and a feminist, would speak in Spanish Parliamentary History. She defended the principles and articles of the Constitutional Project, attacked male privilege and encouraged the Chamber to defend equal rights in the Constitution.\textsuperscript{833} If the civil and electoral rights of women were not to be guaranteed, the first article of the Constitution would have to be modified, according to Campoamor, to read: ‘Spain is an aristocratic Republic of male privilege. All its rights emanate exclusively from men’.\textsuperscript{834}

The true \textit{agon} came on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of October 1931, ‘the grand day of male hysteria’, according to Campoamor.\textsuperscript{835} The other female MP in the chamber —Nelken had not yet taken her seat—

\textsuperscript{829} See \textit{Mundo Femenino} (May-July 1931).
\textsuperscript{830} \textit{Gaceta de Madrid} (10-05-1931).
\textsuperscript{831} Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 115); Gómez Blesa (2009: 231).
\textsuperscript{834} Quoted in Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 124).
\textsuperscript{835} Campoamor (2006: 113).
Victoria Kent, explained her opposition to Female Suffrage, representing the Radical-Socialist Party:

I believe the female vote must be postponed (Good!) This has been spoken by a woman who, at the critical moment of speaking, has renounced an ideal. [...] My honourable friends, it is not a question of capability; it is a question of appropriateness for the Republic.836

Two women who had been at the centre of the Women’s Movement in Spain now stood at each extreme of the dilemma: What came first, Civil Rights or the stability of the Republic? Kent defended that a time of cohabitation for women with the republican cause might be helpful to guarantee their allegiance.837 Her position was influenced by a petition to Parliament, presented by Catholic women, in favour of the religious orders.838 She then illustrated an idea shared by many in the Women’s Movement in Spain, including Nelken:839

If all the Spanish women were workers, if the Spanish women had already gone through a period at university and had been liberated in their conscience, I myself would stand before the whole Chamber to ask for the female vote.840

Campoamor stood to give one of the strongest feminist speeches ever heard to this day in Spain.841 She first questioned the idea that women had not participated in the arrival of the Republic, challenging the need for a female qualified vote, if this had not been demanded from men. She added: ‘What you do is to hold a power; let women manifest themselves and you will see how you cannot hold that power any longer.’842 She then explained that female illiteracy

836 Quoted in Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 158-159).
levels fell at a faster rate than those of illiterate men, making it soon a thing of the past and rendering qualified female suffrage unnecessary. Finally, she reminded the Chamber that not granting female suffrage might force some women to rethink and reshape their political ideals, creating an even bigger threat than that feared: ‘You save the Republic, you help the Republic, by drawing towards you that force that awaits anxiously the moment of its redemption’. 843

Article 34 of the Constitution, granting universal suffrage, was passed by 161 votes to 121, with 188 abstentions, thanks to the support of socialists (with some desertions), Catalan nationalists and the Right. 844 Women had been granted rightful citizenship status in the Constitution of the Second Spanish Republic.

At least that was how it would have been if on the 1st of December the MP Peñalba had not proposed an amendment, after merging his own with an identical amendment conceived by Kent. It proposed that female participation in a general election should take place only after voting in the following two biennial municipal elections. 845 Campoamor spoke as part of the Commission, opposing that ‘a monument to fear, in the style of the Lacedaemonians, may be erected by some proposers in the Chamber’. 846 After a lucid speech by Campoamor, 847 and some further parliamentary strife, the amendment was rejected by 131 votes to 127, a difference of only four votes. This took place, as Campoamor herself explained, without the support of the Right, who had left the Chamber protesting the constitutional articles on religion. 848 Women’s right to vote and participate fully in politics had finally, and unquestionably, become part of Spain’s fundamental law.

846 Quoted in Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 212).
847 Full speech in Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 211-222).
Campoamor was hailed by the most important association in the Women’s Movement, the ANME, as a heroine. Its official newspaper, Mundo Femenino, had Campoamor on the cover of its October issue. The tribute on the 14th of November became a huge suffragist celebration, which included a salutation from English suffragists and the attendance of the then Minister of Justice (later governmental instigator of Seneca’s Medea) Fernando de los Ríos (see Figure 78). De los Ríos would appear on the front cover of Mundo Femenino in November 1931.

New feminist groups now appeared, besides the expansion of existing progressive and conservative or Catholic groups. Out of these, two would become the most notorious, the Unión Republicana Femenina (Feminine Republican Union), founded by Campoamor and the Asociación Femenina de Educación Cívica (Feminine Association of Civic Education), founded by the soon-to-be socialist MP María Lejárraga in 1933. Fernando de los Ríos spoke in late December 1932 to the Asociación Femenina de Educación Cívica. He characterised women as the spiritual reserve of the nation, and saw them as central to his theory of Spanish ethics through aesthetics (see pp. 163-164). The Xirgu-Borràs Company actively collaborated in a gala organised by the Unión Republicana Femenina in support of children’s welfare, on the 4th of April 1933 in the Teatro Español.

The adult female members in the audience of Seneca’s Medea in 1933 understood themselves to be full citizens of the Republic. Indeed a few were active members of republican society, such as the pedagogues Juana Ontañón and Gloria Giner de los Ríos, the MP Margarita Nelken, the actress Carmen Ruiz Moragas, the school inspector María López Cort and the school teacher Mercedes López Cantero.

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852 Mundo Femenino (December 1932).
853 El Sol (31-03-1933); Ahora (05-04-1933); Luz (05-04-1933).
854 La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933); La Libertad (Badajoz) (20-06-1933).
855 Región (19-06-1933).
In April 1933, municipal elections were held in some towns, with a clear victory for the centre-right. Only five days before *Medea*, a governmental crisis had been resolved after the resignation of Prime Minister Azaña. The political situation was tense, and a general election seemed only a question of time. In these electorally intense circumstances, female and male audience members were watching Medea confront Creon, a confrontation Chabás thought Xirgu performed outstandingly (Figure 22). In the tragedy, Medea also recalls her own political and individual value as Princess of Colchis and as culprit in the victory of the Argonauts (Sen. Med. 116-140, 195-280, 431-503). Women would soon also have to develop their own political empowerment and civic worth. 6,800,000 new female electors, more than half the electorate, could vote in the elections of November 1933. Many may have seen Medea as a personification of the positive potential of female empowerment. Others undoubtedly saw the dangers. On the one hand, Medea was perhaps an example of female hysteria which, combined with clerical and conservative pressure, would become the most dangerous threat to the stability of the Republic. On the other hand, the Catholic press was openly attacking *Medea* as a paragon of what the Republic had done and could do. In *Medea*, the audience was watching the performance of potential republican womanhood. They would project their own fears and hopes onto Medea and draw their own positive or negative lessons from her. It is perhaps for this reason that Juan Herrera specifically mentioned the numerous attendance of women in the audience in Mérida:

At half past six in the afternoon it presented a grandiose aspect. The five thousand seats that form it were totally occupied, with numerous women standing out among the spectators.

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856 Casanova (2010: 85).
858 Luz (19-06-1933).
861 *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933).
Although only a small regional newspaper from Toledo, El Castellano thought it necessary, in November 1933, to use Euripides’ Medea to illustrate how women were not oppressed by the Church in their electoral choices, as the Left had claimed, and that non-Christian examples of this also existed:

We can present, on the contrary, the example of pagan theatre, in whose plays women weep, under the intolerable yoke of man, until they cry out in ‘Medea’, by Euripides: ‘We are women, the most abject race among all the living.’

Women were able to vote for the first time in the elections of November 1933. As feared by many, right-wing and pro-Catholic parties won, changing the direction of the Republic. The reasons for this were numerous, and it is difficult to lay the blame exclusively on the gender issue, but many saw Campoamor as the agent of or scapegoat for such a victory. Spain had effectively joined the democratically progressive countries in granting Female Suffrage, therefore becoming another example for nations that had not yet done so. Women could decide on their public future by exercising their public rights. They could speak truth to power, as Medea had done with Creon and Jason in the summer of 1933.

But private freedom was the other side of the coin. Given the state of subjection by and submission to the husband in which contemporary Spanish women lived, divorce had been, unsurprisingly, a strong feminist demand. It seemed at times that a free woman could be an unmarried woman only. Carmen de Burgos defended divorce as ‘a weapon, a protection for the wife’, and received the epithet ‘the divorcer’. Campoamor, herself unmarried, was clear about the implications of marriage and therefore of divorce: ‘It turns women into minors by

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\(^{862}\) El Castellano (04-11-1933).


\(^{864}\) Victor Basch mentions Spain as an example for the French Republic in February 1932; see Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 231).

\(^{865}\) Quoted in Lezcano (1979: 62).

\(^{866}\) Caballé (2013: 186).
stripping them of their personality in exchange for legal love’. Nelken expressed her ideas on divorce to Gomáriz, in the appendix to his monograph on the Divorce Law of 1932:

From a social and ethical point of view, the possibility of divorce is the only guarantee of personal dignity within marriage. And this is the case principally for women, since in marriage, besides all the apparent equality, and besides any of the improvements and freedoms which we may wish to introduce in it, who finds herself truly bound by the tie is her.  

The constitutional article on family and divorce, article 43, had passed the Constitutional Commission’s discussions, opposed only by the Right and Alcalá Zamora’s party. The parliamentary debate on the proposed article began on the 15th of October 1931, a fortnight after Female Suffrage had originally been granted. The Right had already left Parliament in protest after Azaña’s famous speech on the Religious Question. The intention of many republicans, including Campoamor, was to entrench the right to divorce in the Constitution, safeguarding it from the diverse preferences of future legislators.

Much of the debate in the Chamber demonstrated the contemporary prejudices against women. For example, the priest Basilio Álvarez, former director of El Debate until August 1911, had said that when proclaiming the right to divorce, hysteria was being enthroned in the law. The socialist and psychiatrist Sanchis Banús responded clearly and sharply:

How can we be surprised that woman reacts in a hysterical manner, if we close her normal path of reaction? I sustain, not that we enthrone hysteria, but that we annul

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868 Gomáriz (1932: 14). See also Nelken (1931: 38-54).
872 Lezcano (1979: 91); Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 121). He declared the same on Female Suffrage; see Mundo Femenino (September 1931).
hysteria by matrimonial causes when we grant women a legal means to destroy the conjugal tie.  

Several topics of discussion were raised. For example, Campoamor explained that, at the time, children suffered under a ‘divorce de facto and not a legal divorce’, and that no law could protect them from the ‘insoluble tragedy’ at home. Medea’s children’s suffering would be staged twenty months later. After all the discussions, article 43 was passed in the following formula:

Marriage is founded on the equality of rights for both sexes and it can be dissolved by mutual agreement or by petition from either of the spouses, with the allegation, in this case, of just cause.

This constitutional article would soon be regulated by a specific law in February 1932. A long and varied discussion took place, in which many arguments were given in favour or against, from praising the further secularisation of the State to warning of growing delinquency when the law passed. Campoamor was the only woman to speak in this debate. On the 25th of February 1932, with an overwhelming majority of 260 votes to 23, Parliament approved ‘one of the most liberal divorce laws in existence’, according to Graham. ‘It was awaited as a messianic redemption of many and grave ills’, said Jiménez de Asúa, president of the Constitutional Commission.

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873 Quoted in Lezcano (1979: 91).
875 Quoted in Lezcano (1979: 93).
876 Quoted in Lezcano (1979: 101).
881 Lezcano (1979: 35).
Women in Spain could now choose which path their futures would take. 88.60% of all divorces happened within the first two years, probably because these were already ill-fortuned marriages.\textsuperscript{882} Out of the total number of divorces petitioned between March 1932 and December 1933, 56% were the wife’s initiative, as were 81.38% of legal separations.\textsuperscript{883} The statistics show a predominant practical use of the law by women, choosing a path different to Medea’s own. The law was supported by many, such as Ramón Franco, the future Dictator’s brother, María de Maeztu and even the priest and MP López-Dóriga,\textsuperscript{884} alongside the aforementioned Carmen de Burgos, Campoamor and Nelken. The other Margarita present in Mérida on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933, Margarita Xirgu herself, agreed:

\begin{quote}
I am a supporter of divorce, and its implantation in Spain would be in tune with the modern legal currents of democratic countries.\textsuperscript{885}
\end{quote}

In contrast, the Catholic Church was openly opposed to civil divorce, as the Pope’s \textit{Dilectissima Nobis}, quoted above, demonstrates.\textsuperscript{886} The previous status quo on marriage and its indissoluble bond was embodied at the premiere of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida by the presence of the actress Carmen Ruiz Moragas (see p. 38). She had divorced her husband in Mexico in 1925, only for that divorce to be annulled by the Ecclesiastical Tribunal in Spain,\textsuperscript{887} thus making of her a marital pariah, while her former partner was able to remarry in Mexico, as he duly did. Carmen Ruiz Moragas was neither married nor free to marry again under Spanish law.\textsuperscript{888}

Seneca’s \textit{Medea} itself probably had Roman marital law as a guideline originally,\textsuperscript{889} as Luis Araujo-Costa acknowledged in September 1933.\textsuperscript{890} Many articles of the Divorce Law of 1932

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{882} Lezcano (1979: 35).
\item \textsuperscript{884} Lezcano (1979: 102).
\item \textsuperscript{885} Lezcano (1979: 71).
\item \textsuperscript{886} See also Iribarren (1974: 181-189).
\item \textsuperscript{887} Invalidated by the Republic; see Sánchez (1964: 143).
\item \textsuperscript{888} \textit{La Libertad} (17-01-1925). See Cambrils in Solbes, Aguado and Almela (2015: 177).
\item \textsuperscript{889} See Abrahamsen (1999) and Guastella (2001).
\end{itemize}
may have been applicable to the case of Medea and Jason.\textsuperscript{891} For example, the pre-existing condition of fault must have set an interesting mental conundrum for the audience at Mérida. The law listed amongst the thirteen just causes for divorce (art. 3), bigamy, familial neglect ‘without justification’, the violation of marital duties or the immoral or shameful conduct of one of the spouses, specified as ‘any behaviour which is not decorous, such as gambling, drinking or similar’. In the case of a successful divorce, both parties could eventually remarry (art.11). In the parliamentary discussions, Martínez Moya proposed an added reason for the prohibition to remarry: ‘when a crime against the life of one of the spouses, their common children or the children of one of the spouses, had been committed’.\textsuperscript{892} If this amendment had been accepted, it would have been undoubtedly of relevance to Medea’s crimes.

Full powers to administer property were to be established anew after the divorce (art. 24). The guilty party lost all that had been given or promised by the innocent party, or anyone on their behalf. The innocent party preserved all that it had received and could demand anything promised to it (art. 28). Under this article, Medea’s plea of ownership and authorship of the Golden Fleece quest and her return to her prior status in Seneca is of great relevance (Sen. Med. 116-140, 195-280, 431-538).\textsuperscript{893} In addition, in 1933, Medea could have claimed a pension from Jason after divorce, separate to the pension intended for the children (art. 30). Jason would have had to pay this under the threat of sanction (art. 34).

Section 2 of the law states at the outset: ‘The dissolution of marriage does not exempt the parents from their obligations towards their children’ (article 14). Custody and a right to a pension lay with the innocent party (article 17). If Minister Puig de Asprer’s amendment, supported by Campoamor, had succeeded, the children under ten years of age would have automatically remained in the mother’s custody if no agreement were reached.\textsuperscript{894} This could

\textsuperscript{890}La Época (01-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{891} For the legal text of the 1932 Divorce Law see Gomariz (1932).
\textsuperscript{892} Lezcano (1979: 186-188).
\textsuperscript{893} See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 44-45, 49-53 65).
\textsuperscript{894} Lezcano (1979: 192).
have perhaps precluded Medea’s crime. If declared culpable, the parent without custody could gain it when the other died, unless guilty of attempted prostitution or corruption of the wife or children, unjustified neglect of the family or ‘attack on the lives of the children had within the marriage’ (art. 19). If guilty, both Medea and Jason would have found it difficult to gain custody once the other had died.

The marital issues at the heart of Seneca’s Medea were indeed anachronistic in 1933, and they did not correspond with the Divorce Law, promulgated twenty centuries after its composition. The conflict between Medea and Jason may have had a legal solution under the Republic. But probably the different marital status quo prior to the law was in the minds of many in Mérida. One hopes that infanticide might have been avoidable under the 1932 Divorce Law, but the reasons for it had social, rather than legal, echoes in 1933 Spain, as we shall see. Divorce perhaps solved the extreme outcomes of marital strife, but it did not erase it entirely. All these potential interpretations and contradictions are interestingly condensed in a fictional anecdote at the performance of Seneca’s Medea, proposed by Gracia y Justicia:

Xirgu comes out and starts to expel meters of lungs through her mouth saying that Borrás is despicable because he wants to marry another woman. Then mister Fernando de los Ríos interrupts her, warning her that divorce is now implanted. Margarita Nelken adds that even if it did not exist, it would be the same.\textsuperscript{895}

c) An infanticide before the people.

Children were a central concern to the Women’s Movement in Spain. Many saw motherhood as a strong feature of feminine identity, not only in conservative sectors, as Nelken’s ideas exemplify.\textsuperscript{896} The equality among legitimate and illegitimate children was recognised also in the Divorce Law of 1932. Minors should not pay for the conduct of their parents. ‘Their only fault

\textsuperscript{895} Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933).

\textsuperscript{896} See, for example, Maternología y puercicultura (1926), quoted in Martínez Gutiérrez (1997: 62-63).
is to have Jason as father and, a higher one still, to have Medea as a mother’, Medea claims in Seneca’s tragedy (Sen. Med. 933-934). Campoamor’s words in Parliament on the 1st of September 1931 are interestingly coincidental with Medea’s thought:

Children, who are innocent, do not have to answer for, nor must they answer for, sin or illegitimacy. Only because of that ancestral belief that children must inherit all that their parents were, morally and matrimonially, you cannot, even when your tenderness is elevated, separate the idea of sin from parenthood.

