

Medea

a forgotten fairytale



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Synopsis

The play begins with the Nurse giving context to Medea and her current situation. She was “an exile and a stranger” on arrival to Corinth because of past actions but she found peace in her new life with Jason regardless of their shared crimes. She was madly in love with Jason, who she trusted and was married to. “But now that love has turned to hatred” Jason betrayed Medea by cheating on her with the royal daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Jason broke the solemn oaths that came with their marriage, and she is completely broken, and the Nurse notices the hate in her and that she may be a threat to her sons and those close to her as if she seeks revenge.

She hates her children after this betrayal as they are an object of Jason who she now loathes. The nurse is in fear for what she will do and reassures Medea that their father's sin is not a fault that falls onto her innocent children. During these events, the Chorus is present and try their best to calm Medea and reassure her that all will be fine, but Medea has so much rage and hatred in her that their efforts work to no avail.

The news of Medea's current state and “venomous thoughts” have travelled to King Creon. Creon then confronts Medea then orders her to leave his land in exile with her sons. He is in deep fear in fear that she will cause harm to his daughter, The Princess of Corinth who Jason is intending to marry. Medea begs for him to change his mind and at first Creon doesn't seem as if he will change his mind, he emphasises his love for his family, country and daughter above all things and how his only intention is to keep those things safe. Medea continues to push Creon to reconsider her banishment and suggest to give her just one more day in Corinth, to plan and prepare for leaving the country behind with her children. Creon agrees but warns her that if she is still within the borders by dawn she will die. Medea tricked Creon into thinking she was using her last day for the reason she described when instead she will use the day she has left to devise a plan to take revenge on Creon, his daughter and her “faithless husband” Jason.

Jason confronts Medea and tells her that her acts are the only reason she has got to this point and that she deserves the punishment that Creon gave her. Medea then reminds all the sacrifices she has made for Jason throughout their life together. Jason completely disregards all Medea has done for him and in turn says that she “received more than she gave” and further implies that she would have nothing if it wasn't for Jason and calls her a barbarian. Jason then states that he is not marrying the Princess of Corinth because he has “grown tired”, or “lusted for a young bride” but due to him wanting his family to live in comfort nit poverty.

Aegeus, King of Athens, meets with Medea and she explains her situation and banishment. She implores that Aegeus doesn't watch her become banished “without home or friend” and asks that she lets her into his country, Athens.

Medea reveals to the chorus what her plan of vengeance is. She will send them to the Princess with gifts as a bribe for their fate to be changed and stay in Corinth, but they will be “messengers of death” as the gifts (a finely woven robe and a gold chaplet) will be riddled with poison, killing the princess if she wears them and anyone who touches her. Medea's final act of revenge of killing her children is then revealed. She feels as if she has no other choice with “no country; no home; no refuge”. A messenger arrives for Medea to discover her plan worked, the Princess and Creon are dead.

Medea returns home to murder her children and the chorus are upset as to why she is falling through with her disturbing plan and are no longer supporting her or her actions. The children plead for mercy, but she only has eyes for revenge and falls through with what she intended. Jason enters and the chorus reveal what Medea has done to their children and when he finds Medea, she is in a gold chariot run by dragons with the bodies of her children at her side, taunting Jason. Jason is extremely upset, calling her names and they both argue, blaming each other for the event that occurred. Medea leaves to travel to Athens and live without punishment.

Concept



For my concept I aim to explore a redesign of Medea in a dark fantasy, fairytale setting, with dreamlike and gothic visuals that go along with the dark narrative. I am inspired to put the story of Medea in this setting as it will put the common narrative, especially those of Grimm's Fairy tales, in a new light. The messages behind the Grimm's Fairy tales are often misogynistic, framing women as either the innocent, pure love interest or the evil villain. The female protagonists are often victimised by women and saved by a man, who is seen as the saviour within many stories. Medea's narrative is a complete opposite of this. Medea, as a character, is both the victim of betrayal and the person who is behind heinous acts because of this. She is neither the hero or villain and, in this case, the man(who would usually be framed as the 'prince charming') is the route of her downward spiral. By putting the story of Medea in this world of a darker fairytale, it will put a new perspective on what would usually be glamorised and romanticised.

In terms of the silhouette and time period of the redesign, it will resemble the late middle ages/early renaissance. I decided to explore this era as aspects of fashion in the time period is associated with a more fantasy world setting. Another motive for this is romanticism in correlation to the Brother's Grimm.

