

Oliver Baldwin

SENECA'S MEDEA

AND REPUBLICAN SPAIN

Performing the Nation



Colección Tamesis
SERIE A: MONOGRAFÍAS, 397

SENECA'S *MEDEA* AND
REPUBLICAN SPAIN

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MONOGRAFÍAS

ISSN: 0587–9914 (print)

ISSN 2633–7061 (online)

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REPUBLICAN SPAIN
PERFORMING THE NATION

Oliver Baldwin



MONOGRAFÍAS

TAMESIS

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First published 2022
Tamesis, Woodbridge

ISBN 978 1 85566 356 5 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 80010 465 5 (ePDF)

Tamesis is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620–2731, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

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Cover image: Margarita Xirgu as Medea and Enric Borràs as Jason. Mérida. 1933.
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Cover design: riverdesignbooks.com

Matribus meis

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study owes its content to the teams at the many libraries and archives I have visited. Given their collaborative zeal, I must mention Jesús Cimarro, director of the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida, José María Álvarez, former director of MNAR, Dolores Nieto, archivist at the Museu de Badalona, Ana Moreno of the Real Sociedad Económica Extremeña de Amigos del País, Nuria Andreu and Begoña Álvarez, archivists at the Museu de les Arts Escèniques, and the team at the Ateneo de Madrid, my refuge for long periods of work. Aside from institutional archives and libraries, the following lines feed from the assistance of José Luis de la Barrera and José Caballero, exceptional cicerones to Mérida and generous sources of evidential material. I must also thank the teams at the Archivo General de la Administración, the Biblioteca Nacional de España, the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, the Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid, and the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano in Mérida for their help in securing the images that illustrate this book, alongside those already mentioned.

During the discovery and investigation of this study I have been fortunate to enjoy the academic and personal help, encouragement and guidance of Emilio Crespo Güemes, Carmen Morenilla Talens, Francisco García Jurado, Andrés Pociña, Laura Monrós Gaspar, Manuel Aznar, Francesc Foguet i Boreu, Juan Aguilera Sastre, Jean-François Cottier, Daniel Orrells, Irine Darchia, Juan Felipe González Calderón, and Marina Solís de Ovando. This journey owes its origins to my teachers in the IES Emperatriz María de Austria, most especially Marisa Fuentes and Carmen Lacruz, and to my *didaskaloi* at Royal Holloway, most prominently Nick Lowe, Lene Rubinstein, and Richard Hawley, whom I thank for having been a champion of my choice to work in Classical Reception. I also could not forget the influence exercised by Maria Wyke and Miriam Leonard on how I approach, view and enjoy my subject.

The present shape, rigour and good fortune of this book is indebted to María Delgado and Gonda Van Steen, who have generously championed its cause. I must also highlight the support and good work of Megan Milan and the team at Tamesis Books in bringing these pages to existence. I will be forever grateful to the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland for supporting the publication of this book and the first steps of my career.

I will always be thankful for the love, laughter and companionship of my friends and family in Moixent, Madrid and the United Kingdom. I am especially grateful to the team at Pastiche magazine, who were an intellectual and friendly harbour during very special times. I owe special gratitude to Jeffrey, for his unflinching generosity and understanding. I have been very fortunate to have enjoyed the kindness, encouragement and consideration of Tita Manuela and Ismael, Auntie Jane, Evelyne, Sara Luesma, Óscar Vaquerizo, David, Sandra and Diego, Juliana, María Molina, the González Hernández family and my friends at Rafael Calvo 13, who have provided care and comfort throughout the years. I also thank my father for being a stimulating, thoughtful and supportive ally throughout.

Despite the ominous shadow of Medea, a son must honour his mothers. The patience, advice, perseverance, example and understanding showed to me by Edith Hall could never be erased. I could not conceive who I am without the welcoming arms of La Mama, always a hearth and a compass. And, finally, I will be eternally indebted to the inspirational and fundamental presence, resilience and guidance of my mother, Sarah.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGA	Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares, Spain).
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid, Spain).
AHCB	Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain).
BNE	Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid, Spain).
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris, France).
CMU	Casa-Museo Unamuno (Salamanca, Spain).
CDMH	Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (Salamanca, Spain).
CSIC	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Madrid, Spain).
DSCCRE	Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes de la República Española.
MNAR	Museo Nacional de Arte Romano (Mérida, Spain).
MAE	Museu de les Arts Escèniques (Barcelona, Spain).
PMP	Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas.