The Insurance for Maternity was reinstalled in a decree in May 1931 to aid primarily working-class mothers through childbirth and maternity leave. It was signed by the socialist Labour Minister, Largo Caballero, who attended Medea in Madrid in September 1933. In March 1932, soon after the legalisation of divorce, the government launched a campaign to publicise this insurance. Chief amongst the many reasons for the defence of motherhood and children, according to Nuevo Mundo, stood illegitimate children and abortions, two grave problems in Spain at the time:

Every year there is an increase of the statistics of infanticide, of abortions provoked by the misery and shame of millions of women who are helpless, lonely and accused among barbaric universal indifference. Many of these women even pay with their own lives [...] the terror of being mothers.

The killing of newly-born infants was an ever-present reality in the Spanish press. For example, in the year of the premiere of Seneca’s Medea, 1933, the Spanish press reports seventeen cases of infanticide, creating an average of 1.4 infanticides a month. In 1934, when Seneca’s Medea

897 See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 82).
898 Quoted in Fagoaga and Saavedra (2006: 121).
900 Nuevo Mundo (11-03-1932).
returns to Mérida, the cases documented are nineteen, an average of 1.58 infanticides a month. These are all cases in which the body had been found and at times the perpetrator too. The cases in which the body of the newborn had been successfully disposed of are understandably not reported in the newspapers. The picture presented by Nuevo Mundo is thus fairly accurate.

In July 1933, the writer Ramón J. Sender while in the USSR records an anecdote. A Spanish-speaking woman in Strasnaya was shocked and disbelieving when reading of an infanticide in the newspaper Sender held. She did not understand what the newspaper meant by ‘virtue’. She explained that this had happened under the bourgeoisie and that it may be due to economic reasons. Beside any communist undertones in Sender’s anecdote, it may have had a propitious readership. The growing tone of outrage towards cases of infanticide and the pitying tone of many articles may be seen as a reflection of the social perception of such crimes in the months surrounding Seneca’s Medea. The overwhelming majority of reported infanticides in newspapers have the phrase ‘to cover her shame’ inextricably attached: ‘abortion, infanticide, dying, bleeding to death on a bed in an unspeakable den—they were guilty’, Nuevo Mundo opines.

The Republic had swiftly become lenient with cases of infanticide. The 1932 Penal Code considerably reduced the sentences for infanticide (art. 416) and assisted abortion (art. 419), compared to the 1870 Penal Code (articles 424 and 427, respectively). But infanticide was still considered such a profound moral problem that women were banned from serving as jurors in these cases, although they could judge crimes of parricide, homicide or murder with passionate motives. In complete contrast, women did get a chance to judge one of the most notorious infanticide cases in the history of Western Culture when sitting to watch Seneca’s Medea in 1933.

901 La Libertad (07-07-1933).
902 Nuevo Mundo (11-03-1932). See also Nelken (1931: 55-57).
Tragic fate had been fused with infanticide and feminism only nine days before the performance of Seneca’s *Medea*. The audience in Mérida and the whole of Spain had been shocked on the 9th of June 1933 with the murder of Hildegart Rodríguez at the hands of her own mother, Aurora. Everyone present in Mérida could see Hildegart’s face fill the front cover of the newspaper *Crónica* on the 18th of June (Figure 79).

Aurora had engineered Hildegart’s life so that she would serve the cause of women. Hildegart spoke several languages and at thirteen years old she began studying Law at university. She was later a prolific writer on female sexuality and sexual education and health, in contact with the English physician, sexologist and social reformer Havelock Ellis, and had defended eugenic abortion and birth control. She was a prodigy: ‘Her feminist ideas are light years away from her contemporaries’, Caballé affirms.

Incidentally, in 1931 Hildegart’s companion in the Spanish League for Sexual Reform, the psychiatrist Cesar Juarrós, connected Medea’s infanticide to sexuality and sexual reform. In his article, commenting on Louis Gautier-Vignal’s *Medée*, he claimed:

> The key to the horror: to see motherly love vanquished by sexual love [...] Medea sacrificed them to her sexual enthusiasm. Before the hurricane triggered by the example, spirits tremble with fear and uncertainty.

Aurora apparently killed her daughter because of her growing independence from motherly control. She shot Hildegart four times while she was sleeping. She openly admitted her crime. Like Medea, a mother had killed her own daughter because the creation she had invested in was being snatched away from her hands, a comparison Giménez Caballero himself would make in

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905 Hildegart (1930a, 1930b); Hildegart in Noguera and Huerta (1934: I, 203-244). See also Sinclair (2007: 150) and Caballé (2013: 190).
906 Caballé (2013: 190).
907 For example see Juarros in Noguera and Huerta (1934: I, 245-272).
908 *La Libertad* (07-03-1931).
September 1934.\textsuperscript{909} Let us not forget Medea’s children were performed by two girls in the 1933 production. Aurora’s crime of filicide channelled ancient echoes whose pagan Medean undertones, despite the newspaper \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid}’s wish, had not entirely been silenced by 1933:

The death of Hildegart at the hands of her own mother, who, loving her creation to extremity, destroys her rather than seeing her spoiled by the influence of a love affair that had not been foreseen, is a theme rich in suggestions, and one that poses a number of interesting questions for modern psychiatry and penology. And yet, in the end, it is an ancient drama that has its roots in Spartan morality, now well out of use since most of the civilized world has taken to being governed by the postulates of Christianity.\textsuperscript{910}

The journalist and writer Antonio Zozaya perceived Medea’s long shadow looming over Aurora Rodríguez’s infanticidal crime in \textit{El Liberal} on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of June 1933, four days after Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida. According to Zozaya, Aurora performed a style of motherly euthanasia on her engineered daughter in order to spare her the slavery of love. Aurora was discreet in her act of killing, as Horace would have desired (Hor. \textit{Ars.} 185). But although Zozaya fails to mention it, Medea, in Mérida, had done the exact opposite, much to the delight of Rivas Cherif (see pp. 105, 260-262). Medea had committed Aurora’s crime for all the audience to see and for the whole of Spain to witness on tour. In Zozaya’s opinion, Aurora and Medea interrupted nature’s ways, making Jason’s children and Hildegart stand as martyrs through the monstrosity of their infanticides:

\begin{quote}
We must free our loved ones from pain, and for that strange and obsessed mother there is no greater pain than that of loving. And she thinks about killing her daughter: but
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{909} \textit{El Progreso} (29-09-1934).
Medea does not sacrifice her children in the sight of the people. ‘Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet’. She [Aurora] surprises Hildegart asleep and kills her.911

Hildegart’s and Medea’s ‘ancient drama’ was still commonplace in rural Spain. The Republic launched a series of medical campaigns, the Escuela Ambulante de Puericultura (Itinerant School of Childcare), to protect the health of rural children. The doctor Juan Paulis informs the readers of Mundo Gráfico about the campaign launched in Catalonia, in November 1932. Paulis’ principal concern was the dependence many families had on local witches and healers. He complains that 99% of the children are eventually taken to the doctor so he can certify the ‘concealed infanticide’ committed by witch doctors. If Dr. Paulis is right, the connection in rural areas between witchery and children, and perhaps even their deaths, must have been considerable. Let us remember that Extremadura was one of the largest and most remote rural regions in Spain and that most Spaniards either lived or had been born in rural areas. It is therefore easy to conceive that Medea’s witchery and her infanticidal crime may have had profound resonance to the audience of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida and elsewhere. The impact of witchery on children, according to doctor Paulis, was indeed a worrying matter:

It is in this way, discreet and friendly reader, how the Implacable One [Death] every year reaps the flower of the lives of two hundred thousand Spanish children and so, despite the effort of the health classes, the tragic Herodian act that keeps our country in the second column of the European tariff of child mortality is sustained.912

It seems that the predicament of children remained a grave problem that continued to affect Spanish republican society. Children were still the most vulnerable, and seemed to suffer for the sins of their parents (contrary to Campoamor’s wishes), as Medea would so clearly state in Seneca’s tragedy. Hildegart’s murder by her own mother was the sensational distortion of an underlying social problem in 1930s Spain.

911El Liberal (Murcia) (22-06-1933).
912Mundo Gráfico (02-11-1932).
Medea and republican symbolical matriarchy.

We can conclude from our analysis that Medea, as a character, a tragedy, and as republican cultural event, stands at the centre of a debate and a necessary and fundamental change to the Second Spanish Republic: Women’s Rights. Ernesto Giménez Caballero himself believed the Second Spanish Republic had entered in 1931 a phase of symbolic matriarchy, in order to compensate for the deficiencies of its male—leadership. Seneca’s Medea indeed served as a strong cultural affirmation of what Giménez Caballero, and perhaps others, would call, in October 1931, Spain’s gynecocratic Second Republic:

The gynecocratic Spain advances. It achieved suffrage, now divorce. Tomorrow it shall reach out for golden rings to insert in our ears. It is her right; that is, ‘her power’ […] It is no time to argue, my friend. Nor to cry. It is the time to surrender ‘your weapons’. The time for submission. The time of slaves. And poor he who tries to resist and defend himself! ‘The furies of the Averno’—do not forget the myth—, the ‘erinyes’, the ‘harpies’ (Alecto, Tisiphone and Megaera), flying through the air of Spain, ‘roaring like maddened meteorites’, shall fall on the rebel, rip out his eyes and tear him up—now as in the eternal legend. Make way for the might of the Spanish woman! A white flag—from our dismantled trench to divorce.

Conclusion: Medea, the antichristian gynecocratic revolutionary.

Seneca’s Medea became a perfect vehicle, given its themes and context, for the channelling of many of the concerns, disputes, tensions and conflicts that lay at the core of the Republic’s social reform. It served as a reflection and a revelation of the apparent persecution, disempowerment and public displacement of Catholics and the Church and of the advances in Female Suffrage and divorce, alongside the disadvantages of clandestine abortions and filicide.

913 Giménez Caballero (1932: 41-46).
914 Giménez Caballero in El Heraldo de Madrid (17-10-1931).
The key themes of paganism, sorcery, atheism, marital strife, female empowerment and infanticide at the core of Seneca’s *Medea* complemented and responded to a time of Church burnings, the expulsion of a Church Primate, the proclamation of Spain’s non-Catholicism, a condemning papal encyclical, the non-celebration of Holy Week in Seville, the female vote, the legal dissolution of marriage, the killing of children and the death of Hildegart at her mother’s own hands. Seneca’s *Medea* indeed asked some profound and poignant questions to a society in mid-change and social turmoil. Despite the obvious ideological stance of *La Nación*, its words on the 19th of September 1933 exemplify the power of Seneca’s *Medea* in laying out the stark social reality of Spain from 1931 to 1933:

‘Medea’ is the ‘resentment’ that sets fire to palaces, temples, that murders and bewitches with inextinguishable tenacity, like a maenad or a natural force. It is useless for the nurse who nourished her to tell her to calm her rancour. ‘Medea’ will come—as nowadays Hildegart’s mother—to kill her own children. No human or divine resistance can contain her long-stored rancour.

To see ‘Medea’ in Spain today is to partly see Spain itself: Fires, fratricides [sic], uncontrollable passions, rancour, rancour and rancour. [It is] A Spain with a pale and implacable face, like that of ‘Medea’, who flees, carried away by demons!
V. Hispano-Roman tragedy on a reformed stage.

A theatre is, above all, a good director (Federico García Lorca).915

Many of the reviews of Seneca’s Medea considered the production to be one of the most important and transcendent of its time, a view expressed enthusiastically in La Voz:

We draft these pages still overwhelmed by the truly magnificent beauty of the show with which Margarita Xirgu and Enrique Borrás have reached the apex of their artistic career, lavish in hysterical triumphs. In the republican Mérida, the air still vibrates with enthusiastic acclamations, with which the numerous crowd, clustered in the stands of the Roman Theatre of Emerita Augusta, have celebrated the performance of the Latin tragedy ‘Medea’, by Seneca, ‘the Cordobés’, translated into Castilian, at once classical and musical, by Don Miguel de Unamuno.

It is certainly necessary to repeat, in other places—in theatres, ‘cinemas’ and modern stages—, this splendid version of a play that after centuries has seen a perfect theatrical realisation, for which it was written.916

What did La Voz mean by ‘a perfect theatrical realisation, for which it was written’? In the following analysis, it will be argued that Seneca’s Medea was the pièce de résistance, even a true coup de théâtre, in Spain’s own theatrical renovation at the hands of the Xirgu-Borràs Company, with Rivas Cherif at its helm: ‘The modernization of the theatrical landscape that she [Xirgu] fostered in the 1930s in her association with director Cipriano de Rivas Cherif cultivated a dramatic renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s not seen since the Golden Age of Calderón, Tirso de Molina and Lope de Vega’, María Delgado states.917 Xirgu and Rivas Cherif

916 La Voz (19-06-1933). Also in El Sol (20-06-1933).
indeed spearheaded what has been known as the Silver Age of Spanish Theatre.\footnote{See Gentilli (1993: 7), Aznar Soler (1997: 50-52), Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 168-286), Gil Fombellida (2003) and Foguet i Boreu (2010: 135-158).} Between 1930 and 1935, while at the Teatro Español, they became the catalyst for a myriad of theatrical synergies. This was the time of the resurgence of theatrical classics and the consolidation of avant-garde international and national authors.\footnote{See Rivas Cherif (1991: 42-43).} They also initiated a profound reform in stage design,\footnote{See Diez-Canedo (1938: 310; 1968: 55-56).} and helped to consolidate the director as the orchestrating figure in a production.\footnote{See Rivas Cherif (1991: 38-40, 310), Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 40-55), Dougherty and Anderson (2012: 303) and Delgado (2012: 432-433).} Melody’s own director, Rivas Cherif, would be called in 1935, nearing the end of this era, ‘the first great national stage director’,\footnote{‘La Libertad’ (31-03-1935).} and ‘nowadays the most prestigious, the most praiseworthy theatre director in Spain’.\footnote{‘La Humanitat’ (22-9-1935) quoted in Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 265). See also Diez-Canedo (1968: 57).}

Seneca’s Medea lay at the chronological heart of this era,\footnote{For praise of Rivas Cherif as director of Seneca’s Medea see, for example, El Sur (22-06-1933), Luz (19-06-1933), Ahora (21-06-1933) and El Sol (21-06-1933, 25-06-1933).} and Rivas Cherif considered it the summit of their work at the Teatro Español: ‘Our endeavour culminated in the performances of Seneca’s Medea, translated by Unamuno and with music by Gluck in the Roman Theatre in Mérida’.\footnote{Rivas Cherif in El Redondel (15-01-1968, 21-01-1968, 28-01-1968); quoted in Rivas Cherif (2013: 54) and in Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 472). See also Rivas Cherif in Luz (13-05-1934); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 159-162), and Rivas Cherif in El Redondel (03-01-1960). Domínguez agrees; see Domínguez (2008: 89).} Seneca’s Medea indeed became an exhibition of the theatrical talents that staged it and the summit for many of their cultural and scenic ambitions. The 18th of June 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea will be seen in this chapter to have been a definitive example of Xirgu and Rivas Cherif’s ideas on, and experience in, the use of ancient drama to renovate the stage and showcase acting talents (1), an exploration of Senecan tragedy and Roman theatrical space to create new dramatic and scenic languages (2), and an opportunity for Rivas Cherif and the Xirgu-Borràs Company to implement ideas on architectural stage design, the use of natural and artificial lighting and the role of the Dionysian in merging music, movement and the collective into one true theatrical experience of total theatre (3). We shall understand why
Seneca’s *Medea* most certainly became, on the 18th of June 1933, the pièce de resistance of the whole theatrical endeavour the Republic was seeking, as the critic Juan Chabás explained:

Those who have attended the fiesta in Mérida will surely count the 18th of June as a date worthy of registering in the history of our theatre. [It represents] Deep and total emotion of perfect and full achievement, which was not born only from the play, from the authors or from the audience, but was formed by merging each element in a living synthesis of elaborated and natural beauty.926

1. Theatrical renewal through Classics.

For much of the theatrical avant-garde, including the Xirgu-Borràs Company, Shakespeare, Spanish Golden Age Drama, Racine, Molière and ancient drama were useful, and frequently employed, tools in the exploration of new ways of communicating on stage, of developing a theatrical renewal.927 This use of theatrical classics informs the arguments made by Fernando Vázquez, director of the newspaper *El Sur*, in praising the production of Seneca’s *Medea*:

Also the tragedies have gradually degenerated, since the pieces of Aeschylus or Sophocles to the dramas of Bataille or Benavente. Theatre is saved only when the dramaturge, whether he is called Shakespeare, Calderón or Schiller, Crommelik [sic] or Giraudoux, recovers the classic norms, and understands like Diomedes, that tragedy must be the representation of a heroic destiny, or like Aristophanes, [that it must] make the sad insufficiency of man alive. That is why we believe that the staging of Seneca’s ‘Medea’ in the grand ruins of Mérida, can produce exemplary reactions in the spoilt taste of our authors, actors and critics.928

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926 Chabás in *Luz* (19-06-1933).
927 On the impact of Greek Tragedy for the theatrical renewal in Spain in the early 20th century, see Morenilla Talens (2006).
928 *El Sur* (21-06-1933).
a) Margarita Xirgu and the consecration of Medea.

