The playwrights Euripides and Federico Garcia Lorca both revolve their work around similar themes, though the two pieces were published centuries apart. The play Medea, written by Euripides, focuses on a woman named Medea who believes she has been wronged by her husband Jason, and she will go far lengths to amend his wrong-doing. Lorca’s play, The House of Bernarda Alba, revolves around a household of women controlled and dominated by Bernarda. Bernarda, a mother of five daughters, remains true to her values and punishes anyone who threatens them. These two women refuse to negotiate their desires for others; both must have it their way or no way at all. Bernarda and Medea use manipulative and coercive forms of power to successfully control others. These women do so by using techniques such as emotional abuse, deception, and physical violence.

Bernarda is a power addict; she will not be satisfied unless she has full control of her household and her daughters. She uses coercive power to accomplish her goals to maintain her power and move up in society. In The House of Bernarda Alba, Bernarda has recently become a widow, but seems as though she maintained her dominant figure in her household. Bernarda’s uses coercion by scolding her daughters and the people in her life. This becomes evident in the beginning of the play “You slippery, sugary little humbug,” (Lorca, Pg. 127) she says. By verbally abusing her children, Bernarda appears strong and intimidating. She uses such threatening language to produce fear within others so she can maintain and grow her power. Also, she forcefully keeps her mother locked away and refuses to let her be defiant. She makes an example out of her mother to prove she will have no mercy towards her daughters either. Her daughters relentlessly follow all of her orders, even if they disagree. For example, in Act 2 Poncia says to Bernarda, “Martirio falls in love easily, no matter what you say. Why didn’t you
let her marry Enrique Humanes?" (Lorca, Pg. 152) Bernarda stopped a man from asking for her
daughter’s hand in marriage because “his father was a farmhand” (Lorca, Pg. 152). She
forcefully turned away her daughter’s opportunity to move out the house because she feeds off of
the power she has over her daughters, and Bernarda would never let a man jeopardize the power
she has gained over her family. Therefore, she uses coercion to manipulate the situation to her
favor, which is to keep her daughters home.

Medea, on the other hand, is not a power-hungry woman like Bernarda. Her use of
coercion derives from her loathing she has for her ex-husband, Jason. She has a record of
committing atrocities out of love for her former husband. She killed her own brother and
betrayed her father in order to help Jason procure the Golden Fleece. Because of all she did for
Jason, it’s not surprising that she wants her revenge. “I would rather stand three times in the
battle line than bear one child” (Medea, lines 251). She went through child birth twice for Jason,
after he dragged her away from her homeland for the sanctity of their marriage. Medea seeks
revenge for Jason’s actions by devising a plan to kill her own children. In her mind, this will to
cause Jason the same pain that he has caused her. She successfully murders her children and
Jason’s mistress, causing Jason the pain she had planned. She using physical violence with her
coercive power to achieve her desired revenge.

Medea’s use of manipulation and deception shows how she dominates the people around
her. It is first seen in her conversation with Creon, the king of Corinth, and in her second
interaction with Jason. Creon wants to banish Medea because he is fearful of the violence she
might bring against his family. Medea persuades Creon to let her stay one more day by
promising him that she will take no violence against his family. She manipulates him by saying,
“have no fear of me, Creon—to offend a royal family. After all, how have you wronged me?” (Medea, lines 308-309) Medea continues the manipulation and deception by telling Creon she needs one more day to “think out how I can best go into exile and find a haven for my children”. (Medea, lines 340-341) In reality, Medea needs that extra day to carry out her plan to kill Jason’s mistress and her two children. When Medea speaks to Jason for the second time on line 867-973, she apologizes to him for her past actions and admits that, instead of going against her husband, she should have supported him. She says to Jason, “I ought to be sharing in these plans and helping to bring them to them to fulfilment” (Medea, lines 886-888). Medea, once again, deceives and manipulates Jason into thinking that she wants to do no harm and only wants the best for her former husband. Jason fell for his ex-wife’s ruthless plan because she had mastered the art of manipulation and deception.

In the plays Medea and The House of Bernarda Alba, the two leading female characters, Medea and Bernarda, excessively use emotional and physical harm to assert their power over others. Bernarda’s weapon of choice, when it comes to keeping her daughters in line, is either her tongue or her walking stick. Bernarda uses her tongue to verbally abuse her daughters, which leaves them emotionally weak and dependent on her. She lowers their self-esteem by consistently making fun of their appearance. She even goes as far as calling Adela a “depraved creature” (Lorca, Pg. 150). Not only does she verbally abuse her daughters she also physically hits them with her walking cane. By using emotional and physical violence, Bernarda puts her daughters in a position where they are always seeking Bernarda’s approval. This allows Bernarda to hold all of power within in her household, while preventing her daughters from looking to remove her power at bay. After her several of her daughters spoke up in disagreement, Bernarda
says, “what a torrent of hatred you have unleashed on my heart…I’ve got five chains to bind you with besides this house my father built, so that not even the grass outside will hear of my humiliation” (Lorca, Pg. 150-151). If any of them dare to test her power, she will flip the table around and make herself the victim of abuse.

Medea, unlike Bernarda, uses more physical abuse and emotional abuse rather than verbal abuse to harness and exert her power over Jason. Medea’s violence comes out of strategic planning, not out of impulse. Medea has the opportunity to use violence against Jason and exact her revenge upon him, but Medea wants Jason’s pain to be emotional and something that he must live with for the rest of his life. After the murder takes place Medea says to Jason “You are still a novice in grief. Wait till you grow old”. (Medea, Line 1396) Jason will have to cope with the emotional abuse Medea has caused him even after she is no longer in his life. Medea is very patient compared to Bernarda but she is a lot my cynical in the sense that Medea is more willing to use physical violence as a projector of her power. Medea’s wanting of revenge fuels the physical and emotional power she has over Jason. She proves that that she willing to go to extreme lengths to harness and perpetuate that power over him.

Federico Garcia Lorca, and Euripides plays Medea, and The House of Bernarda Alba, both have characters that exert their power over the people around them through manipulation, deception, and physical and emotional abuse. Bernarda achieves her goals by using coercion to build fear and dependence within her family and uses manipulation to prevent an over throw of power. She also manipulates outsiders who are trying to disrupt her dominance. Medea’s art of deception and manipulation allow her to control the situation, and not let outside forces disrupt her plan of murdering Jason’s mistress, and her two children. Both of this women harness their
powers through physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. In doing so they both succeed in projecting their power, and controlling the people around them.