Introduction: A Spanish *Medea* in Republican Spain

Seneca's *Medea* and the Second Spanish Republic

On 18 June 1933 Seneca's tragedy *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, produced by Spain's leading theatre company, the Xirgu-Borràs Company, and backed by the government of the Second Spanish Republic, became one of the most important theatre performances in Spanish history.

The town of Mérida, once the Roman 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 (Minister of Education and Culture) 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, with the governmental committee being cheered as they arrived at the Roman Theatre, while the republican national anthem, the 'Himno de Riego', was being played.

The Xirgu-Borràs Company produced and performed Seneca's *Medea* in Mérida. 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. The Orquesta Filarmónica de Madrid, led by the maestro Bartolomé Pérez Casas, provided a suitable musical pathos with Gluckian illustrations (see pp. 42, 243–47). 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 as the tragic curtain

fell. The performance was a success and received much praise from all present. After all, a tragedy of the potency of *Medea*, authored by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 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, a renewed theatrical stage after centuries of silence. It was an evening to remember, an historical event in Spanish theatre history and an exultation of republican culture:

The performance, a 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 49 and 50).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. The sorcery of Seneca’s *Medea* cast a long spell over the Roman Theatre in Mérida and Spanish theatre in 1933, a spell whose effect still lingers.

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

¹ ‘La representación—verdadero estreno—de la “Medea”, de Séneca, en el teatro romano de Mérida fue una famosa gesta artística, digna del mayor encomio para sus iniciadores y organizadores, especialmente para Cipriano Rivas Cherif, animador supremo y máximo responsable de la dirección del teatro Español. Una feliz complejidad de aciertos comportaba la magnífica empresa, a la que contribuyeron acordes y generosos la Poesía, la Historia y la misma Naturaleza en beneficio del soberbio espectáculo’ (*La Libertad*, 2 September 1933). All translations in this book are my own unless otherwise stated.

² Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s play adapted from Sophocles, in which Xirgu had starred in 1912 at the Spanish première in Barcelona and several times thereafter. The 1934 translation was by Eduardo Marquina.

on the monarchy of Alfonso XIII, who had eight years earlier supported a dictatorship, that of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, lasting seven years (1923–30). This had cost many their personal freedom, their jobs and even exile. The Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed on 14 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.³ As a response, liberal intellectuals created cultural and educational institutions that became a beacon of progress in Spain, most importantly the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE), founded in 1876.⁴ The tension grew stronger twenty years later, in the midst of the Cuban War of Independence (1895–98) which ended with the loss of Spain's overseas empire, the so-called Disaster of 1898. 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. 73–81), the leading theorist on the 'Problem of Spain'.

The Problem of Spain was solved, at least for many, by the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship. But soon, any illusions of prosperity and direction were shattered. 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 14 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, had 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

³ Krausism, named after philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), advocated independence of thought and resistance to religious dogma, and had been of great importance in Restoration Spain. See Molero Pintado (1977: 24–25), Tuñón de Lara (1993: 3–7) and Holguin (2003: 25–26).

⁴ On the educational, political and cultural ideals and methods of the ILE and the responses and impact it provoked see Boyd (1997).

socialist educational and cultural advancements and efforts. Many in the government were themselves their beneficiaries or sympathisers. Education, culture and social concern thus became the motor of many of the intentions of the Republic.

'A symbol of the preference of institutionist intellectuals (ILE) for prestigious acts dedicated to the established culture was the staging of Seneca's *Medea*', Christopher Cobb wrote in 1981.⁵ Seneca's *Medea* undoubtedly emerged from 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 groups, customarily considered as generations, would excel in it: the Generation of '98, into which Ángel Ganivet and Unamuno are often classified, the Generation of '14, which counted Manuel Azaña, José 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.⁶ All three groups culturally, politically and governmentally inspired the arrival and development of the Republic, with some its members undertaking major governmental duties after its proclamation.