The choice of Seneca’s Medea helped Margarita Xirgu advance and consolidate her career. She played famous international roles in Zaza (1910), La Dame aux Camélias (1911), Magda (1911), Frou Frou (1912) or Sardou’s Theodora (1912), whose central roles had been played by actresses such as Eleonora Duse, Gabrielle Réjane, Italia Vitaliani and Sarah Bernhardt. Xirgu even performed the role of Hamlet while in exile in 1938, probably with Bernhardt’s 1899 performance as the Danish prince in mind. She personally met Gabrielle Réjane in Paris in 1912 and Eleonora Duse in 1924 in Havana. Xirgu was aware of what had made previous actresses gain their international reputation. She has often been compared to the four great actresses here mentioned, especially Vitaliani and Bernhardt. Whether or not Xirgu was in fact ‘a Duse’, as Borràs scornfully called her in 1943, it was her success in the international repertoire, her defence and patronage of Lorca and other Spanish playwrights alongside her work playing Elektra and Medea that made her reputation in the history of theatre.

Xirgu had first made her name in the 1910s by playing precisely Hofmannsthal’s Elektra: ‘There the great tragic actress who would renovate Spanish theatre was born’, according to Guansé. Ancient drama had become an essential part of the repertoire ever since the famous Mademoiselle Rachel performed as Phaedra, a role played also by Adelaide Ristori and later Sarah Bernhardt. Bernhardt’s own performance in Catulle Mendès’ Medée in 1898 would remain fixed in theatrical memory. Xirgu appropriately attempted to play Bernhardt’s great tragic role in 1933. Ristori’s historical performance of Medea, which had greatly impacted

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930 See González (2014: 175).
934 See George (2004: 50).
audiences in Barcelona in 1857, only adds to its appropriateness. ‘Margarita Xirgu culminated the expression of her art as tragedienne par excellence’ with Medea, according to the critic Enrique Haro.  

If we are to consider Medea in this context, Xirgu’s performance of the Colchian princess acquires a new international and historical dimension. The reputation Medea brought to Xirgu was enthusiastically appreciated by Chabás in October 1933:

The energy, the art, the tension with which Margarita Xirgu creates such a harsh, difficult and intense role, are enough to consecrate an actress with the highest degree of fame: that which the deep feeling of the tragic awards.  

Seneca’s Medea would unquestionably set Xirgu on the path towards theatrical history. It has subsequently become almost obligatory for any actress aspiring to lead her generation in Spain to perform Medea in the Roman Theatre in Mérida, as Xirgu had once done. Medea, in different versions, has been the most performed role in Mérida ever since Xirgu, counting nineteen productions so far. The Venezuelan actress Maritza Caballero consciously sought to emulate Xirgu when she performed, under Franco’s regime, in Seneca’s Medea in Mérida in 1955. Xirgu, as Bernhardt and Ristori had done for her, enters the genealogical stemma of Medea, that would later also include Nuria Espert’s numerous performances of Medea in Mérida and Blanca Portillo’s in 2009 (Figure 80). The genealogy is firm, as Nuria Espert, seven years before Blanca Portillo’s Medea in Mérida, would prophetically acknowledge:

But when I have felt really linked to Margarita Xirgu, was not when I premiered in Barcelona, not when I was nineteen years old, but later, throughout my life, when I sincerely think that I continue something she began, is really with Medea. And I know that next year, or in five years’ time, there will be a very good actress, who must be

938 La Libertad (21-06-1933).
939 Luz (30-10-1933). González Olmedilla agrees in El Heraldo de Madrid (02-09-1933).
940 This phenomenon is most surprising for Sánchez Matas (1991: 98).
working already, one of those magnificent young actresses—and there are many, and not so young, already thirty years old—, one of them will make an extraordinary Medea. She must be preparing herself already, even if she does not yet know it herself. And such beauty will continue. And after that there will be others. And after another two thousand five hundred years, which is what has passed since Euripides to us, there will have to be other actresses that transmit such immense beauty, there must be other Medeas in Mérida, or the human race will be irremissibly lost.943

Coincidently, the Roman Theatre in Mérida may have also played a part in Xirgu’s ambitions. She had great admiration for her predecessor as Grande Dame of the Spanish stage with a notable international reputation, María Guerrero.944 Xirgu kept in her dressing room a signed photograph of Guerrero, which had a—seemingly rivalrous—dedication that read: ‘I wish you a great triumph, as I do for myself’.945 Guerrero had previously sought to stage a play in the Roman Theatre in Mérida in the 1920s, very probably her production of Pérez Galdós’ Alceste.946 Her wishes were not fulfilled because there were doubts about building a set and the viability of staging a play at the Roman Theatre, then still under excavation.947 Xirgu was aware of this when she intended to perform in Mérida. She was successful. It must have felt as if Xirgu was living out one of Guerrero’s dreams. Although Xirgu was perhaps unaware of it, she also, in practice, accepted the invitation the writer Max Aub made to Guerrero in 1928 to perform precisely Seneca’s Medea or Troades:

Madam: I come to ask you to perform ‘Trojan Women’ or ‘Medea’, by Seneca. In them your work can reach a level that another may not be able to. As ‘Hecuba’ or ‘Medea’

you, madam, could vivify the scenic glory of the great Cordobés moralist. Theatre in
general, and Spanish theatre in particular, which, they say, owes so much to you, may
owe you more, and in a better way.  

The 1933 performance of Medea in Mérida joined Margarita Xirgu to her predecessor, María
Guerrero, and to her successors in the role, Nuria Espert and Blanca Portillo, as Grandes Dames
of Spanish Theatre. The historical and almost ritualistic importance of Xirgu’s Medea in Mérida
also defied the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. In 1967, at the Cour d’honneur du Palais des
Papes in Avignon, the Spanish actress María Casares became Seneca’s Medea. In a
production directed by the Argentinian Jorge Lavelli, Casares, herself the embodiment of the
‘wandering Spain in France’ by her own admission, played Medea the exile, the woman
expelled on a king’s orders, with all the passion and visual force of her most Spanish of
appearances. María Casares was the daughter of the once Minister and Prime Minister of the
Second Spanish Republic, Santiago Casares Quiroga. Casares Quiroga had also been one of
the three ministers that attended the performance of Medea at the Royal Palace in Madrid in
September 1933 (Figure 52). As a girl, María Casares had watched the theatrical renovation
created by Rivas Cherif and Margarita Xirgu, as she explains in her autobiography. If she was
unable to watch Seneca’s Medea in person, her father could have described in detail the potency
of Xirgu’s performance as the Colchian sorceress. Her insistence on her affinity with Seneca’s
Spanishness at the time of her Avignon performance of Medea, echoes much of what
discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, María Casares was to collaborate with her
predecessor as Spanish tragedienne in Argentina, when Xirgu directed Casares in Lorca’s
Yerma in 1963, a play Casares had watched when directed by Rivas Cherif in 1934. Four
years later, in 1967, in Avignon, the force of Xirgu’s Medea was to reincarnate itself, once

948 La Gaceta Literaria (15-01-1928).
949 On this production see Delgado (2003: 103-105).
951 On María Casares, see Delgado (2003: 90-131).
954 Delgado (2003: 112-113). It seems that Xirgu intended to direct Casares also in Lorca’s La Casa de
Bernarda Alba in 1956, see Xirgu (2018: 466).
more, in the theatrical personification of Spanish republican exile beyond the Pyrenees, María Casares, thus proving how the Spanish genealogy of Medea could survive even the most fratricidal of horrors.

b) Rivas Cherif and the ritorno all’antico.

Cipriano Rivas Cherif was also interested in staging ancient drama throughout his career. Besides having staged Unamuno’s *Fedra* in 1918, he had the project of staging, as early as 1921, ‘some Greek Tragedies’ with the dancer and actress Antonia Mercé, *La Argentina*.\(^955\) One of the archaeologists of Mérida, Maximiliano Macías, counted *La Argentina*, the first artist to receive a decoration from the Republic,\(^956\) as a former petitioner of the Roman Theatre.\(^957\) This perhaps points towards Rivas Cherif’s prior involvement in setting up a project in Mérida, alongside his long-time esteemed collaborator,\(^958\) although there is no conclusive evidence to prove this. Rivas Cherif would also direct and star in Cocteau’s *Orphée* in December 1928,\(^959\) and unsuccessfully attempted to stage fragments of Aristophanes, to be translated by Unamuno, in Salamanca in 1934 (see p. 76). We should not forget his role as artistic director to the Xirgu-Borrás Company in their 1930s stagings of Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra* or his work with his Teatro Escuela de Arte, which included an interest in staging Plautus’ *Miles Gloriosus* and Aeschylus’ *Persians*.\(^960\)

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\(^955\) Letter to Adrià Gual (9-12-1921) in *Epistolari Adrià Gual* vol. IV O-Ser n. 12:210-12-297. Institut del Teatre, Barcelona.


\(^957\) *El Heraldo de Madrid* (27-04-1933).


Rivas Cherif was aware of the contemporary importance of ancient drama. He seems to have seen Gémier’s _Oedipe, roi de Thèbes_, at the Cirque d’Hiver in Paris in 1919, and knew about Copeau’s reading of Aeschylus’ _Persians_ in January 1927. The 1933 production of Aristophanes’ _Peace_ by Gémier’s protégé, Charles Dullin, would leave an ‘indelible memory’ on Rivas Cherif. The impression was not only aesthetic, but also reminded Rivas Cherif of the great worth of theatre, in this case ancient drama, as a social mirror and instrument:

Aristophanes’ _Peace_ is being performed in Paris with Greek costumes, but with allusions to our current events. [...] at the curtain call, Dullin himself explains the moral of the story: we have seen the pain it takes to obtain peace. The world is on its way to another war. Is this possible? Most surely there were orphans, widows of war, even mutilated people in the theatre. Is this possible? But why? Because we are not determined, because we do not all go to pull the rope and rescue peace from the well it is in.

Rivas Cherif must also have been aware, even if only indirectly or vaguely, of Reinhardt’s productions of _Medea_ (1904), _Oedipus Rex_ (1910), _The Oresteia_ (1911) and of Hofmannsthal’s _Elektra_ (1903). Dullin’s exhilarating production of the opera _Antigone_ (1922), with Picasso as its stage designer, or his staging of Aristophanes’ _Birds_ (1928), must have been known to him as well. He probably was also aware of Lugné-Poe’s _Oedipe à Colone_ (1904) and his production of Hofmannsthal’s _Elektra_ (1908)—he perhaps even saw his staging of Racine’s _Phèdre_, played by Marie-Thérèse Pierat in Madrid, in 1922. John Sheppard, of King’s College Cambridge, in his translation of _Oedipus Tyrannus_ (1920), stated: ‘If you doubt

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961 Rivas Cherif in _La Libertad_ (24-01-1920) and in _La Pluma_ (08-1920); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 61-64, 80-85). Also Rivas Cherif in _Luz_ (13-04-1934); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 159-162). For a brief summary of the production see Baron (2008: 165) and Macintosh (2009: 134-138).

962 Rivas Cherif in _El Heraldo de Madrid_ (22-01-1927); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 152-153).


964 Rivas Cherif in _El Sol_ (22-04-1933).

965 _La Libertad_ (07-03-1922); _El Sol_ (07-03-1922).
whether in these days Greek tragedy still matters, you may learn the answer in Paris. Rivas Cherif, although with a different aesthetic world-view, would have agreed with the eminent scholar, but referring to Europe, instead of Paris.

c) Ancient Drama on the European stage.

The 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea is linked to this broader theatrical trend through two specific European stage directors. Georges Pitoëff’s own production of Seneca’s Medea premiered on the 13th of May 1932 at the Théâtre de l’Avenue in Paris, with Ludmilla Pitoëff as Medea, exactly seven months and a day before the final decision to stage Seneca’s Medea in Spain, in December 1932 (Chapter I). There is no proof of any influence of Pitoëff’s production on the 1933 production at Mérida. But a loose awareness of the Parisian production could have been possible. First, Rivas Cherif was profoundly aware of Parisian theatre. Secondly, De los Ríos’ predecessor in Instrucción Pública, Marcelino Domingo, was present in Paris on the 15th and 16th of May 1932, and the Spanish Ambassador to France—with whom Rivas Cherif stayed in March 1933—, Salvador de Madariaga, was well connected with de los Ríos, Rivas Cherif and Azaña. In addition, Xirgu followed the work of Ludmilla Pitoëff, and even closed her own theatre on the day Mme Pitoëff performed Shaw’s Saint Joan, in February 1927.

The 1932 Parisian production was also one of the first instances of a theatrical vindication of Seneca’s tragic worth in practice, as Pitoëff himself declared: ‘I wanted to see if it was possible to stage a play that all the dictionaries and all the textbooks declare unstageable’.

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966 Sheppard in The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles (1920); quoted and contextualised in Hall and Macintosh (2005: 521) and in Macintosh (2009: 104, 124).
967 Bernat i Duran firmly places the 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea within the European avant-garde scene; see El Noticiero Universal (15-09-1933).
968 On Pitoëff’s production see Hort (1966: 542) and Jomaron (1979: 322).
969 Guansé (1963: 65); Delgado (2003: 61). For the Pitoëff production in Madrid see La Época (04-02-1927), El Heraldo de Madrid (04-02-1927), El Imparcial (04-02-1927), La Nación (04-02-1927), La Libertad (04-02-1927) and El Liberal (04-02-1927).
production may in fact be in Rivas Cherif’s mind when in 1933 he writes that Seneca’s name ‘now is reborn in the cultured spheres of Europe kindled by a vindication of his dramatic poetry’.\textsuperscript{971} It is possible that Rivas Cherif is here not referring to Pitoëff’s production but instead to Leon Hermann’s defence of the theatricality of Seneca’s tragedies in his \textit{Le Théâtre de Sénèque} (1924) or T.S. Eliot’s reappraisal of Senecan drama in his ‘Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca’ (1927).\textsuperscript{972} There is simply no conclusive evidence.

Even so, the first conversation on the staging of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} took place on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March 1932, months before the Paris première (see pp. 65-66). In addition, there were no aesthetic similarities in costumes or staging between the Parisian and the Spanish productions.\textsuperscript{973} Pitoëff explained in May 1932: ‘Obviously I rely on special spectators within the audience who are capable of understanding our attempt. I am addressing mostly the curious, and also students and professors. [...] It must be known that it is not a play like the others, but an essay; I hope that our effort will be understood in this sense’\textsuperscript{974} This cultured and exploratory intention contrasts with the popular, republican and national approach of the Spanish creators of Seneca’s \textit{Medea}. Thus any links between the two productions were coincidental. Nevertheless, the Spanish staging was unquestionably at the vanguard of explorations of the limits of what is stageable generally and particularly on the true on-stage viability of Senecan tragedy.

The connection with European theatre continues. In March 1933, only three months before the staging of Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, Rivas Cherif went to interview Max Reinhardt, whom he would call ‘prince of stage directors’.\textsuperscript{975} The precise intention was the staging of his theatre of masses in the bullring in Las Ventas,\textsuperscript{976} almost certainly Büchner’s \textit{Danton’s Death},\textsuperscript{977} one of the best

\textsuperscript{971} Rivas Cherif in \textit{El Sol} (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
\textsuperscript{972} For Eliot’s essay see Eliot (1964: 33-54). See also Trinacty (2015: 29).
\textsuperscript{973} For photographs see BNF (4-COL-17 (373)) and Pitoëff (1955: 128-129). For a description of the set see Hort (1966: 364).
\textsuperscript{974} \textit{Comoedia} (13-05-1933).
\textsuperscript{975} \textit{Sparta} (25-03-1933). For Rivas Cherif’s articles about his meetings with Max Reinhardt see \textit{El Sol} (14-03-1933, 29-03-1933, 05-04-1933, 09-04-1933, 19-04-1933, 22-04-1933).
\textsuperscript{976} Rivas Cherif in \textit{El Sol} (09-04-1933).
examples of Reinhardt’s theatre of masses since 1916 (see pp. 169, 267 and 277). Reinhardt’s work in Spain ultimately did not take place.

Disconcertingly, Rivas Cherif specifies, in 1966, that the intention was to invite Reinhardt to stage Medea in Mérida. But there is no other evidence to prove this was the original intention. To make matters even more confusing, in 1945, while in prison, Rivas Cherif states the following after mentioning Danton’s Death as the proposed play: ‘Reinhardt did not come [...] And the Minister had to console himself with the Medea I could offer him in Mérida, [which was] much cheaper’. Why did Rivas Cherif claim Reinhardt’s potential staging of Medea during his Mexican exile, when there is no evidence to support this from 1933? Perhaps in his memory the fact of visiting Reinhardt and his preparation of Medea, which were parallel in time, could have been confused. Also, Reinhardt’s previous experience in staging Medea, and the great influence of Reinhardt’s style on Rivas Cherif’s own production might have contributed to the confusion. Whatever the reason, at the time of writing this thesis, I have no knowledge of any evidence that proves Reinhardt’s potential, projected or effective involvement in Seneca’s Medea. The evidence points to the contrary. Seneca’s Medea was a work executed solely by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, with Rivas Cherif as its stage director and no external collaboration. Reinhardt might have influenced aspects of it, but did not collaborate in it.

In practice, the staging of Seneca’s Medea served to explore theatrical innovation, through the vindication of Seneca the tragedian, as we shall see in the next section. This would include the use of ancient open-air venues, developments in lighting, music, theatrical simplicity, grand spectacle and theatre of masses, all culminating in the idea of theatre as a spiritual communion, with art and emotion at its core, as we shall explore in the last section of this chapter. The 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea seems to be a strong active response to the idea of a rìtorno.

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977 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (09-04-1933) and Luz (13-04-1934). The latter see Rivas Cherif (2013: 159-162).
978 On Reinhardt’s 1920 production see Patterson (1981: 37).
979 Rivas Cherif in El Redondel (08-05-1966).
all’antico’ that Rivas Cherif had identified in Gordon Craig. Eleonora Duse had also defended this vehemently at the beginning of the century, as recounted by Arthur Symons:

We should return to the Greeks, play in the open air; the drama dies of stalls and boxes and evening dress and people who come to digest their dinner. [...] I want Rome and the Coliseum, the Acropolis, Athens; I want beauty, and the flame of life.