The brothers Grimm were influenced by the romanticism movement and an aspect commonly seen in romantics work is an idealised/ glorified past as an escape from an industrialized present world. Medieval and renaissance culture was part of this idealisation as it was believed it was more spiritual than modern day 19th century. I believe this is a similarity to Medea and Greek tragedies/mythology in general as it is also something that is seen as very mystical yet holds darker stories and themes. By focussing in on a more gloomy and gothic aesthetic, it put a new perspective on something which is often staged as a utopia.

Visually I am inspired by illustrations that go along with dark fairy tales and fantasy worlds, particularly the work of Arthur Rackham's illustrations for the 1917 edition of the Complete Grimm's fairy tales. I'm interested in the idea of how his work has a mystical and dreamlike atmosphere but the link to each piece may have a disturbing story to them making the visuals overall more eerie and gothic. To emulate a similar feeling within the costumes, I plan to focus on different fabric weights and layering which would affect how the costume moves with the actor which could play a big role in a more surreal feeling to the costumes. Print and pattern will also play a big role in the gothic feeling I want to convey. Imagery used within motifs may symbolize certain traits or actions of a character to add more depth to their presence.



Research

The Brothers Grimm, Romanticism & Arthur Rackham

The Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, were best known for the publications and collection of German folk-tales, which in turn popularized classic fairy tales like 'The Frog Prince', 'Cinderella', 'Rapunzel' amongst many others. The Brothers Grimm were commissioned to collect traditional Germanic folk-tales from across the countryside which culminated to their collection of gothic, dark stories that were released throughout 1812- 1858. Initially when they first began publishing, the folk-tales were looked down upon and criticized as it was assumed they could be enjoyed by children but their dark themes and violence that entailed proved otherwise. The physical violence that was occurring within their stories was usually enforced on the antagonists, but the emotional trauma of characters inflicted on main characters by the antagonists was not left unnoticed. An examples of this in the Grimm version of snow white, the queen is punished for her crimes against the princess by being forced to wear red-hot iron shoes and to dance until she drops down dead which shockingly isn't the darkest of situations that occurs in the stories. There is a sense of irony to the dark nature of Grimm's Fairy tales as the imagery and atmosphere that goes along with them, especially Arthur Rackham's work has a mythical and dreamlike feeling which completely juxtaposes the subject matter and adds an uneasiness to the visual aesthetic that goes along with them.

Romanticism

The Brothers Grimm were influenced by the romanticism movement which was popularized during the 19th century among writers, artists and musicians. It is a complex movement which prioritized on authentic emotional expression in art and literature, focusing on a human feeling and a deeper connection to nature to break away from modern changes in society. Another aspect of romanticism is a glorification of past time periods, particularly medieval culture. The sense of spirituality that was believed to be apparent in this era was romanticized and was inspiration for creative works as a form of escape from fast-paced urbanisation and industrialisation of the world at the time.

"Many of the Romanticists emphasized the individual's connection to nature and an idealized past"



Illustrations by Arthur Rackham from the 1917 special edition of Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales. I like how there is a disturbing feeling and strong sense of melancholy in his work yet it is still extremely detailed and beautiful to juxtapose the nature of the story the go alongside. I'm inspired to recreate this feeling within my designs and final illustrations.

Fashion of the Late Middle Ages & Renaissance

Fashion of the late middle ages had clear influences of Greek, Roman and Byzantine cultures within their silhouettes but bridged the gap between earlier renaissance fashion where gothic architecture was on the rise.

Long, drapery dresses were popular among women with elaborate sleeves to add more grandeur to their style. Linen and cotton and wool remained the basic materials, but the nobility began to value velvet, silk, taffeta and fur to greatly highlight status. An outfit often composed of a chemise worn under a 'cotte' which is a long-sleeved full-length dress which would often be worn with a belt or 'girded'. Examples of outer garments include the pelican and surcoat. Both fur-lined the pelican resembled a cloak slits for the wearers arms while a surcoat was more along the lines of a sleeveless dress that had armholes open to the waist to accentuate the figure. The 'bliaut' is a recognizable style of medieval dress with the classic long, flared sleeves, while the body of the dress was fitted from the bust to hips with a long voluminous skirt.



Men's clothes completely contrasted and was easily differentiated from women's compared to earlier centuries. Men often wore hose and a doublet which grew shorter over time. Sleeves varied and could be very fitted in some cases while there are many cases of massive flared sleeves, especially in outer garment. An example of outerwear for men (that was also adorned by women) was the 'houppelande' which was a full robe with long flared sleeve that were often floor length that was belted at the waist/hips. Both men and women wore a style of shoes called poulaines which had extreme elongated, pointed toes which would often be filled and padded to maintain the dramatic shape. Capes and cloaks were popular among both men and women and would be lined with fur in winter months.