Theatre played a major role in the Silver Age of Spanish culture. The theatrical crisis was deep in the early twentieth century, according to many critics and analysts, including Unamuno, Lorca and Rivas Cherif. The vices of naturalism and nineteenth-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 system. Even though these forms of entertainment continued and even flourished during the new regime, theatre artists, critics and analysts, and their governmental supporters, were engaged in promoting poetic theatre, tragedy, Spanish Golden Age drama and an engaging and avant-garde *mise-en-scène* as the theatre of a new, republican, system.

⁵ Cobb (1981: 78). Morán Sánchez agrees that the production of Seneca's *Medea* was part of the legacy of the ILE; see Morán Sánchez (2018: 189).

⁶ I understand, and agree with, the problems raised by using the term *generation* to refer to disparate personalities with diverse agendas, outlooks and styles. I have here used it as a customary shorthand term that does express the broad commonalities within each generation and the major differences between each, although it does not account for the terminological and classificatory difficulties entailed in its use.

The Xirgu-Borràs Company led 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. 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 allusions to 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, was to be found in the Teatro Español.

Federico García Lorca's development as one of Spain's most renowned playwrights was encouragingly promoted by both Rivas Cherif and Margarita Xirgu, the director and leading actress of Seneca's *Medea*, respectively. Xirgu had nourished Lorca's theatrical talents ever since she played his *Mariana Pineda* in 1927. Rivas Cherif almost directed Lorca's *Amor de don Perlimplín* in 1929, but his theatre was forcibly closed owing 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 did, 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*).⁷ 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 for 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

⁷ On Lorca and Greek tragedy see González del Valle (1971), Feal (1986), Rodríguez Adrados (1989), Boscán de Lombardi (1995), Rosslyn (2000), Carmona Vázquez (2003), Romero Mariscal and Sánchez Montes (2006), Domenech (2008), and Baldwin (forthcoming-a).

Guerrero Theatre in Madrid, whose governmental delegate, its director, would be none other than Rivas Cherif, the director of Seneca's *Medea* and artistic director of the Teatro Español. Additionally, the Republic funded the staging of Seneca's *Medea* with part of a budget established for the 'renovation of the national theatre'.⁸ It is no coincidence that this was a tragedy, written by an ancient Hispanic philosopher, translated by a leading intellectual of the Republic and staged by the leaders of theatrical reform, making the performance of Seneca's *Medea* 'a significant date in the history of Spanish theatre'.⁹ Seneca's *Medea* was a new Spanish theatre for a new Spanish regime.

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 (1923–30), sponsored by King Alfonso XIII. During 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 had partially followed the authoritarian path of Italy – by different means but with much collegiality.¹⁰ Therefore, by April 1931, 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.

Spain became a democratic liberal republic in April 1931. It allied itself quite clearly with the Third French Republic and had an important voice at the League of Nations. Its period of republican consolidation (1931–33) 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, Raffaele 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. 150–52). 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

⁸ *Gaceta de Madrid* (22 May 1933).

⁹ Byrd (1975: 63).

¹⁰ See Saz (1986: 19–27), Payne (1998, 1999: 20–44) and Domínguez Menéndez (2013).

Civil War. The authoritarian result of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 ended any trace of Spain's apparent exceptionalism. As Casanova has pointed out, by the end of 1940, only six out of twenty-eight European States remained democracies.¹¹ Although Spain had chosen a path contrary to authoritarianism in 1931, history proved that it was in no way immune to it.

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.¹² In parallel, it had also inherited a 32% illiteracy rate from the Dictatorship.¹³ The Republic faced a population of 80% of unschooled children in certain areas, according to the first *Ministro de Instrucción Pública*.¹⁴ The Republic soon endeavoured 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 2,036.¹⁵ The Second Republic established 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 strove to promote a national identity based on liberal and participatory democracy, republican citizenship, progress, science, culture, and secularism. It sought to make the subjects of the Bourbon dynasty become rightful citizens of the Republic. State force would be replaced by civil intelligence. Poverty and backwardness was to be superseded by State responsibility. Ethno-nationalism should be supplanted by cultural and republican nationalism. Class distinction was 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 needed to become a Republic of letters, a Republic of free citizenship, a Republic of progress, and a Republic of civic rights.

One of the means of spreading this counter-hegemonic discourse was to create State-sponsored endeavours of cultural dissemination. To this end, libraries were established in towns and villages, while a cultural organisation – the *Misiones Pedagógicas* – was created, bringing art, music, theatre and civic education to remote areas of Spain. Meanwhile the itinerant theatre company, *La*

¹¹ Casanova (2010: 4).