2. Ancient theatre: Roman text and space.

The Xirgu-Borràs Company chose to stage Seneca’s version of Medea, and not the more popular version by Euripides. We have already explored the reasons why Seneca was attractive to the Spanish government and intellectuals (see Chapter II). But, what aesthetic interest did the Xirgu-Borràs Company have in Seneca’s tragic work, and Medea specifically, beyond the contextual interest in ancient drama as a platform for theatrical renewal and experimentation? Why stage Seneca? The answer seems to have three main interconnected ideas, as explored below: Seneca’s Spanish ritualistic theatricality, the suitability of a Roman play to the space of the Roman Theatre in Mérida and the broader context within the creation of a festival of ancient drama.

a) Senecan tragedy.

Seneca was amply regarded in Spain as unstageable up to 1933. Even Menéndez Pelayo, the scholar responsible for the ‘Translation Project of Seneca’ in 1872 (see pp. 99-100), agreed: ‘As theatre plays they would be unbearable and soporific. As works destined for reading, they are

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981 Rivas Cherif (1991: 37). On Reinhardt’s ideas on this see Carter (1914: 121).
982 Symons (1906: 336-337). Margarita Xirgu herself must have known about these ideas of Eleonora Duse, according to Rodrigo (1974: 31).
983 Luz (13-06-1933); La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933), Nuevo Mundo (30-06-1933), La Época (01-09-1933, 02-09-1933), La Libertad (01-09-1933, 04-09-1933), La Vanguardia (13-09-1933), La Veu del Vespre (15-09-1933); La Veu de Catalunya (16-09-1933). Rivas Cherif in El Sol (14-05-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 154-155)
truly immortal works. They are perhaps some of the most philosophical works to have reached us from Antiquity.\textsuperscript{984} This view had enjoyed a long international tradition ever since Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1754) first developed it, arguing that the plays were meant to be recited rhetorically, as training and recreational activity for Roman orators, without masks or costume or staging, a position consolidated by August Wilhelm Schlegel (1809).\textsuperscript{985} Eminent French classicist Gaston Boissier had a similar understanding in 1861,\textsuperscript{986} as did Friedrich Leo, in his influential \textit{Complete Works of Seneca} (1878), both mentioned by Vera in his Senecan anthology of the 1930s (see pp. 97-98). Juan Chabás also mentions Boissier in his guide to Seneca’s \textit{Medea}.\textsuperscript{987} The sole exception to this general understanding in Spain, which none of the creators of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} ever acknowledged, was Max Aub’s call to stage Senecan tragedy in 1928, in order to demonstrate his viability and usefulness for the contemporary stage:

This contemporary of Christ [Seneca], who is so contemporaneous, cries out for his tragedies to be stripped bare on the stage. There is so much current theatrical emotion in them that it is well worth trying to shout out this cry. […] [In them] there is such a deep wisdom, a domain of the spirit, knowledge, intelligence, that they point towards a position on the stage […] which, if he never occupied, he could occupy today.\textsuperscript{988}

But Aub’s plea remained unheard. In 1933, Luis Araujo-Costa thought Seneca’s tragedies should be categorised as ‘erudite’, meant for a select audience in a small venue, and not for big stages and the masses.\textsuperscript{989} This idea was repeated by Rodríguez Codolà in \textit{La Vanguardia}, which ironically appeared as an introduction in the programme for the Barcelona performance of

\textsuperscript{984} See ‘Ensayo sobre la tragedia española. Catálogo de las tragedias españolas, desde los orígenes del teatro hasta nuestros días’ in Menéndez Pelayo (1956: 8).

\textsuperscript{985} On the state of the question of Seneca’s perceived unstageability see Fitch (2000: 1-12) and Citti (2016: 255-266). See also Fortey and Gluckner (1975: 699).

\textsuperscript{986} See Boissier (1861). Boissier is mentioned by Chabás in \textit{Luz} (13-06-1933).

\textsuperscript{987} \textit{Luz} (13-06-1933).

\textsuperscript{988} Aub in \textit{La Gaceta Literaria} (15-01-1928).

\textsuperscript{989} \textit{La Epoca} (02-09-1933). Rivas Cherif himself alludes to Araujo-Costa’s comment in \textit{Crónica} (05-11-1933).
Seneca’s *Medea* (Figure 65). One of the archaeologists of Mérida, Macías himself, believed Terence or Plautus to be preferable, ‘more stageable’. It is therefore understandable that, when listing Xirgu’s merits in 1935, Casona would exclaim: ‘And she has dared to perform Seneca’. Given the overwhelming consensus on Seneca’s unstageability, it would have been advisable to choose Euripides’ *Medea*. But Rivas Cherif, having been asked ‘And why ‘Medea’ by Seneca and not the Greek one?’, unflinchingly replied:

> Because Seneca was ours, very much ours. And because the Medea of the Cordobés writer is much more theatrical than the other. She is alive in all the scenes; ‘everything can be seen’ in it, even if it contradicts Horace’s norms in their technical intention.

To contravene Horace’s recommendation on Medea, the need to avoid showing her infanticide to the audience (*coram populo*, Hor. *Ars.* 185), was one of Rivas Cherif’s chief reasons for choosing Seneca. He wrote three articles in *El Sol* before the première in Mérida, explaining the reasons behind the production and its background. In the first, he begins by alluding to Seneca’s Spanishness: ‘What did we give Rome for such a monumental theatre? The name of Seneca, the Cordobés’. But after acknowledging Seneca’s perceived unstageability, we hear the reason for contravening Horace, namely Seneca’s position as the precursor of Spain’s theatre of horror and Seneca’s use of theatrical *direct action* (see pp. 105-110).

The theory of Seneca’s *direct action* as his main dramatic appeal is noteworthy. Staging—inhomely Spanish—unstageable and unpurged horrors was not one of the arguments against Seneca but one in favour of him. Later in his life, while incarcerated in El Dueso in 1945, Rivas Cherif would vindicate Seneca’s theatricality even further:

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990 *La Vanguardia* (13-09-1933).
991 *El Heraldo de Madrid* (27-04-1933).
992 *La Voz* (26-04-1935).
993 *El Heraldo de Madrid* (10-04-1933); *Sparta* (15-04-1933).
994 *El Heraldo de Madrid* (10-04-1933); *Sparta* (15-04-1933); *El Sol* (13-04-1933).
996 Rivas Cherif in *El Sol* (14-05-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 155).
If in fact there was no other intention when staging his *Medea* but to associate the restoration of the Theatre in Mérida with the universal name of the Roman Cordobés, the success of the spectacle demonstrated, with irrefutable evidence, the vanity of a fame so unjust as the concept on which it was founded.997

Staging Seneca’s *Medea* proved, in practice, that the allegation of Seneca’s unstageability was false.998 In fact, Senecan tragedy revealed itself as a truly original and attractive proposition for the stage, which the critic Juan Chabás praised as such.999 It was the practical response to Aub’s 1928 call to demonstrate Seneca’s true stageability. Seneca’s on-stage appeal was to enhance his pedigree as founding father of Spain’s theatre of horror in 1933 (see pp. 105-110), a theory Rivas Cherif sharpened with time, adding blood and bullfighting to the recipe in 1945, in connection with his own conception of communal theatre in bullrings (see pp. 170-171). Seneca and his *Medea* were established, retrospectively, by Rivas Cherif in a continuum of an ancestral Spanish bloody and collective ritual:

But I must underline the theatrical fact that constitutes the originality of the Senecan interpretation of Greek myth and announces the root of the horror so characteristic of our Spanish dramatics. [...] Seneca’s Medea kills her own children on stage. No thought or act is concealed from the spectator; for Spanish theatre will be above all action, and Seneca’s *Medea* the predecessor throughout the centuries of the terrible *Médico de su honra*, by Calderón.

Possibly, Romain Rolland said [...] that Spanish theatre—I do not remember well if he specified Calderón’s own, I believe so—distressed him like a bullfight. Spain’s passion for raw blood is indubitable. There is something not yet purged in our sensibility, which, whether heroic or basic, responds to bloody ardour and redness.1000

998 Thus preceding Fortey and Glucker’s theory of proving Seneca’s theatrical viability by staging *Phaedra* in 1973; see Fortey and Glucker (1975).
999 Luz (13-06-1933).
What is stageable is closely related to what can be recreated on stage. If the language of verisimilitude could not—and would not—be used to stage Seneca’s Medea and its direct action and bloody ritual, other theatrical languages, such as symbols, allegories, atmospheres, emotional persuasions or a significant degree of suspension of disbelief, were needed. This was in line with contemporary avant-garde practice of choosing a specific play not so much for its dramatic or literary qualities, but for its performative potential. The coincidences here with Gordon Craig’s theory of theatre are notable. One of Gordon Craig’s main frustrations was the expectation that he must compromise his ideas on theatre in favour of the viability of the play: ‘In short, change the art for the machine. Not while I’m alive!’, he wrote in 1909. The way to exploit the art of theatre was undoubtedly to alter the machine, or discard it entirely. Rivas Cherif had in Seneca’s Medea an unconventional machine, or an element of it, that he could put at the service of his art, in order to stage the unstageable.

Seneca’s Medea is at the centre of another theatrical challenge: To include, and in some way exceed, the limitations and impositions of the powerfully poetic literary text in order to create a piece of theatrical art. Gordon Craig, whom Rivas Cherif unquestionably admired, would eventually claim: ‘Words are a bad means of communicating ideas’. To rid oneself of the text is to let the theatrical art reach new peaks of self-expression and communication. Rivas Cherif differs. He is more in line with Copeau’s idea of putting the text at the centre of the theatrical production. Xirgu seems to have agreed: ‘Any performance—she says—is the illustration of a text, an explanation’. The text is central to establishing the aesthetic coherence of the theatrical piece and its correct choice is central to the development of all the other elements in its staging. Seneca’s Medea became a means of exploring theatrical languages with which to create an aesthetically coherent production that would both make the tragedy corporeal and also enhance and express its poetic power, as we shall explore in the next section.

1004 Rivas Cherif in La Pluma (August 1920); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 80-85).
That the text performed was not Seneca’s original, but Unamuno’s translation, must not be here forgotten. Unamuno is portrayed as the avant-garde catalyst of ancient drama’s advantages for the renewal of theatre by Rivas Cherif himself. In the very text performed in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933, an ancient tragedy in a modern translation would support a practical exercise in theatrical reform. In the first introductory article of Rivas Cherif, entitled ‘The reason for Seneca’, he explains this, even if he does seemingly contradict the vision of Greek theatre he expresses elsewhere:

What better translator of Seneca is there, then, than Unamuno, whose concept of theatre, reactionary in its unity against the diversity of traditional Spanish drama, is related to Greek classicism, of which Roman tragedy was its shadow?1006

**b) Roman theatre.**

Seneca’s *Medea* was chosen alongside the Roman Theatre in Mérida, a choice linked to Xirgu’s own longstanding wish to perform in Mérida (see pp. 65 and 170). Xirgu had experience in open-air productions, as the performances of *Elektra* in the Chapultepec forest in Mexico in 1914 (Figure 71), in the Retiro Park in 1931 (Figures 72, 73 and 74) and in the Teatre Grec—a modernist ‘Greek’ Theatre—in Barcelona in 1932 demonstrate (Figure 75).1007 Rivas Cherif also had some experience in open-air productions, besides the 1931 and 1932 stagings of *Elektra*. He notably staged two plays, Ramón de la Cruz’s *Los cómicos en Argel* and *La Pradrera de San Isidro*, in the Jardines de los Martires, in Granada in 1928.1008 He would later

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1006 Rivas Cherif *El Sol* (14-05-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 154-155).
call this his first ‘lesson of love to Theatre in a garden’. Open-air theatre was thus a major interest for Xirgu and Rivas Cherif, separately and in conjunction.

The Roman Theatre offered an opportunity to break the constraints of conventional theatres and opened up the possibilities of performance, quite literally. Performers, in Medea’s case the chorus, broke the frontal stage/auditorium polarity of the proscenium arch, by occupying the space of the audience when they entered the orchestra, thus establishing a much closer interaction between audience and performer. Space is also more versatile and capacious in the Roman Theatre. It reduced the impact of individual performances, but aided in creating a grander collective impression, entailing a chorus of fifteen men, a chariot and around ninety extras. Of necessity the action had forcibly to be on a grand scale. This was retrospectively acknowledged by the magazine Sparta when reviewing the performance of Seneca’s Medea in the indoor Teatro Español in Madrid:

Classic tragedy needs the open air, the stones. [...] This was demonstrated previously in the magnificent performance of Elektra that the same company gave in la Chopera in El Retiro Park and which, when repeated in the enclosed boundaries of el Español, lost its most beautiful qualities and became reduced to the extraordinary work of the protagonist, which nothing and no one can extinguish.

Also in Medea the final scene turns pale, which in the open air has always achieved an intensity of an apotheosis of extraordinary and crushing force, constituting the most beautiful spectacle of the past season.

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1011 Sparta (04-11-1933). The critic Antonio Barbero agreed in ABC (29-10-1933). Bernat i Durán had a similar idea in El Noticiero Universal (15-09-1933). Carter agrees when judging Reinhardt’s productions of Oedipus Rex; see Carter (1914: 217).
In choosing the Roman Theatre in Mérida, Rivas Cherif turned the venue into another piece of theatrical machinery. He considered it superior to those in Orange, Fiesole or Syracuse, in 1945.\textsuperscript{1012} In Gordon Craig’s A Living Theatre (1913), his own open-air Arena Goldoni in Florence is described as follows: ‘All of it is perfectly consistent with a Roman Theatre and should surprise lovers of antiquity who cannot find elsewhere an imitation as faithful’.\textsuperscript{1013} Rivas Cherif’s hero had demonstrated that a Roman theatre was the perfect performance space to explore possibilities that the proscenium theatre prevented. Such constraints were notably broken also by Reinhardt,\textsuperscript{1014} and Granville-Barker in his London 1912 production of Iphigenia in Tauris.\textsuperscript{1015}

Reinhardt’s Grosses Schauspielhaus, previously Zirkus Schumann, is similar to a bullring, the esteemed communal theatrical space for Rivas Cherif and Xirgu (see pp. 170-171). Similarly, Reinhardt’s theatre seated 3,200 spectators and the Roman Theatre in Mérida seated at least 3,000 in 1933 (see p. 33).\textsuperscript{1016} The space of a Roman Theatre has a similar disposition to the Grosses Schauspielhaus, even if it is only half its shape, given that the stage lies at the basis and centre of the cavea. Even so, the empty space behind the scenaefrons in Mérida may be seen as a picture-negative of the Roman Theatre, thus expanding it into a circular space, of which only one half is used. In the Grosses Schauspielhaus the stage is not only in the centre, as the term circus implies, but it continues up one side of the structure also. This still offers an opening through and on which the scenic action can take place, similarly to how the distributions of the orchestra and the stage can be used in a Roman or Greek Theatre. The Roman Theatre in Mérida thus enjoyed many spatial similarities with Reinhardt’s own theatrical venue in Berlin.

\textsuperscript{1012} Rivas Cherif (1991: 106).
\textsuperscript{1013} Gordon Craig (1913: 25).
\textsuperscript{1015} Hall (2012: 242-243, 249).
\textsuperscript{1016} Patterson (1981: 37).
‘There is something which brings out a natural magnetic power in having an audience placed around a circle and looking down at a point which is their own centre’ wrote Eva Palmer-Sikelianou in 1935, after her experiences in the theatre in Delphi. Rivas Cherif knew of the theatrical advantages of circular spaces for collective communion, aesthetic renovation and the breaking of stage boundaries, as experienced and exposed in bullrings, the Arena Goldoni and the Grosses Schauspielhaus. Seneca’s Medea in the Roman Theatre at Mérida was his chance to put this knowledge into practice. For example, he placed the tragic chorus strictly within the orchestra, around the altar to Dionysus, either in circular or semicircular formations (Figures 18 and 19), similarly to how Palmer-Sikelianou created circular formations in her productions in Delphi. Rivas Cherif’s 1933 description of the space used by Reinhardt in Danton’s Death, reads rather aspirationally in the light of his own staging of Seneca’s Medea:

‘Danton’s death’ was performed according to the circular theory practised by the great director to restore the sense of the performances of Greek theatre, that is, staging not only on the principal stage, but also in the proscenium and the orchestra or ring, in such a way that the actors would break the barrier that the footlights, set and wings usually pose, in the pure contemplation of the audience, to the confusion of these with the audience.

Nature plays an important role in open-air theatre which it cannot in conventional indoor theatre. Rivas Cherif had been aware of this since his open-air production in Granada in 1928, and compared the similarities between ancient theatres and bullrings in this regard, in his book Cómo hacer teatro. Nature would be central to Seneca’s Medea in 1933, for example in terms of the use of sunlight and sunset explored below. A pair of storks, the birds

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1018 Diario de Córdoba (20-06-33).
1019 For examples of these and an explanation of their intended purpose; see Van Steen (2002).
1020 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (09-04-1933).
that folk tales understood to bring babies to their mothers, fortuitously flew over the theatre in Mérida.\textsuperscript{1023} This was an irony, created by chance, that could only have happened in the open air, as had been the case at the 1927 performance of Prometheus Bound in Delphi, when two eagles flew down from the mountains just as Prometheus was referring to his liver being plucked by Zeus’ messenger birds.\textsuperscript{1024} Gods find it easier to play their part in open-air theatre than inside a closed building.

c) Ancient festival.