Design Development



Medea

Medea is broken and betrayed, her husband Jason left her for Glauke, a young innocent princess. Medea is a character completely overrun by passion but in a negative sense which completely tears her apart. The only way Medea believes she can get back at the person who broke her heart is by killing those who are close to Jason to "kill him while he is still alive"

Medea isn't the typical fairytale protagonist; she is flawed yet relatable on an emotional level. Although she is framed as the villain due to the extent of how she acted on her feelings, she only got to that place because of Jason's actions. On top of this she has a bad reputation, being seen as a barbarian and is feared by those in power as she is someone that isn't afraid to challenge them.

She will take on silhouettes of that are more commonly seen on noble women but the prints and patterns in her design will clearly visualise her stormy and bold nature. I also want to explore head-wear and rethink what would usually be seen as very high status into something that adds a strong overpowering nature to her presence, potentially covering parts of her face or taking on a large scale to achieve this.



"The female way is the best way, poison. the murderess' way and am not I the queen of it? Pretty poison my certain expertise"

Gloomy and mysterious,
creating a dark and rage-
filled demeanour in her colour
palette and silhouette.



Print development focusing on the motif
of ravens. I like how they symbolise
bad fortune and transformation which
can represent how Jason's actions have
changed her and foreshadow the events to
come.



Jason

Jason is someone in denial of the extent of the damage to Medea due to his actions. Although he claims he is marrying Glauke to help the family get into a more stable financial situation, is he just using a 'perfect', obedient princess to sneak his way into royalty and rid himself of his shared bad reputation with Medea? He also blames her reaction on her just being overemotional, not taking any responsibility for his actions. He is the villain posing as the hero.

Jason only got to where he is because of the help of Medea's sorcery to retrieve the Golden Fleece which ended up raising his status. But, regardless of this he is still insensitive towards what Medea is going through. He thinks he did her a favour giving her a home in Corinth, suggesting she came from nothing but it's the complete opposite. She was of high status in her homeland Colchis and Jason is the one who wasn't high on anyone's radar.

I imagine Jason as being an 'anti'-prince-charming. He poses himself as a great man doing a 'good deed' when in fact he has a very dark and insensitive personality which completely destroyed Medea. His ego is beyond that of any other character, and he believes he is royalty, and his actions shouldn't have consequences.



"Let's not exaggerate your role in my story, what you did for me Medea, you did it in the first flush of lust for me let's face it"



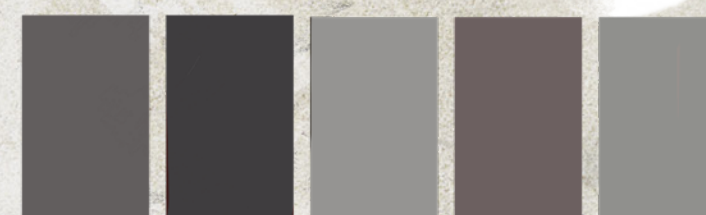
Print development with snake motifs. Reflecting his actions and overall character.