¹² Sancho Flórez (1997: 22).

¹³ Domingo (1932: 8); Vilanova Ribas and Moreno Julia (1992: 141, 166); Álvarez Junco (1995: 82); Holguin (2003: 62, 174).

¹⁴ Domingo (1934: 158).

¹⁵ Liébana Collado (2009: 17). See also De Gabriel (1997: 220).

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 theatre group of the Misiones Pedagógicas, and La Barraca.¹⁶ 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, headed, in person, by the Prime Minister of the Republic 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.¹⁷ 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. Instead, it helped in alienating large landowners who began increasingly to plot against the Republic. The military needed to be purged of its reactionary elements. A new promotion system was projected 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 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 nation.

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

¹⁶ *Gaceta de Madrid* (22 May 1933).

¹⁷ These terms have been capitalised throughout as marking the republican government's specific agendas in these areas, thus distinguishing them from their general meaning.

Spain away from progress, science, liberty and democracy. The Republic saw it necessary to break from the Church in order to secure civic liberty, 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 the regime by what they saw as an anti-Christian persecutory Republic.

Many reformist and progressive republicans were abruptly awakened from their utopian and ambitious objectives when the centre-right and the 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 party 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 also 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, son of the dictator, although as a member 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 (Popular Front), 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 book is to do justice to this echo and restore the production as fully 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 following pages bring voice and colour back to the performance on 18 June 1933 in Mérida of Seneca's *Medea*; and with it, to a Spain that could have been, but never was.

Sources, methodology and challenges

Given the vast array of themes, sources and methodology this book contends with, it is important here to lay out in brief the focus, limitations and exclusions this research has entailed. The completion of this book has had to face three main challenges. First, the issues related to sources. Second, the overarching methodology of this research, alongside the perspectives and challenges entailed. Third, the themes considered and discarded and their chronology.

The primary sources for this research 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 from the Second Spanish Republic. Documentary evidence, ranging from official documents to letters, diaries or notebooks, suffered much destruction or misplacement during and after the war. This is particularly frustrating. For example, it is well documented in newspapers of 1933 that the performance of Seneca's *Medea* in Mérida was filmed (see pp. 48–49). Such a film is nowhere to be found, despite my own insistent efforts. 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 his own creative process.¹⁸ This has also been lost. In addition, 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 must be checked, contextualised or simply laid out for the reader to interpret.

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 remarkable, 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 have

¹⁸ Rivas Cherif (1991: 252–54), Gentilli (1993: 91–92) and Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 58).

made this possible. New documents emerge every day and are identified by scholars and archivists. My own research has unearthed many unpublished photographs and documents and identified many more (see e.g. Figures 11–13, 18, 22–24, 33–36, 37–38, 41 and 51). To this, one must add the scattered nature of documentary evidence in several – geographically disperse – archives, which makes its gathering both time-consuming and expensive. Although some excellent theatre archives exist in Spain, primarily that of the Centro de Documentación Teatral (Madrid), the Centre de Documentació i Museu de les Arts Escèniques (Institut del Teatre, Barcelona) and the Centro de Investigación y Recursos de las Artes Escénicas de Andalucía (Seville), more work needs to be done in this regard and the creation of a centralised archive of performances of Greek and Roman Drama, in the style of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (Oxford), alongside the development of an accessible archive of the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico de Mérida, would be two very welcomed developments. Finally, the lack of re-editions makes the accessing of bibliographic evidence at times excruciating. Some editions of letters or diaries or re-editions of out-of-print literature have been of vast use for many scholars,¹⁹ but more needs to be done in this regard.

The secondary literature on Seneca's *Medea* poses further problems, the most important being the non-existence of a thorough analysis of what occurred on 18 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 study. The reason these are incomplete or vague at times is that their intention was other than to analyse the performance and its surrounding themes.²⁰ They are either special editions of the text or commemorative exhibition catalogues with contextual prologues or epilogues,²¹ articles or chapters analysing the broader phenomenon of the performance and reception of ancient drama in Spain,²² books on the history of the Festival Internacional de Teatro Clásico in Mérida or on the Roman Theatre,²³ or articles on specific aspects of the production, such as Unamuno's unperformed choral verses for *Medea*.²⁴ Other secondary sources touch on the production of Seneca's *Medea*, but only briefly, for their larger interest is

¹⁹ See e.g. Martínez Sierra (1989), Azaña and Rivas Cherif (1991), Rivas Cherif (1991, 2013) Ramón y Cajal (1999), Nelken (2012) and Xirgu (2018).