The Roman Theatre in Mérida had connotations beyond the physical space it offered. It was ‘the theatrical frame for which it [Seneca’s Medea] was written’, according to La Voz.\textsuperscript{1025} The significance of reviving the play in its—apparent—original setting was a declaration voiced by its creators and acknowledged by critics: ‘Latin tragedy on Latin soil’, Crónica claimed, adding:

These stones on which the chorus stands, nimbly placed, always animated and dynamic, are the same on which the Roman chorus members of two thousand years ago beat their sandals. Each stone vibrates and seems to be coloured by a blood of transparent purple, when the known cries once more tear the twilight air and awaken the first birds of night, which fly with ominous swirls.\textsuperscript{1026}

The idea of pairing ancient spaces and ancient drama was somewhat new to Spain, but not new to other places in Europe.\textsuperscript{1027} The creators of Seneca’s Medea and its critics were well aware of the festivals in Orange, Delphi, Verona or Syracuse.\textsuperscript{1028} Chabás even called for the creation of a

\textsuperscript{1023} See Luz (19-06-1933, 30-10-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (20-06-1933); Crónica (25-06-1933); Guansé (1963: 68); Rivas Cherif (1991: 232); Azaña (2007: IV, 782).
\textsuperscript{1024} Wiles (2000: 113).
\textsuperscript{1025} La Voz (Córdoba) (21-06-1933). See also Ahora (21-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1026} Crónica (25-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1027} See Michelakis (2010a).
\textsuperscript{1028} Rivas Cherif in El Heraldo de Madrid (02-10-1926). See also Luz (15-05-1933, 19-06-1933), El Día Gráfico (18-06-33), La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933), La Veu del Vespres (20-06-1933), El Sol (20-06-1933), Nuevo Mundo (30-06-1933) and El Mundo Deportivo (14-09-1933). According to Rivas Cherif, a comparison with these festivals had been made by the foreign press; see Luz (22-09-1933).
Spanish equivalent to the Italian Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico. To emulate Orange had been one of the dreams of Mérida himself at the very beginnings of the excavations, and Gazul had seen in 1928 the potential Mérida had for imitating the international models, in the midst of the regional debate on reviving the Roman Theatre (see p. 67). In fact, the whole project came partly to address Xirgu’s own complaint, when dreaming of staging Elektra in Mérida: ‘That sort of thing can be done in Italy or Greece’. Some, as a result of Medea, called for an established annual performance in Mérida. This was indeed Rivas Cherif’s intention, and the desire of Mérida’s Town Council. Medea would return alongside Elektra and ‘classical dances’ to Mérida’s Roman Week in 1934 (see pp. 74-75).

In El Sol, the same newspaper in which, and roughly at the same time as, Rivas Cherif published his articles on visiting Berlin, we can find an unsigned article on Fotos Politis’ production of Euripides’ Hecuba, at the Panathenaic Stadium, although the exact date of this performance is not specified. In this same article, a production of Prometheus Bound in Delphi, which must be Palmer-Sikelianou’s production (1927, 1930), is also mentioned. There is no evidence at all of any direct knowledge of Fotos Politis or Eva Palmer-Sikelianou by Rivas Cherif, although the article mentioned may prove some indirect knowledge. This is more frustrating than it may seem at first. Both Fotos Politis and Rivas Cherif seem to have lived fairly parallel professional lives (see pp. 160-161). Also, the uses of space and ancient theatres made by Palmer-Sikelianou in her production and Rivas Cherif’s own in Mérida are almost coincidental, as a detailed comparison of Van Steen’s article and this chapter may reveal. Yet the mention of ancient festivals and other international tragic productions is persistent.

1029 Luz (15-05-1933).
1030 See Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011: 417-418) and Caballero Rodríguez (2008: 407). Mérida was moved at seeing Medea performed in the Roman Theatre; see Crónica (25-06-1933).
1032 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
1033 Luz (15-05-1933), La Voz (Madrid) (19-06-1933); El Sol (20-06-1933).
1034 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933), quoted in Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158); El Sur (22-06-1933); Crónica (02-07-1933, 05-11-1933); Luz (22-09-1933); La Voz (23-09-1933); El Heraldo de Madrid (16-11-1933).
1035 Libro de Juntas del Ayuntamiento de Mérida (19-06-1933) in Archivo Histórico Municipal de Mérida.
1036 El Sol (14-04-1933).
enough to indicate that contemporaries considered the staging of Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida as part of this broader movement.

The staging of Seneca’s *Medea* in Mérida proved a fresh tool with which to explore Spanish theatre of horror in new scenic languages and ways, a theatrical machine by which to break conventional spaces and dynamics in an environment open to the collaboration of nature. Finally, the combination of Roman tragedy and Roman space brought forward an understanding of a broader endeavour—the theatrical vindication of ancient drama—that was to have institutional backing and continuity in the future. These three constituent theatrical engines made Seneca’s *Medea* a true theatrical locomotive for the renewal of the Spanish, and international, stage.

3. Recreating tragedy: Seneca’s *Medea* on stage.

The determining factors of text and space had been chosen, or not rejected, precisely for their advantages to an agenda of theatrical renovation. The limitations and conditions implicit in these were used in favour of the production and a broader theatrical agenda. The Roman Theatre was used to follow a simple (in fact non-existent) stage set of pictorial and romantic force alongside the evocative use of natural and artificial light. In addition, this was exploited to create a scenic movement in entrances and exits, constituting a great amount of on-stage dynamism. The combination of the text and the space would bring forward the possibility of grand acting and gesticulation, big crowds on stage, the use of fire and torches, and a spectacular rapturous ending. Finally, the pace of the text’s intensity was met with a strategic, atmospheric and modernised use of the Dionysian elements of tragedy, through orchestral music, classic dance and the tragic chorus. The theatrical exploitation of Seneca’s *Medea* and the Roman Theatre in Mérida created a style of total theatre that would invoke the spirits of Wagner, Craig, Adolphe Appia, Reinhardt and Nietzsche in a great ritual of scenic art. The following pages explain how.
a) **Ruins of white marble.**

María Guerrero’s past attempt at performing in Mérida had been unsuccessful, not because she would not accept the lack of a set, but rather because she could not. Her times and style were inclined towards a naturalistic stage design which demanded a detailed reconstruction of the space in which the action would occur. The ruinous unreconstructed columns of an archaeological site did not fit her customary theatrical practice. But after the new simple architectural style of Gordon Craig, Appia or Reinhardt, a style also developed at the Teatro Español, using a bare stage with all the pictorial force of a ruinous Roman theatre, seemed not only possible, but desirable, as *Sparta* suggests: ‘a classic background which must not be offended with the smallest set even if this is the work of the most illustrious scenographer’.¹⁰³⁸

Mélida’s discouragement of erecting any sort of structure thus seems to have convinced Xirgu and Rivas Cherif of their pre-existing wish in this direction, and *vice versa*,¹⁰³⁹ as seen in Rivas Cherif’s own recollection in 1945:

> I went to see the archaeologist, mister Mélida, director of the works and he discouraged me from trying. Nothing could be done there. Guerrero and Díaz de Mendoza had already tried and they soon saw the impossibility of building any scenery or stage machinery. And not to mention the accommodation of the audience. Although I assured him that if I were to do anything it would be without nailing a pole down or touching a stone, he convinced me more than I convinced him. Only for me to do my part, I made my first exploratory trip to Mérida.

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¹⁰³⁸ *Sparta* (17-06-1933).

¹⁰³⁹ Mélida tells Macías in a letter (22-05-1933) that he informed Rivas Cherif of the limitations and that he was happy to comply, so arrangements needed to be made; see Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011: 367) and Morán Sánchez (2018: 187). For Xirgu’s account see Guansé (1963: 67). See also Rivas Cherif in *El Sol* (11-06-1933). Despite the apparent reticence from the archaeologist, it had been a long-held dream of his and of Macías to watch performances at the Roman Theatre; see Caballero Rodríguez (2008: 407), Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011: 417-418), López Díaz (2011: 251-252) and Morán Sánchez (2018: 182-184, 188).
Later in the dress rehearsal of *Medea* I could observe the silent emotion of the old Mélida, sitting on the edge of the ‘cavea’ with tears springing from his eyes: ‘You are not aware, you are not aware, of what this means to me’, he said to me as soon as he noticed I was looking at him.\(^{1040}\)

In 1945 Rivas Cherif would say of the Roman Theatre that ‘the invariable architecture of its stage excludes any decoration in the sense that we employ it’.\(^{1041}\) It offered a simplicity that could complement, and not distract from, the action on stage. Some pages earlier, he had reflected on its advantages for his idea of theatre and stage design: ‘There is not, and this must be repeated for those who have eyes but do not see, a better set than the background wall of the Theatre in Orange; than the small temple and disparate columns of Mérida’.\(^{1042}\) The Roman Theatre in Mérida had all the potential to create his principal goal of stylised theatre: ‘Stylisation consists in artistically eliminating all that is superfluous’.\(^{1043}\) The ruins of the *scaenae frons* offered a bare background which broke with conventions of naturalism entirely: ‘Rivas Cherif knew, with great skill, how to take advantage of the ruins of the theatre as an element of decoration’, Chabás would write in his critique of *Medea*.\(^{1044}\)

‘To regenerate the theatre, as the natural scenery of the character, of the *Mask*, one only has to place the human figure against a neutral background’, was Craig’s main idea for Rivas Cherif.\(^{1045}\) The effect created by the contrast between the bare white *scaenae frons* and Medea’s intensely red and golden costume was enthusiastically realised by Xirgu, much to Rivas Cherif’s own delight,\(^{1046}\) as did Enrique Haro:

\(^{1044}\) Luz (19-06-1933).  
\(^{1046}\) Rivas Cherif (1991: 266).
As a first impression we, therefore, take note of the contrast between the decorative and symbolic notions of the Roman theatre of Mérida and the aesthetic of a realism of quietude and peace, in which the tragic grandiosity of Medea stood out even more.  

Rivas Cherif was aware of the atmosphere conveyed by ancient bare white marble, while knowing that this is, in fact, a false image created by Romanticism. His approach to the Roman Theatre in Mérida fitted an aesthetic vision that ran from Romanticism to 1933, which in turn makes the Senecan performance belong to a modern aesthetic genealogy rather than to an archaeological recreation. The Roman Theatre thus evoked Antiquity not in order to return to the past, but to bring it forward to the present:

I have already spoken about how in the performances given by me in Mérida with the company of the Teatro Español I abstained from adding to the enormous nobility of such ruins any decorative element in an impossible rivalry with such illustrious stones and marbles. I even took advantage, for the tragic sentiment of ‘Medea’ and ‘Elektra’, of the effect of the truncated columns, the romantic impression of the ruins, which for almost a century and a half has grown in the poetic sensitivity of humanity. That is something which would have been entirely impossible in ancient Rome or in classical Greece. But I repeat I never intended to substitute the current, present, emotion, that a performance arouses, with an archaeological reproduction, however faithfully it may be possible to achieve it. [...] Reliable evidence assures us that the temples, the palaces, the Greek theatres, alongside the sculptures that entered in their greatest architectural decorum, were, if not always, the majority of times pictorially coloured. Our emotive idea of Greece has, in spite of archaeological history, the current quality of the white marble.


The *scaenae frons* in Mérida also offered a particular style of architectural set. According to Rivas Cherif, ‘the inescapable condition of the set is its delimitation and architectural outline, the bulk, the plastic form of its visuality’.\(^{1049}\) The most important designer in the Teatro Español, and in architectural set design in Spain, was Siegfried Burmann. No structure was created in Mérida. But Burmann designed the stage at the Royal Palace in Madrid and at the Teatro Español, in the autumn of 1933. The two performances fall only on the fringes of this thesis’ remit, but it is important to briefly address them to understand the architectural intentions of Rivas Cherif and Burmann.

The set at the Teatro Español was reminiscent of the work by Reinhardt and Appia, as *Sparta* acknowledged in November 1933: ‘one must mention Burmann’s indisputable success in his architectural set, which resembles the rhythmic drawing of Adolphe Appia’.\(^{1050}\) At the Royal Palace, the set stood on multilevel surfaces with four erect columns before the façade, which served as a noble backdrop that would follow Mérida’s own nobility, in line with Reinhardt and Copeau’s practice (Figures 46, 49, 50 and 51).\(^{1051}\) Burmann’s work at the Royal Palace was enthusiastically applauded by *El Heraldo de Madrid*: ‘this artist, with the supreme audacity of simplicity, has solved in a masterly simple way the arduous problem of the scenography of “Medea”. In all fairness, the first applause should have been for Burmann’.\(^{1052}\) The architectural intention was explained by Rivas Cherif in 1945:

> When in the open air I have not had the august background of Mérida I have always ensured an architectural setting in noble stone. It did not occur to me to build a stage set, or a frame for decorations in cloth or paper, against the façade of the Palace in the Plaza de la Armería in Madrid. I arranged a stairway stage, at different levels, with no other

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\(^{1050}\) *Sparta* (04-11-1933). See also *Luz* (30-10-1933).

\(^{1051}\) Reinhardt used the façade of the Salzburg Cathedral in *Jedermann* (1920), as Copeau did in *Le Mystère de Sainte Olive* before the Santa Croce in Florence precisely in 1933; see Baron (2008: 163, 166) and Fischer-Lichte (2000: 83). Burmann might have met Reinhardt while an understudy in Germany between 1905 and 1910, and he coincidentally worked on the *Medea* staged by the Dusseldorf Schauspielhaus; see Beckers (1992: 23-24). For Burmann’s early work see Riesgo-Demange (1992).

\(^{1052}\) *El Heraldo de Madrid* (02-09-1933).
background but the building’s wall, whose entrance we concealed, yes, with decorative elements that could hide from the audience’s view the ugly glass of its roof. I did not even need a stage in Salamanca, with the stairway, the colonnade and the door of the College adjacent to the Cathedral, when I also did Medea there.\textsuperscript{1053}

The lack of a set and any stage design at the Roman Theatre in Mérida meant that the machinery available to create dramatic effects or ambience was non-existent. No ramp, screens, decorated panels or props could be used. This could have forced Medea to become a pale, two-dimensional declamation by great actors and would not have satisfied the desire for a fully engaging and atmospheric theatrical reform. The dramatism, pathos, horror and power of Seneca’s Medea needed to be carefully highlighted to aid in its impact on the audience. Medea’s director only needed to turn to the experience of the great theatrical renovators of previous decades and his own to find two key elements that would enhance the performance on stage and make Seneca’s Medea so memorable: light and spectacle.

\textbf{b) Sun’s chariot: Light and darkness.}

In his book on theatre and theatre-making, Rivas Cherif insists on the power of light as a creator of atmospheres and illusions, central to his vision of theatre. His awareness of this grew when staging Seneca’s Medea in Mérida: ‘Light resolves the gravest complications in the scenic expression of fantasy, something previously reserved only for the stage machinery’.\textsuperscript{1054} By his own admission, Copeau had taught him, with his production of Shakespeare’s A Winter’s Tale (1920), in which ‘the most varied and quick set changes, that is, of ambience, were achieved with only the use of light’, how light could become essential on a set of ‘invariable architecture’.\textsuperscript{1055} Indeed, on his return from seeing Reinhardt in 1933, Rivas Cherif was

\textsuperscript{1053}Rivas Cherif (1991: 266).
\textsuperscript{1054} Rivas Cherif (1991: 308).
\textsuperscript{1055} Rivas Cherif (1991: 308).
impressed by the use of light on the German stage: ‘light is nowadays essential in theatre; the majority of the scenic audacity and achievements are due to light’.  

The advantage of natural light for the production had been clear almost as soon as the Roman Theatre was chosen: ‘The performance will take place in the afternoon. We will gain effects with this’, Rivas Cherif cryptically admitted in April 1933. On the 22nd of June 1933 one could read in El Sur: ‘It was intended that the transition of lights, from the natural light of sunset—it began at seven o’clock in the evening—to that of some electric lights, would adjust to the passionate crescendo of the tragedy’. One can only imagine the visual impact of the action on stage, framed by a typically pink, then red, then purple Spanish summer sunset, followed by the moon rising as Medea invokes her powers, all ending with the complete darkness of night. This transition must have been essential in convincing the audience of the impending fate that was to manifest itself on stage and also of Medea’s powers as a sorceress: ‘It is now time, Moon, that you attend your sacrifices’, Medea says in the tragedy (Sen. Med. 770). The use of natural light was the most memorable detail of the whole production for Enrique Haro:

We will never forget that authentic moon that rose precisely when Medea invoked her, when she exited from the ‘aula regia’. It was the marvellous effect of that set of Nature, which bathed with light the ecstatic expression of the reproductions of the statues of Ceres and Proserpina. Even Pluto himself, under the moon, seemed a smiling god.

As the light dimmed, artificial lighting had to be used—two freestanding electric lights, in the style of broad spotlights. They stood at the two top corners of the cavea and projected two

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1056 Sparta (25-03-1933).
1058 El Sur (22-06-1933).
1060 See Unamuno in Domínguez (2008: 76).
1061 La Libertad (21-06-1933).
beams of light that converged on the stage (Figures 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23 and 68). Their focused and artificial nature, alongside the natural moonlight, created an atmosphere that would be propitious for Medea’s sorcery: ‘the effect of the lights reinforcing the rising moon’s own emphasised the romantic dramatism of the ruins’, Rivas Cherif recalls in prison.\footnote{Rivas Cherif (1991: 266).}

Three photographs of the final scene at night have survived. Two of these do not seem to have been taken from the performance, but were posed photographs, judging by the rather static posture of some (Figures 4 and 5). There is only one surviving photograph from the performance taken at night, from precisely the last scene, published in Sparta on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933 (Figure 23). In addition, another night photograph survives, kept in the MNAR, of the performance of Elektra in the same theatre in 1934 which had a similar lighting arrangement (Figure 68). The artificial lighting provided an expressionistic effect of light and shadow, creating sharper contours and pronounced figures. It is indeed the kind of light design that Rivas Cherif praised in German productions and learnt from Gordon Craig and Copeau.

The veritable coup de théâtre was the final scene of Seneca’s Medea. It was the moment in which the open space, light, music, fire, a spectacular chariot, an on-stage mass of extras and the passionate and murderous finale could be joined into one final explosion of theatrical force (Figures 4, 5 and 23; also see Figures 51, 54, 55, 56 and 68 as a guide). The depths of Medea’s sorcery and crime had been reached. While the electric lights were dimmed, the crowd, bearing torches and chasing Medea, followed her through the scaenae frons and darkness, into the distance. Only the light of the torches remained, running through darkness. When the torches were extinguished, darkness was only tinged by one single torch that had been dropped on the stage in the pursuit of Medea. The music underlined the very last seconds of darkness, spectacle and tragedy. This is how Rivas Cherif recalls it, including the lone torch expiring to the notes of Gluck’s Alceste—and not Orphée—:
In Mérida I reinforced with two big lights the natural effect of the setting sun and the rising moon; and no more was needed but the violent cortege of torches surrounding the rapturous Medea on the infernal chariot, to give an apotheosis-like end to the most clamorous of my theatrical achievements. By the way, we had arranged that the young girl would run the last, lagging behind the tremendous and motley furious horde, outlining her juvenile figure with a special tragic suggestion, aside from the chorus of extras. But having chosen her precisely as the most experienced in stepping on stage, she tripped slightly and since a spark fell on her hand, she let go of the torch she was carrying. She did not stop, obviously, to pick it up; she continued running after the chariot and the mob. And the torch was extinguished on the floor coinciding with the final chords of Gluck’s Orphée that accompany the mimicry of the spectacle.

There were people who congratulated me very especially for that final detail, which offered such a singular interest to the magnificence of the apotheosis-like sequence, in the contrast of that dying flame on the floor, while the red night gleamed with torches behind the columns, the small temple in the background and the infernal cloud of smoke in which wicked Medea lost herself, dissipated into air.\footnote{Rivas Cherif (1991: 307-308).}

The grand chiaroscuro, the expressionistic visuals, the highlighted pathos and the focused attention on action, created an effect reminiscent of the spectacle and use of light in contemporary cinema. The popularity of cinema, music halls or cabarets had already been understood by the renowned critic and intellectual Pérez de Ayala, as an understandable, although unwelcome, alternative to theatre, already in 1927.\footnote{Pérez de Ayala, ‘La crisis teatral’ (1927), quoted in Dougherty (1984: 87).} Rivas Cherif would become a great defender of cinema: ‘The theatrical creed’s last word is cinema’.\footnote{Rivas Cherif (1991: 29).} Although he saw cinema as inferior to theatre in many aspects,\footnote{Rivas Cherif (1991: 32).} he appreciated its central use of light and shadows: ‘Cinema, in its perfection, must compose with lights and shadows a silent world,
tinged with words and rumours, in short, animated by music. Theatre will always be a dialogue tinged with silences’.\textsuperscript{1067}

Although Rivas Cherif makes no mention of these, the grand stories of antiquity, such as Medea’s, had begun to create a vision of the spectacular through cinema, after the appearance of films like Pastrone’s \textit{Cabiria} (1914), Gordon Edward’s \textit{Cleopatra} (1917) or Fred Niblo’s \textit{Ben-Hur} (1925). Cinema opened the path to a grand vision of monochrome, light-enhanced, epic-scale antiquity to the wider audience. The connections between the visual culture of cinema, in its epic films about antiquity, and the use of lighting, costume, extras and spectacle in Seneca’s \textit{Medea} did not escape some members of the audience. Luis R. Alonso indeed filmed the performance with Gaumont-Pathé, although the film has not survived (see p. 55). It was shown on cinema screens, at least in fragments.\textsuperscript{1068} \textit{Luz} reports that a happy member of the audience told Rivas Cherif after the performance: ‘It was so beautiful that it almost, almost, looked like cinema’.\textsuperscript{1069} \textit{Medea}’s cinematic effects caught a young boy’s attention in what would be one of Rivas Cherif’s proudest moments:

When \textit{Medea} in Mérida had finished, an excited local man, who held the hand of a boy, was pointing at Xirgu, [who was] besieged like a bullfighter, and saying to him: ‘Look, look at the Lady!’ . And when I asked the boy if he had liked it, seeing that the father stepped forward to answer on his behalf I said:

— ‘He could have not!’—I insisted with the kid—‘And what did you like the most?’
— ‘The last part’, he said no longer hesitating.
— ‘And...why?’
—‘Because it looked like the movies’.

\textit{The movies} were until then the most beautiful theatre that could be seen in Mérida.\textsuperscript{1070}

\textsuperscript{1067} Rivas Cherif (1991: 32).
\textsuperscript{1068} \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (22-06-1933, 23-06-1933, 24-06-1933); \textit{ABC} (22-06-1933, 23-06-1933, 24-06-1933, 25-06-1933); \textit{Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Ciudad Real} (06-09-1933).
\textsuperscript{1069} \textit{Luz} (23-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1070} Rivas Cherif (1991: 299). The comparison of ancient drama performance and cinema was also made by a spectator of Palmer-Sikelianou’s \textit{Prometheus Bound}; see Michelakis (2010b: 228).
c) Bacchic rhythm.

The ideas conveyed in Friedrich Nietzsche’s book *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) had a most outstanding impact on theatre practitioners who spearheaded the theatrical reform of the first decades of the 20th century. They moulded the works of Reinhardt, as in his Covent Garden *Oedipus* in 1912,1071 Eva Palmer-Sikelianou’s own in Delphi in 1927 and 1930,1072 and even Isadora Duncan’s experimentations with choreography, ancient themes and music.1073 The creation of a transfixing and intoxicating Dionysian theatre that would dissolve the individual into an irrational, non-Apollonian, ritualistic universal unity in imitation of ancient tragedy became the focus of much of the theatrical reform during these decades.

Spain was no stranger to this.1074 Nietzsche’s aesthetics informed an important essay on the renovation of theatre and its socio-political advantages by the socialist Luis de Araquistáin, *La batalla teatral* (1930, see pp. 162). Araquistáin was an acquaintance of Rivas Cherif and a comrade of the minister Fernando de los Ríos, who himself had developed a Nietzschean idea of the pursuit of ethics through aesthetics (see pp. 163-164). In addition, Araquistáin had been the instigator of Rivas Cherif’s visit to Germany for Reinhardt to stage his theatre of masses in the Madrid bullring (see p. 169). Rivas Cherif had also been infected by the Dionysian virus, as his theatre textbook *Cómo hacer teatro* reveals.1075

Seneca’s *Medea* became an outstanding arena in which to explore this mode of theatre-making, as this section argues. In *La Libertad* one could read the following: ‘the tragedy was also the chorus and the orchestra (music by Gluck was performed), which give a greater prominence to all the spiritual states of Medea with a fervently human eloquence’.1076 The union of music,
dance and the collective body of the chorus, the three elements explored in this section, were essential constituent parts of the performance. They were major conducers to the final scene’s dissolution of the individual on stage and in the audience, into a universal unity of ritualistic, collective spectacular theatre. Seneca’s Medea thus became the most important Dionysian ritual of its time in Spain.

The Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, directed by Bartolomé Pérez Casas, played the overture to Gluck’s opera Iphigénie en Aulide as an introduction to the performance. In the piece’s last minutes the red-robed figure of Medea walked towards the stage. The music ended just as she stopped. The orchestra and its accompanying choir performed again in the choral interludes of the tragedy with choral pieces from Gluck’s Orphée et Eurydice. The choral pieces from Orphée served as introductions to each act. For the final climactic scene the overture to Gluck’s Alceste was performed (see pp. 52, 56, 280 and 294). It began at the beginning of Medea’s flight, chased by the torch-holding crowd, and ended just after the lone dropped torch had expired. Music was essential to create the tragic atmosphere and support the pathos on stage, as demonstrated by Ana Nadal de San Juan’s review of the performance at the Teatre Grec in Barcelona in September 1933:

What a moment, when the first chords of Gluck’s overture to ‘Iphigenia in Aulis’ started to vibrate in the air! The broad, magnificent notes ascended, tearing the density of the trees, from which they emerged in explosions of exalted complaint, or of hurtful melancholy, as if auguries of tragedy.1077

Rivas Cherif was convinced of the value of music in theatrical productions.1078 He often worked with musicians and commissioned new pieces for his plays. This might have some relation to the importance Craig gave to the dancer, as ultimate dramaturge, and thereby to music. It may also have much to do with the idea of Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, the intention of which

1077 Contemporánea (09-1933).
Rivas Cherif aspired to achieve, even if he did not fully approve of its precise realisation. Artistic integration in theatre, he would later say, ‘consists of the concurrence of all the arts within the dramatic production; but not by a simple accumulation or in the same degree, but in the ordered scale and dependency of scenic emotion, which Wagner did not consider’. In Mérida, music was a necessary tool in creating a sensuous atmosphere for the play. In addition, the importance Gluck placed on simple, direct and unadorned composition in his Alceste must have seemed attractive to Rivas Cherif, alongside Gluck’s reform of the chorus and dance. Gluck’s music appears as the cord that ties together the unadorned, Romantic and emotional stage design, the vindication of ancient tragedy and the combination of musical pathos, dance and the collective, so central to this staging of Seneca’s Medea.

Rivas Cherif makes the following fleeting remark in his second introductory article: ‘The organisers asked of mister Bartolomé Pérez Casas his personal participation at the helm of the Orquesta Filarmónica for the music and choir, so as to enhance, with a modern interpretation, the necessary evocation for the tragedy’. The key here is ‘the necessary evocation for the tragedy’. To add music to the performance was therefore central to the idea of resurrecting ancient tragedy, as El Sur explains: ‘The musical accompaniment of zithers and monodies of Ancient Greek Tragedy, which in Euripides was already almost opera, was replaced by small choral pieces and selections from Gluck—of ‘Iphigénie’ and ‘Alceste’—which filled the pauses and underscored the presence of the chorus’. A similar idea is expressed by Juan del Brezo in his article ‘Music in classical tragedy’, published on the 19th of June 1933:

Classical tragedy (tragos-ode, song of the male goat, the totemic animal dedicated to Dionysus) was structured approximately like an old comic opera. The dialogue as such did not present any musical element. The anapaest of the chorus (a type of meter which

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1079 Rivas Cherif in El Heraldo de Madrid (22-01-1927); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 152-153).
1081 Hall (2012: 204).
1083 Rivas Cherif in El Sol (03-06-1933); see Rivas Cherif (2013: 156-158).
1084 El Sur (22-06-1933).
meant two short syllables followed by a long one; the opposite of a dactyl) are recited to the rhythm of the *aulos*. Certain verses recited by the actors, but inserted in a lyric scene, also had instrumental accompaniment. The *paracataloge*, which the ancients signified as having great tragic effect, and which [sic] ultimately can be compared with the melodrama imposed in the 18th century, and which [sic] such tender tears it made our romantic grandparents shed.  

In September 1933, Juan del Brezo himself did not entirely agree with resurrecting the tragic use of music: ‘A Greek might understand our contemporary theatre; but our music is sure to be completely unattainable for him in its structure and meaning.’ Despite this, he understood the internal logic in choosing Gluck, given the connection his operas had with ancient tragedies, although he would have rather chosen Wagner, whose ‘Funeral March’ in *Götterdämmerung* Rivas Cherif would use in 1934 to accompany *Elektra*. José Subirá accepts the choice of Gluck, given the understandable ignorance by the creators of the Spanish composer Blas de Laserna’s *Medea y Jasón* (c.1794), which he considers well suited to the production. Even so, the resurrection of ancient tragedy and its adaptation to more recent theatrical, musical and artistic practices, an apparent maxim for the production, was behind the choice of using Gluck’s music specifically. It was even behind the (rejected) possibility of using Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*. Rivas Cherif connected Gluck, ‘the Greek and Roman of the old German music’, as Rodrigo Soriano called him in 1933, with the uses of music in ancient tragedies in the handbook he wrote in 1953 for a course he gave in Guatemala. His words give a clue as to why he used Gluck for Seneca’s *Medea*:

Greek Tragedy and Comedy had a predominantly lyric and danceable origin. […] Gluck, with a more evident design, aspires towards that return, of which I earlier spoke, to the

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1085 *La Voz* (19-06-1933).
1086 *La Voz* (02-09-1933).
1088 *Revista de la Biblioteca, Archivo y Museos. Ayuntamiento de Madrid* (October 1933).
1089 *El Sol* (13-04-1933), *Crónica* (02-07-1933).
1090 *El Heraldo de Madrid* (20-06-1933).
lyric inspiration of the first tragedies and Greek myths, which inspired his *Alceste*, his *

Armida*, his *Orphée*.

There is no clear information on the specific reasons for the choice of the operatic pieces. What is certain is that Gluck was not unknown to the audience in Madrid and its cultured elite, given his popularity on the radio and in concerts. Interestingly, the overture to *Iphigénie en Aulide* was played by the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid at the Teatro Español in April 1933, and also for the production of Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* by an amateur theatrical group on the 26th of April 1933. The same orchestra that played on the 18th of June 1933, the Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, had performed the same overture at least twice before and less than two months earlier.

Some members of the audience may have inferred a certain veiled connection between the choice of music, and the operas they come from, with Medea’s tragedy. The sacrifice of one’s own child for the success of one’s mission in *Iphigénie en Aulide*, the deadly loss of one’s beloved in *Orphée et Eurydice*, and the death in place of one’s beloved in *Alceste*, may be seen as parallels to Medea’s killing of her children, Jason’s loss of Creusa and Creusa’s death as victim of Medea’s hatred for Jason. Also, the coincidence of Euripides’ authorship of the tragedies on the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the self-sacrifice of Alcestis and Medea’s revenge might have been in the minds of some audience members. To this we must add the explicit mentions of Orpheus in Seneca’s text (Sen. *Med.* 228-229, 346-349, 357-360). Although it is not clear that this was intended, those well read in the Greco-Roman classics would probably not have failed to make such connections.

1092 One only needs to browse the issues of the radio magazine *Ondas* in the 1930s. See also *La Voz* (12-11-1932); *Luz* (19-11-1932); *La Libertad* (15-12-1932); *Ahora* (08-02-1933, 17-03-1933, 12-11-1932, 11-12-1932).
1093 *La Libertad* (02-04-1933).
1094 *La Época* (15-04-1933); *La Nación* (27-04-1933).
Gluck’s music had been used for many works of modern dance pioneers, and he had himself revolutionised the dancing chorus.\textsuperscript{1095} The Xirgu-Borràs Company and Rivas Cherif had a strong interest in dance. Rivas Cherif had before 1933 created his own ballet projects alongside Antonia Mercé, \textit{La Argentina}, and collaborated in others, writing a goodly amount himself.\textsuperscript{1096} The connection between Isadora Duncan’s work, which he appears to have seen in 1919 or 1920, and Gordon Craig’s own ideas of the dancer as ultimate dramaturge, must have been present in Rivas Cherif’s mind throughout his career. Xirgu herself experienced contemporary dance trends. She performed the ‘Dance of the seven veils’, notoriously popularised by Maud Allan, in Wilde’s \textit{Salome}.\textsuperscript{1097} She would later see Mary Garden perform the dance in Strauss’ opera in 1912 in Paris, a production that influenced her subsequent performances as Salome.\textsuperscript{1098}

According to Rivas Cherif, Greek Tragedy ‘had a predominantly lyric and danceable origin’, as quoted above. The descriptions and photographs that remain of the female dancing chorus point in the direction of a style reminiscent of Isadora Duncan’s own paradigmatic Greek-style dances, which made her so popular in previous decades and aided in her becoming an innovator of dance.\textsuperscript{1099} Duncan’s autobiography had been translated into Spanish in 1929, and may have been read by the creators of \textit{Medea}. Her specific use of Gluck’s music, most relevant in her combination of Gluck’s two Iphigenias,\textsuperscript{1100} which she mentions alongside Gluck’s \textit{Orphée} in her autobiography,\textsuperscript{1101} might also point towards the combination of Gluck and dance in Mérida in 1933. Frontal poses, static formations, tragic extended arms and legs, the gestural relationship with the ruins, are all features of the dancers in Mérida in 1933 and 1934 and of Duncan’s own work (Figures 27, 28, 29, 30 and 65). This style of dance may be what the critic in \textit{El Sol} refers to as dancing ‘with a bacchic rhythm’, for the dancers may have imitated bacchants in mid-

\textsuperscript{1095} See Hall (2012: 191, 201-202).
\textsuperscript{1098} Foguet i Boreu (2010: 70).
\textsuperscript{1099} ‘Whatever she said herself, from the evidence a good case can be made for antiquity being the main inspirational force in her career, certainly in the early stages, but never quite relinquished’, Naerebout (2010: 51). This had a great impact in Spain too; see Morenilla Talens (2006: 450-452).
\textsuperscript{1100} Zanobi (2010: 235-236); Hall (2012: 201-202, 236).
\textsuperscript{1101} See Duncan (1929: 86, 117, 147-148, 232, 284, 360).
ecstasy.\footnote{The dancing female chorus similarly appeared in previous performances of ancient drama, such as the productions of \textit{Prometheus Bound} by Adolphe Appia (1925) and by Palmer-Sikelianou (1927, 1930).} 

Attired in Greek-style clothing, and aiding in the dramaturgy of Seneca’s \textit{Medea}, the dancing chorus created a sense of ritual, rapture and trepidation, thus making Gluck’s music corporeal, theatrical, and invoking the memory of Duncan. On stage, the dancing chorus became the expressive interlude between the collective Dionysian chorus and orchestra and the individual figures, above all Medea. The dancing female chorus thus played an essential part in not only creating total theatre, but in conveying the power, theatricality and expressiveness of Seneca’s \textit{Medea} in Mérida.