²⁰ The exception to this is Pociña (2002b: 887–96), whose spatial limitations make it somewhat broad and introductory.

²¹ Domínguez (2008a, 2008c).

²² Morenilla Talens (2006); González-Vázquez (2015).

²³ Monleón (1985; 1988; 1989; 2009); Sánchez Matas (1991); Caballero Rodríguez (2008); Caballero Rodríguez and Álvarez Martínez (2011); Morán Sánchez (2018).

²⁴ Robles Carcedo (1998).

in broader subjects, such as the careers of Margarita Xirgu, Unamuno, Rivas Cherif, or Lorca or the cultural endeavours of the Republic.²⁵

This study contends with these issues 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, of great assistance in assessing the veracity and chronology of sources, but also in constructing a clear picture of the crucial context of the production here explored, without which it could not be understood.

The ever-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 questions to broader and varied subjects 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 study responds to 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 twentieth century. It is of course limited in its scope and reach to the

²⁵ See Guansé (1963: 66–72), Poblet (1963: 62), Valbuena Briones (1966), Rodrigo (1974; 2005), Byrd (1975: 62–63), Cobb (1981: 78), Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000: 184–85), Delgado (2003: 47, 66), Gil Fombellida (2003: 262–73), Foguet i Boreu and Graña (2007: 135–38), Foguet i Boreu (2010), López Díaz (2011: 253–62).

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 book also, with due humility, supplements the study of the Second Spanish Republic and early twentieth-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 1936.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ These enquiries will aid scholars and students in appreciating and understanding the accumulation of interpretations of antiquity which

²⁶ For Seneca as the embodiment of the Spanish essence see Chapter II in this book and Baldwin (2020). For Spanish nationalism see the inestimable work of Álvarez Junco (2011). A comprehensive analysis of Greco-Roman antiquity in Spanish nationalism is still lacking. Some work has been done on the Franco regime in Duplá (1993), Wulff and Álvarez Martí-Aguilar (2003) and Baldwin (forthcoming-b).

²⁷ For the reception of Seneca in Spain see seminal works by Blüher (1983) and Fothergill-Payne (1988) and the thesis by Del Río Sanz (1992). A comprehensive study on the reception of Seneca in Spain after the seventeenth century is still lacking.

²⁸ See the seminal works by Cobb (1981), Huertas Vázquez (1988), García Delgado (1993) and Holguin (2003).

²⁹ On State-Church relations during the Second Spanish Republic see e.g. Sánchez (1964), Payne (1984), Callahan (2000) and Trybus (2014). On the Women’s Movement in Spain see e.g. Fagoaga (1985), Nash (1995), Domingo (2004), Lannon (2011) and Caballé (2013).

³⁰ On Spanish Theatre during the 1930s see e.g. García Templado (1990), Dougherty and Vilches de Frutos (1992), Gentilli (1993), Aznar Soler (1997), Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler (2000), Gil Fombellida (2003) and Ruiz Ramón (2011).

ultimately constitute perceptions of Greece and Rome in Spain to this day;³¹ and, in comparing these interpretations with other societies, they may clarify the perceptions of these societies too.

The veracity or implausibility of the claims developed by the interpretations of the topics mentioned, which are those of this study, also contribute to the study 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.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ It is indubitable that these questions have been asked for decades, if not centuries, before these lines were written. My intention here is not to directly question, amend or stimulate new perspectives on such questions, but rather 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 is invariably a conundrum of this line of work. Different methodologies

³¹ Classical Reception in Spain is still largely underdeveloped in comparison to the UK, the US, Germany, and France. The Spanish custom so far has been to focus on matters of – mostly literary – tradition instead; 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 e.g. Pujante Álvarez-Castellanos and Gregor (1996), López 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.

³² See e.g. Johnston (2017).

³³ 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 theatre outside Athens edited by Boshier (2012).

³⁴ See e.g. McAuley (2012), Walsh (2012) and Winter (2018).