The tragic chorus, whose presence the female dancers merge with Gluck’s music and Medea’s appearance on stage, offered a final element with which to explore theatricality and new stage languages. Gluck’s own choral reform must have been especially relevant in him being chosen in 1933: ‘It was perhaps in this creative handling of the chorus that his aspiration to emulate the effect of ancient Greek theatre is most apparent’, Hall explains.\footnote{The dramatic employment of choruses was interestingly developed in 1930s Spain by Federico García Lorca, principally in his play \textit{Yerma}, although variants can be found in \textit{Bodas de sangre} or \textit{La casa de Bernarda Alba}, for example.} \footnote{Rivas Cherif was essential in developing the on-stage presence of Lorca’s choruses as stage director of \textit{Yerma} and \textit{Bodas de sangre}.} The contemporary national and international theatrical resurgence of the chorus is mixed with Nietzschen notions of the tragic

\footnotesize{\textcite{El Sol (20-06-1933).}}
\footnotesize{\textcite{See Van Steen (2002) and Michelakis (2010b: 332-333).}}
\footnotesize{\textcite{Hall (2012: 190).}}
\footnotesize{\textcite{See Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 261-265) and Gil Fombellida (2003: 122-135).}}
and the collective, alongside an interest in promoting grander productions and the use of on-stage masses, spearheaded by Max Reinhardt.1107

It is safe to assume that it was Rivas Cherif who decided on the canonical number of fifteen chorus members, including its leader, to perform in Mérida.1108 It was ‘declamatory and mimic’,1109 ‘rhythmic’, according to critics.1110 The implications of placing the chorus, the collective, the onlooker, the on-stage manifestation of the audience, around the altar to Dionysus, surrounded by the semi-circular space created by the cavea, indeed provoke Nietzschean interpretations of the Dionysian in theatre and in society.1111 In the case of Seneca’s Medea the chorus is more than an onlooker. In their exegeses on the Argonauts (Sen. Med. 301-379, 579-669),1112 the collective chorus becomes a style of knowledgeable and trans-historical, even trans-mythical onlooker and commentator. While in prison, Rivas Cherif wrote an account of the ritual origins of theatre, with Seneca as a relegated example, which is an almost exact copy of Nietzsche’s ideas throughout The Birth of Tragedy:

If already in the Neronian times of Seneca theatre in Rome had declined, with no space for Senecan tragedies, later, the ruin of the Empire erased, during centuries in the Middle Ages, the trace of the cult to the gods which classic theatre had maintained until its final days.

Greek theatre is born at the feet of the altar of sacrifices. More specifically, at the feet of the altar of sacrifices to Dionysus, whom the Latins called by his Roman name Bacchus.

It is, therefore, an intoxicating and passionate Dionysian art, as it tends towards the

1107 Rivas Cherif knew about Reinhardt’s use of choruses; see Rivas Cherif (1991: 324).
1109 Diario de Córdoba (20-06-1933).
1110 El Sur (22-06-1933).
1111 For choral ritual origins and the altar to Dionysus; see Rivas Cherif (1991: 108-109).
exaltation and punishment of passions through the performance of the movements of the spirit: through an action.

Theatre will be essentially dynamic. We call Apollonian, in contrast, the art that derives from the cult of Apollo, a god that appears to us in his images and in his transcendence of the order of life, as static and serene. Sculpture and painting are Apollonian arts.\textsuperscript{1113}

The Apollonian and the Dionysian also establish the contrast between the individual and the collective, between the particular and the universal, according to Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{1114} In Rivas Cherif’s understanding, this came to Spanish audiences after having been filtered through Spain’s Golden Age Theatre, whose origins are also to be found in the chorus.\textsuperscript{1115} The most outstanding example was, according to Rivas Cherif, Cervantes’ \textit{Numancia} (which was itself influenced by Aeschylus’ tragedy \textit{Persians})\textsuperscript{1116}: ‘The chorus already has in \textit{Numancia} a more lively representation, distinctly realistic, which, without subverting the dramatic laws, assigns to the mass, the people, a typical representation in specific individuals’.\textsuperscript{1117} This stable continuity between antiquity and modernity is behind Rivas Cherif’s defence of the chorus as the key to modern theatre in 1945:

[In response to Boileau’s neoclassic vision of Greco-Roman perfection] We understand it in a different way, because every nation has intended to be a world of its own, and then each individual has wanted to be a world apart, until it clashes with the contrary idea and returns to the universal and cosmic aspiration and the consequent unity. To reconcile that Catholic unity with variety and the chorus with the dramatic persona is the crux of current theatre if it is to be an image of life itself.\textsuperscript{1118}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1113} Rivas Cherif (1991: 98).
\textsuperscript{1114} Nietzsche (2000: 23, 29-32, 60, 86-92).
\textsuperscript{1117} Rivas Cherif (1991: 92).
\textsuperscript{1118} Rivas Cherif (1991: 79).
\end{flushright}
The word *chorus* was also used for the mass of extras that appear in the final scene of Seneca’s *Medea*.\textsuperscript{1119} At least ninety extras appeared on stage holding torches in pursuit of *Medea*.\textsuperscript{1120} Reinhardt had also used roughly a hundred extras in his production of *Oedipus Rex* in Covent Garden in 1912.\textsuperscript{1121} At least ten of the extras were dressed as soldiers, with crested helmets and shields, perhaps with some echoes of the pyrrhic performance within Gémier’s *Oedipe, roi de Thèbes* (1919) at the Cirque d’Hiver,\textsuperscript{1122} attended by Rivas Cherif. This chorus of extras was to be the on-stage extension of the collective body of the tragic chorus, so as to create a sense of infectious trepidation in the final scene.

In *Medea*’s escape at the end of the performance, this unidentifiable on-stage mass, the extended collective body, dissolved the individualities of Jason and Medea into the crowd, moving from the ritual to the collective. This mechanism was similar to the way in which Oedipus merges with the mass in Reinhardt’s production of *Oedipus Rex*.\textsuperscript{1123} This dissolution of individuality also affected the audience in Mérida,\textsuperscript{1124} becoming ‘one of the main characters of the show. [...] [It] was indeed the mute chorus that stands as a witness to the misadventures of the drama and is intimidated by the power of destiny’, according to *El Sur*.\textsuperscript{1125} The collectivity was then dissolved into the universal in Mérida through its conversion into the lights of the torches moving through darkness behind the *scaenae frons* and the final chords of Gluck’s *Alceste*. The individuals on and off stage thus transcended into the universality of fire, music, darkness. It fulfilled Nietzsche’s claim that the Dionysian ‘seeks to annihilate the individual and to redeem him through a mystical feeling of unity’.\textsuperscript{1126}

\textsuperscript{1119} *El Heraldo de Madrid* (27-04-1933); *El Sol* (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1120} *Diario de Córdoba* (20-06-1933); *La Voz* (Córdoba) (20-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1121} Hall and Macintosh (2005: 522); Macintosh (2009: 164); Patterson (1981: 38).
\textsuperscript{1122} See Baron (2008: 165) and Macintosh (2009: 135).
\textsuperscript{1123} Hall and Macintosh (2005: 524, 540).
\textsuperscript{1124} The audience might have even rapturously invaded the stage at the end, according to *Crónica* (25-06-1933).
\textsuperscript{1126} Nietzsche (2000: 23).
The orchestra unleashes the last chords of the overture of ‘Alceste’. With the last notes one can see Borrás running with his dead son in his arms and the crowd furiously gesticulating and ululating chasing Medea's chariot. The fire is extinguished and the smoke dissipates. In the still night, after the cry with which the audience has seconded the cry of the scenic crowd, there has been a silence of expectation and then a clamour of delirious enthusiasm, a resounding bravo in the theatre.\(^{1127}\)

The evidence unmistakably demonstrates that the three elements of music, dance and the choral body were united and interconnected in a triply-dependent structuring of the Dionysian. Gluck’s music was essential in key stages of the performance to move the audience emotionally and enhance moments of pathos, action and rapture. Three choruses, the Gluckian singing choir, the bacchic dancing ensemble and the tragic chorus, performed as an interconnected chorus, greater in every choral interlude. This was further extended by the extras in the final scene thus forming a greater collective body. The collectivity not only moved the audience through the gamut of senses, but also penetrated their space, creating a strong identification between the audience and those on stage. The Dionysian dissolution of the individual into the universal was indeed achieved in Seneca’s *Medea* on the 18\(^{th}\) of June 1933.

**Conclusion: Medea’s theatrical sorcery.**

As Rivas Cherif himself would claim throughout his life, the 1933 production of Seneca’s *Medea* could be understood as the crowning glory of the work by the team at the Teatro Español.\(^{1128}\) This chapter has explained why. In his execution of Seneca’s *Medea*, Rivas Cherif exploited his deep knowledge of international theatrical trends, alongside Xirgu’s experience and his own. Xirgu, as heir to Ristori and Bernhardt, in her own performance of *Medea* in Mérida, created an acting genealogy that would have its most outstanding offspring in Nuria

\(^{1127}\) *El Sol* (20-06-1933).

\(^{1128}\) See Rivas Cherif (2013: 54, 160, 398, 468, 478).
Espert and Blanca Portillo. In practice, to stage the unstageable Seneca became the fertile opportunity to explore open-air spaces, ritualistic popular theatre, the breaking of spatial barriers and new dynamics of on-stage movement. In the Roman Theatre, spectacle, on-stage masses and expressionistic lighting would summon the artistic team, the audience and the actors in Mérida, to a stage apotheosis, whose grandeur, impact and rapture surpassed the popular spectacle of *the movies*. The final scene became the culmination of an intoxicating mix of all the Dionysian elements of tragedy—music, dance and the choral body—which gradually dissolved individualities on stage and amongst the spectators into an indistinguishable collectivity and its final total absorption into universal unity. The Xirgu-Rivas Cherif partnership created an historical and transcendent performance in Seneca’s *Medea*, which any author or practitioner of theatre at the time, who wished to contribute to the progress of theatre, had to study, as Fernando Vázquez claimed:

If any contemporary author with a yen for the stage had been present in Mérida, he must have felt embarrassed, humiliated by the greatness of ancient theatre. The architecture, the scenic dynamics, the drama and the verbal display, the majestic ambience and the presence of a poetry that accompanied the nascent hour of a civilisation, encouraged anyone to remember with fury all the apostasies committed by numerous generations of authors, in the name of Melpomene.\(^\text{129}\)

\(^{129}\) *El Sur* (21-06-1933).
Conclusion: The Senecan Medea that was in Mérida.

On the 18th of June 1933 Seneca’s Medea was performed in the town of Mérida, once Emerita Augusta, in the region of Extremadura, Western Spain. It was a spectacular production undertaken by the Xirgu-Borràs Company and funded by the government of the Second Spanish Republic. More than three thousand spectators watched in admiration, expectation and awe how Medea’s revenge unfolded on the stage of the Roman Theatre. All present experienced a communion that united the townsmen and townswomen of Mérida and its surroundings, with national intellectuals and MPs, the Italian Ambassador, two government ministers and the Prime Minister of the Second Spanish Republic. The performance of Seneca’s Medea thus became one of the most memorable and meaningful theatrical productions and cultural events of the Second Spanish Republic and of the entirety of Spanish History:

But depending on the future of the Spanish stage, the resuscitated Seneca can constitute a starting date. Watching ‘Medea’, many realised what Theatre, with capital letters, is and in all its dimensions. Those who most need to learn from it—performers and managers of the theatre business alike—, must not forget it.1130

This historical production came to encapsulate, develop or provoke an immense array of themes, theories, ideologies, conflicts, changes and aesthetic practices that laid it at the very heart of the constituent years of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1933). As if an act of sorcery itself, the performance, at times wittingly, on many occasions unwittingly, came to exorcise, invoke, enchant, bewilder, possess and even annihilate the ideological, socio-political and cultural spectres of the Second Spanish Republic.

1130 Fernández Almagro in El Sol (21-06-1933).
Its inception responded directly to the perceived need to reinstate the dramatic might of Spain’s most ancient intellectual, poet, dramaturge and philosopher, thus redressing the historical and cultural bias in favour of Seneca the philosopher as the proto-Christian national sage. The production of Seneca’s Medea came to exorcise the old regime’s conception of the nation by invoking the spirit of a renewed Seneca Hispanicus, so that it might contribute to the new national endeavour, the pursuit of a republican nationalism based on secularism, liberty and the progressive continuum of Spanish culture art and letters, which, in this thesis, has been termed Hispanitas:

The performance of ‘Medea’, desired by scholars, mocked by ignorance, and scorned today by the forgetful people, was undoubtedly the resurrection of the very people who disdained it. [...] And the Roman soul, who spoke yesterday to the centuries with the muteness and silence of the stones, cried today with its noble, tragic voice, in the resurrected theatre of Mérida.\textsuperscript{1131}

The production also contributed to the practical development of Hispanitas, the building of the republican nation that was the Second Spanish Republic. It responded to the Republic’s wish to develop republican citizenship and national unity through the promotion of culture. It was performed in one of the poorest and most isolated and ignored regions of Spain, Extremadurad. Funded with 50,000 pesetas, it surpassed the republican aim of bridging the cultural and social gap that existed between the cultural and social centres of Spain and its regional and rural areas, by establishing a bi-directional cultural exchange. The citizens of the Republic, whether rural or urban, witnessed, together, a performance of their most distinguished theatrical past, performed by their most renowned theatre-makers, which displayed themes which were not associated, and could be seen to reject, the two pillars of the old regime: Crown and Mitre. On the 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933 and in the subsequent tour, Seneca’s Medea provoked the so-desired national republican

\footnote{Soriano in \textit{El Heraldo de Madrid} (20-06-1933).}
unity, not only amongst its citizens, but between the new regime and an outstanding example of *Hispanitas*; between the Republic and its proudest cultural artefact: theatre.

Since the meeting the Minister Fernando de los Ríos had with Margarita Xirgu in March 1932, to the very day its governmental grant was awarded, the different steps and circumstances of the creation of Seneca’s *Medea* illustrate, coincide with and respond to the assurances, actions, and interests of the Minister De los Ríos in his quest for the creation of a State-sponsored Spanish National Theatre, which was radically informed by his promotion of civic ethics through aesthetics.

Given the centrality of Seneca’s *Medea* to the national project of the Second Spanish Republic in its constituent period, the political interests and goals of republicans, socialists, philo-fascists, Fascist Italy, Catholics and the right-wing were channelled and evidenced by their praise, attacks or criticism of Seneca’s *Medea*. The production of Seneca’s *Medea* was formally and structurally republican, and so it appeared as a most fecund ground on which to seed political visions against or in favour of it and the Republic:

Xirgu is ‘Medea.’ Borrás is ‘Jason.’ The spectacle is superb. Arty feelings. Murmurs of approval. Dialogue:

**JASON:** Do not pretend that I pay for your crimes.

**MEDEA:** He who gains with the crime is the true and only guilty one.

Emotion. Nobody or almost nobody looks at the stage. All eyes have been fixed on the box that Azaña occupies. Don Manuel, the cold man, the man with unbeatable serenity, feels disturbed. He blushes like a naive school-girl. The accusation is crystal clear. There were no ‘Medea’ and ‘Jason’. They were—that’s how we imagine it at least—Rojas and Azaña, who occupied the places of Xirgu and Borrás.\(^\text{1132}\)

\(^{1132}\) *La Tierra* (30-10-1933).
The close formal and structural association of Seneca’s *Medea* with the Second Spanish Republic was further expanded into a thematic association by many of the responses to the production. Many in the Catholic opposition press saw in *Medea’s* incendiary pagan crimes and atheist claims the demonstration of the Republic’s ultimate anti-Catholic sentiments in their promotion of Secularism which had taken the shape of a renewed Neronian persecution. The Catholic newspaper *El Siglo Futuro* saw it necessary to correct the monstrous blasphemy of the pagan and Senecan *Medea* with a performance of the martyrdom of Saint Eulalia of Mérida, victim of Diocletian, in Mérida itself.

One other profound socio-political change at the time, Women’s Rights, was a most poignant context for reading many themes in Seneca’s *Medea*, such as female empowerment, marital strife or infanticide. Medea, in her 1933 performance, appeared as the ultimate ‘bad woman’, as a ‘frantic enamoured woman and tragic and ferocious mother’, subverting and questioning the paradigm of perceived Spanish femininity, the ‘angel of the hearth’. Ever since December 1931, Spanish women had the constitutional right to choose their public and private futures through suffrage and divorce. Many in the audience of Seneca’s *Medea* saw potential republican womanhood performed before their own eyes. They could read their own fears or hopes into it. In addition, Medea’s infanticidal crime came to mirror the killing of Hildegart Rodríguez by her own mother, a sensationalistic example of a deeper social concern in 1930s Spain. Spain watched many of the most important social concerns and developments of the Second Spanish Republic played out and displayed in the actions and words of Seneca’s *Medea*.

This ‘acting out’ was in itself a theatrical production of the highest standard. It became a most illustrious attempt at renewing the Spanish stage, leading broader European trends in many ways. In pairing the Senecan text and the Roman Theatre in Mérida, the Xirgu-Borràs Company was able to explore new ways of solving the challenges of a powerful poetic text, unconventional theatrical spaces, movement, acting techniques, open-air performance and the establishment of a festival of ancient drama in an ancient venue. The major tragic thrust of the

1133 Chabás in *Luz* (13-06-1933).
performance was achieved by the union of three most Dionysian elements in the Nietzschean fashion: music, dance and the collective. This intoxicating Dionysian union found its ultimate cusp in the final scene. The individualities of those present on and before the stage were disintegrated into a Dionysian universal intoxication of fire, music and darkness. Medea’s sorcery was able to provoke a theatrical spectacle of aesthetic renewal:

While the sunset fell meekly, in passing from the golden glow to the darkness of ashes, the ruins of the theatre of Mérida seemed to complement each other. And as the performance of ‘Medea’ progressed, and with it night, the crowd, gathered in the ‘cavea’, lost, in its imagination, its modern character, and it was not necessary to be endowed with a powerful capacity of historical recreation to feel—given the performance of the actors and the robust Roman architecture—that you were living a theatrical performance of two thousand years ago. Our contemporary theatre, with its backstage and its lighting artefacts and its plays without mythical substance, seemed as ephemeral as an artificial silk fabric when confronted with the elegant solidity of the Roman architecture and verb, the daughter of an insatiate and insatiable thirst of eternity.\textsuperscript{1134}

The chapters of this thesis have come to demonstrate how the 1933 production of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida appeared as the result, enactment, culmination, reverberation and provocation of many of the fundamental questions and themes that stood at the very core of the regime, ideology, society, purpose, and aesthetics of the constituent period of the Second Spanish Republic.

Ironically, much of what took place on stage that evening of the 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933 came to symbolically mirror much of the essential developments of the Second Spanish Republic. As Medea reclaims her past actions and her authorship of the stealing of the Golden Fleece so as to assert her status, so was the Republic reclaiming its historical progressive essence and its future

\textsuperscript{1134}Juan de la Encina in \textit{El Sol} (25-06-1933).
identity through *Hispanitas* and the Seneca Hispanicus. In a similar way as Medea founds on her past identity in Colchis her new identity as infanticidal sorceress by cancelling-out her previous status as mother and wife, so did the Republic intend to cancel-out Spain’s monarchical and confessional past by channelling its progressive continuum and establishing new republican citizenship and unity. When Medea powerfully and unashamedly confronts Jason and Creon and chooses her own path of infanticide by reasserting her identity, she is acting out the new public and private empowerment of women through Female Suffrage and divorce. When Jason cries out ‘Leave for the deep spaces of the high firmament to testify, wherever you roam, that there are no gods!’ (Sen. *Med.* 1026-1027) he is replicating, to the ears of many in 1933, the famous words by Azaña: ‘Spain has ceased to be Catholic’. In the elaborate, spectacular, moving and tragic staging by Medea of her own revenge in Seneca’s tragedy, she is mirroring the care, potency and intensity of the staging by the Xirgu-Borràs Company in the Roman Theatre in Mérida.

Medea, in Seneca’s tragedy, reveals her true tragic identity when she claims: ‘Medea nunc sum’ (Sen. *Med.* 910). In claiming that she is now Medea, the Colchian sorceress is uniting into one unique sentence a variety of meanings and implications. She is claiming that her mythical past identity is reinstated. She is claiming that her present agency is reinstalled. She is also claiming that she is finally acting out her mythical prescribed identity in being the sorceress, the murderous princess, the infanticidal mother. In the Roman Theatre in Mérida, the circumstances that led to or were provoked by her speaking such words added a new meaning to her claim. In *being* Medea, she was being Seneca’s *Medea* as created by the Xirgu-Borràs Company, as the product of the tragic genius of the Seneca Hispanicus, as the enactment of the Republic’s cultural policy, as the mirror for Spanish society. In *being* Medea in Mérida, Seneca’s *Medea* encapsulated a whole society in mid-transformation. But the fatal irony, tragically, was at that time unexpected. Only three years later, the Spanish society embodied by Seneca’s *Medea* would finally kill its own children in the Civil War, and escape on her winged chariot, leaving behind her death, fire and destruction. Many, just as Jason had, would think that divine intervention indeed did not exist.
Despite this tragic irony, Seneca’s *Medea* unquestionably *was* in the Roman Theatre in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933. Seneca’s *Medea has been* in the memories of many theatre makers, citizens of Mérida, and scholars since. Seneca’s *Medea is now* once more, revivified, with her full powers reinstated, with all the echoes of a society that was, in this thesis. Seneca’s *Medea is now* in these lines, so she can *be*, repeatedly, in the minds of its readers for many a year to come. Medea superest.
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APPENDIX 1.
GRAPHIC EVIDENCE.
Figure 1. Publicity poster for the performance of Seneca’s Medea in Mérida on the 18th of June 1933. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE B 444-05).
Figure 2. Drawing of the Roman Theatre in Mérida by Villanueva. La Libertad (20-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 3. Performance of Seneca's Medea. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Photograph by Barrera. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borràs (Badalona).
Figure 4. Final scene of Seneca’s Medea. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. Photograph by Bocconi. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-22). Also Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera (Mérida).

Figure 5. Final scene of Seneca’s Medea. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. Photograph by Bocconi. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-22).
Figure 6. Margarita Xirgu as Medea, Enric Borràs as Jason, and unknown actresses, near the Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. Photograph by Bocconi. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borras (Badalona).

Figure 7. Margarita Xirgu as Medea and Enric Borràs as Jason, posing near the Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. Photograph by Barrera. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borras (Badalona).
Figure 8. Margarita Xirgu as Medea and Enric Borràs as Jason, posing near the Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. Photography by Bocconi. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borras (Badalona).

Figure 9. Margarita Xirgu as Medea and Enric Borràs as Jason, near the Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. MNAR (Mérida) (MNAR N12-0623).
Figure 10. Design for Jason’s costume in Medea by Miguel Xirgu. 1933. AHBDN, Fons Enric Borras (Badalona).
Figure 11. Alberto Contreras as Creon. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. MNAR (Mérida) (MNAR 55-XIX-2).

Figure 12. Alberto Contreras as Creon. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. Fondo Privado José Caballero Rodríguez.
Figure 13. Enric Guitart as Second Chorus Leader. Roman Theatre in Mérida (backstage). 1933-1934. MAE (Barcelona). Fons Enric Guitart (E 348-26_04; E 348-26_02).

Figure 14. Enric Guitart as Second Chorus Leader (left standing), two unknown actors dressed as dragons (centre standing) and three unidentified actors in unidentified roles. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. MAE (Barcelona). Fons Enric Guitart (E 348-26_10).
Figure 15. Enric Guitart as Second Chorus Leader (second left) and group of actors as soldiers. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. MAE (Barcelona). Fons Enric Guitart (E 348-26_06).

Figure 16. Audience awaiting the performance of Seneca’s Medea. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Fondo Privado José Caballero Rodríguez.
Figure 17. Performance of Seneca’s *Medea*. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Photograph by Bocconi. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borràs (Badalona).

Figure 18. Performance of Seneca’s *Medea*. Chorus (centre) and Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid (left of the stage). Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. Photograph by Bocconi. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borrás (Badalona). Also in MAE (Barcelona), Fons Enric Guitart (E 348-26_08).
Figure 19. The chorus of Seneca’s Medea performing. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.


Figure 22. Performance of Seneca’s Medea. Contreras as Creon (left) and Xirgu as Medea (right). Roman Theatre in Mérida. 18th of June 1933. *Mundo Gráfico* (21-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 23. Final scene of Seneca’s Medea. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Sparta (24-06-1933). Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid (Madrid).

Figure 24. After the performance. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933. From left to right: Macías, Rivas Cherif, Mélida, Xirgu as Medea, Unamuno, Sánchez Ariño as Nurse, Borràs as Jason, Contreras as Creon, López Lagar as Messenger and two girls as Medea's children. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borras (Badalona). Also in Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera and MNAR (MNAR N12-0860).
Figure 25. Dress rehearsal at the Roman Theatre. Mérida. Xirgu-Borràs Company. 1933-1934. Fondo Privado José Caballero Rodríguez.

Figure 26. Left: Margarita Xirgu as Medea in a studio photograph. 1933-1934. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 142-02). Right: Second class ticket for Seneca’s Medea on the 18th of June 1933 at the Roman Theatre in Mérida. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.
Figure 27. Dancers. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.

Figure 29. Dancers. Roman Theatre. Mérida. 1933-1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.

Figure 31. *Left:* Miguel de Unamuno speaking with a group of men at the Roman Theatre in Mérida (centre) and head of Cipriano Rivas Cherif (right). *Right:* Authorities at the Roman Theatre in Mérida. 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933. In order: Hermógenes Cenamor (Governor of Badajoz), Rafaele Guariglia (Italian Ambassador), De los Ríos (Ministro de Estado), Azaña (Prime Minister), F. Barnés (Ministro de Instrucción Pública) and Andrés Nieto (Mayor of Mérida). *Crónica* (25-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 32. Authorities at the Roman Theatre. Mérida. 18\textsuperscript{th} of June 1933. From left to right: Fernando de los Ríos (Ministro de Estado), Manuel Azaña (Prime Minister), Francisco Barnés (Ministro de Instrucción Pública) and Andrés Nieto (Mayor of Mérida). MAE (Barcelona) (MAE B 706-34).
Figure 33. Banquet after the performance. Parador Nacional de Turismo, Mérida. 18th of June 1933. Seated from left to right: De los Ríos, Dolores Rivas Cherif (Azaña's wife), Mr. Guariglia, Xirgu, Azaña, Gloria Giner de los Ríos (Fernando de los Ríos' wife), Andres Nieto (Mayor of Mérida), Teodomiro Menéndez's wife, F. Barnés, Andres Nieto's wife and Governor Cenamor. Photograph by Bocconi. *Crónica* (02-07-1933). BNE (Madrid). Also Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.

Figure 34. Cipriano Rivas Cherif, Enric Borràs and Margarita Xirgu (centre) surrounded by students from the Madrid Architecture School. *Crónica* (02-07-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 35. Roman statue of Ceres (left). Roman statue of Proserpina, allegedly (right). Mérida Museum. 1944. Photographs by Barrera Abascal. MNAR (Mérida) (MNAR MFCE00639; MNAR CE00642).

Figure 36. Left: Roman statue of Pluto (allegedly). Mérida Museum. 1944. Photograph by Barrera Abascal. MNAR (Mérida). (MNAR CE00641). Right: Maximiliano Macías (left) and José Ramón Méliá (right), the archaeologists responsible for Mérida. Roman Theatre. Mérida. c.1925. Photograph by Bocconi. MNAR (Mérida) (MNAR MF55-III-23_R).
Figure 37. Left: Laurel branch from Rome to Mérida. The ribbon reads SPQR. Photograph by Bocconi. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera. Right: Official letter signed by the Mayor of Mérida by which Borràs is declared adoptive son of Mérida. AHBDN, Fons Enric Borràs (Badalona).

Figure 38. Tourist map to Mérida. El Heraldo de Madrid (02-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 39. An actor dressed as Borràs speaks with a rural woman. The text reads: "THE WOMAN— And to do a comedy you have all come here?/ THE ACTOR— It isn't a comedy; it's the tragedy "Medea". / THE WOMAN— Ours is a tragedy, and despite not charging any money, nobody in power comes to see it". Gracia y Justicia (24-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 40. The word-game in the text reads: "—Medea? Medea? And who gives me-the food I need". Gracia y Justicia (09-09-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 41. Cartoon depicting Alejandro Lerroux as Jason (left) and Manuel Azaña as Medea (right). The text reads: "ALEJANDRO JASON—Don’t behave like this, Medea. Our children are already quite worn-out; but we know you and we do not ignore that, at our first mistake, you will throw cold water in our faces, or Prieto will refresh us with some champagne". *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 42. Left: The text reads: "—The Monarchy did not know Seneca's oeuvre. / —What for? It already had 'Las Corsarias'!". El Sol (21-06-1933). Right: The word-game in the text reads: "— I believe that "Medea" is something insurmountable. / —Well, you have no idea about "Medea"!... And you, young man, what do you say? / —I do not want to medeate in this.". Gutiérrez (24-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 43. Left: A man speaking to two builders. The text reads: "—Hey! Are you performing "Medea"?". La Libertad (20-06-1933). Right: Two Romans speak. The text reads: "—I believe it is not a real tragedy/ —Well, it has cost the government fifty thousand pesetas. / —Ah! Then it is." ABC (22-06-1933). ARCHIVO ABC.
Figure 44. Vignettes of different members of the government up to different classically-related acts of mischief. *Gracia y Justicia* (24-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 45. Drawings by José Machado of Seneca (left) and Margarita Xirgu (right). *La Libertad* (03-09-1933). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 46. Sketch of Burmann's stage design for the performance of Seneca's *Medea* at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). MAE (Barcelona) (MAE P 47).
Figure 47. Cartoon showing Borràs as Jason and Xirgu as Medea at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). *El Heraldo de Madrid* (02-09-33). BNE (Madrid).

Figure 48. Margarita Xirgu and Enric Borràs posing as Medea and Jason at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). September 1933. *Mundo Gráfico* (06-09-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 49. Performance of Seneca’s *Medea* at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). September 1933. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028968).

Figure 50. Performance of Seneca’s *Medea* at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). September 1933. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028970).
Figure 51. Performance of Seneca's *Medea* at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). September 1933. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028969).

Figure 52. Authorities at the performance of Seneca's *Medea* at the Palacio Nacional (Madrid). First row from left to right: Indalecio Prieto (Minister of Public Works), Francisco Largo Caballero (Labour Minister), Santiago Casares Quiroga (Ministro de la Gobernación), Niceto Alcalá Zamora (President of the Republic) and Purificación Castillo (Alcalá Zamora’s wife). AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028965)
Figure 53. *Left:* Enric Borràs as Jason, Margarita Xirgu as Medea and Rivas Cherif at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. Photograph by Branguli i Soler. *Right:* Xirgu as Medea at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE FG19; F 276-17).

Figure 54. Escape scene from the performance of Seneca’s *Medea* at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. Photograph by Branguli i Soler. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-22). Also MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-23).
Figure 55. Two scenes from the performance of Seneca's *Medea* at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. Photographs by Brangulí i Soler. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-22).

Figure 56. Final scene of Seneca's *Medea* at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-17).

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Figure 58. Margarita Xirgu as Medea (left) and Alberto Contreras as Creon (right) at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). Photograph by Brangulí i Soler. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-22). Also MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 276-23).

Figure 59. Photograph of the audience of Seneca's Medea at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). September 1933. Photograph by Torrente. Mundo Gráfico (20-09-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 60. Programme of Seneca’s Medea, performed at the Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona) on the 14th of September 1933. Text by Rodríguez Codolá. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE B 444-05).
Figure 61. Publicity programme of the 1933-1934 season at the Teatro Español, Madrid. October 1933. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE B 444-05).
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Figure 63. Programme for the Roman Week in Mérida, September 1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.

Figure 64. Souvenir of the Roman Week in Mérida. September 1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.
Figure 65. Josefina Cireza dancing around the altar to Dionysus. Roman Theatre. Mérida. September 1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.

Figure 66. Authorities watching Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* at the Roman Theatre in Mérida. 8th of September 1934. From left to right, first row: Diego Hidalgo (War Minister), Niceto Alcalá Zamora (President of the Republic), Filiberto Villalobos (Ministro de Instrucción Pública) and Asensio Masegosa (Mayor of Mérida). Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.
Figure 67. Margarita Xirgu posing as Elektra in the Roman Theatre. Mérida. September 1934. Fondo Privado José Luis de la Barrera.
Figure 68. Performance of Hofmannsthal’s Elektra. Roman Theatre. Mérida. September 1934. Photograph by Bocconi. MNAR (Mérida) (MNAR 55-XIX-5).

Figure 69. Performance of Seneca’s Medea at the Plaza de Anaya (Salamanca). 11th of September 1934. Photograph by Almaraz. Ahora (14-09-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 70. Publicity programme for the performance of Seneca’s Medea in the bullring of Bogotá, Colombia. December 1936. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE B 444-05).

Figure 71. Margarita Xirgu as Elektra in Hofmannsthal’s Elektra. Chapultepec Forest (Mexico). 1914. Museu de Badalona, AI. (Badalona).
Figure 72. Margarita Xirgu in Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. Retiro Park (Madrid). 18th of June 1931. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028900).

Figure 73. Performance of Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. Retiro Park (Madrid). 18th of June 1931. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028902).
Figure 74. Margarita Xirgu in Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. Retiro Park (Madrid). 18th of June 1931. AGA. Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (028900).

Figure 75. Margarita Xirgu in Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. Teatre Grec, Montjuïc (Barcelona). 21st of August 1932. Photograph by Brangulí i Soler. Institut del Teatre (MAE, Barcelona) (MAE F 142-02).
Figure 76. Xirgu-Borràs Company. 1933-1934. Photograph by Santos Yubero. Museu de Badalona, AI, Fons Enric Borràs (Badalona).

Figure 77. Fernando de los Ríos, Margarita Xirgu and Enric Borràs after the performance of Clavigo. 22nd of March 1932. Photograph by Contreras y Villaseca. MAE (Barcelona) (MAE F 142-02).
Figure 78. Homage to Clara Campoamor. 14th of November 1931. Fernando de los Ríos (centre) surrounded by members of the ANME, including Benita Asas (to his right) and Clara Campoamor (to his left). AGA, Estudio Fotográfico Alfonso (033572).

Figure 79. Hildegart Rodríguez on the cover of Crónica (18-06-1933). BNE (Madrid).
Figure 80. Nuria Espert (left) and Blanca Portillo (right) pose as Margarita Xirgu playing Medea. Photograph by Cristobal Manuel. El País (14-06-2008). Copyright: CRISTOBAL MANUEL / EDICIONES EL PAÍS E.L. 2008.