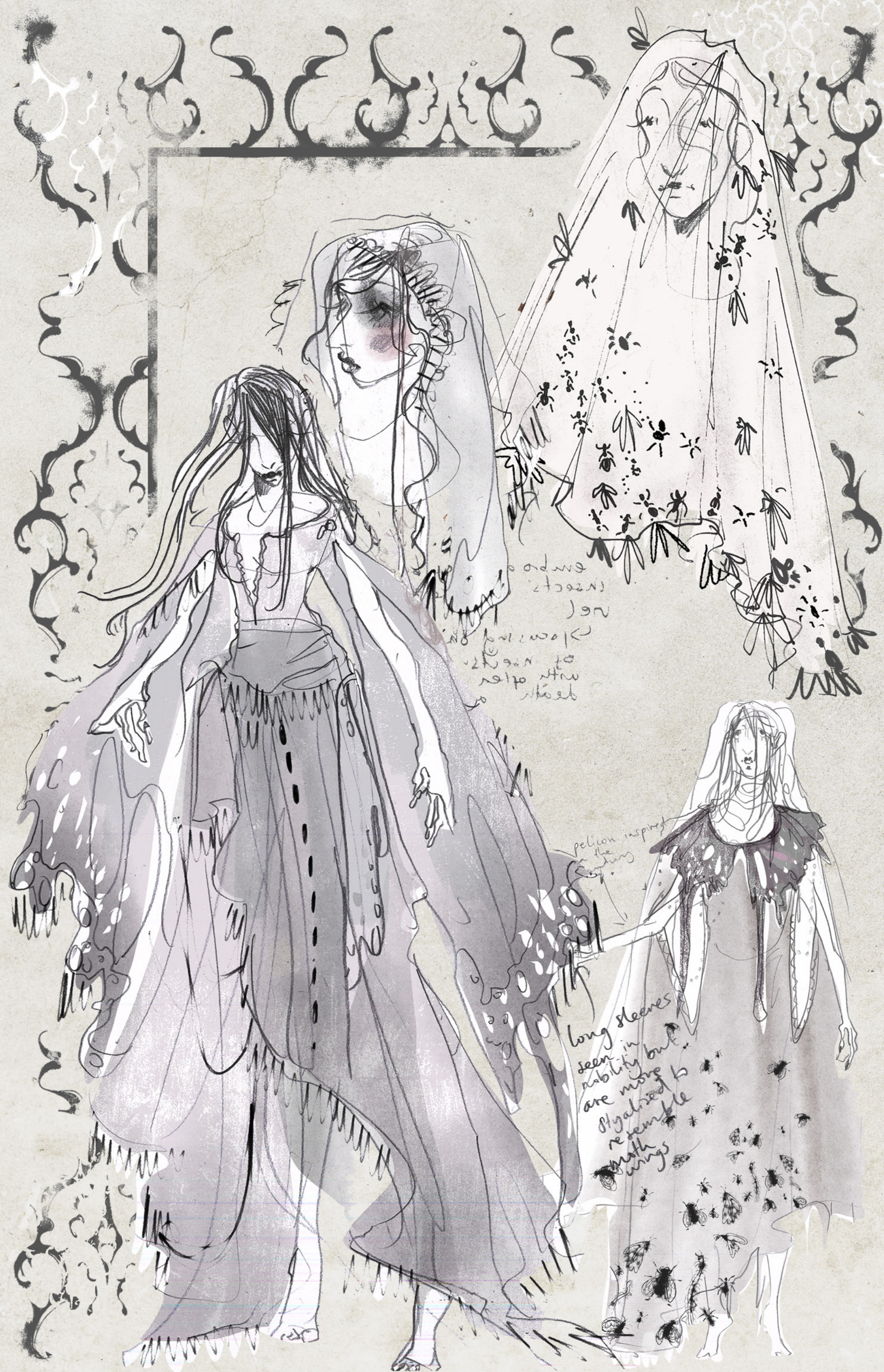
Chorus

I interpret the Chorus of Medea as the spirits of women of Corinth who have had their heart broken or betrayed. They are always surrounding Medea, taunting and supporting her passionate rage as they understand exactly how she is feeling. They are the personification of Medea's emotions, giving them strong feeling of melancholy as they encapsulate the emotions of sadness. Betrayal, death and passion. I'm inspired by the 'Wilis' in the ballet Giselle which are similar in which they are the ghosts of women who passed before their wedding day.

They have an eerie yet mythical aura to them which would be reflected in lightweight fabrics with lots of drapery which would distinguish them from the rest of the cast by the way they move and how their costumes move with them. The silhouettes of the chorus' costumes will only loosely resemble that of the time period of the other characters, which will again differentiate the living from the deceased.

"We promise you,
we are women
Medea, we know
men, we know
who's in the right,
punish him for us
Medea"





Bugs, moths and insects representing death within the chorus. Also creates a more uneasy, and creepy feeling to their character, contrasting the mystical silhouette of their clothes.



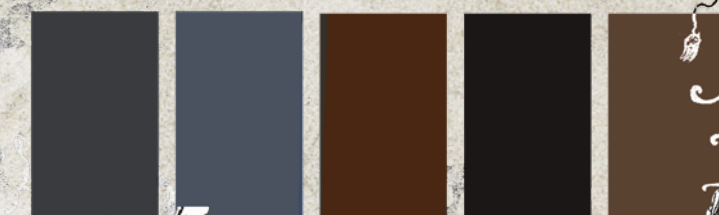
The chorus will feature more layering of sheer and floaty fabrics compared to the other characters that will help them come across clearer as spirits/ghosts.



Kreon

Kreon is an imposing, grand ruler of Corinth. Although he has a high status, he isn't a match for Medea, who he hears rumour of threats and rage from her. Although he correctly guesses that she may intend to cause harm on those close to him, he incorrectly uses his power to combat what is to come.

He will have an intimidating presence to reflect his power and status which could be achieved through larger amounts of fabric within his costumes, through capes and grand robes etc. I aim to take inspiration from imposing, gothic architecture both with prints for Kreon, as well as within silhouettes and details in his clothes. Compare to the rest of the cast, he takes up the most space with his costume, this will more greatly emphasise his status yet add irony to his poor decision making which results in his demise.



"One day,
that's no long
enough
for any of the
dirty tricks I'm
feart o"



Grand silhouettes and large cloaks to show his status and importance.



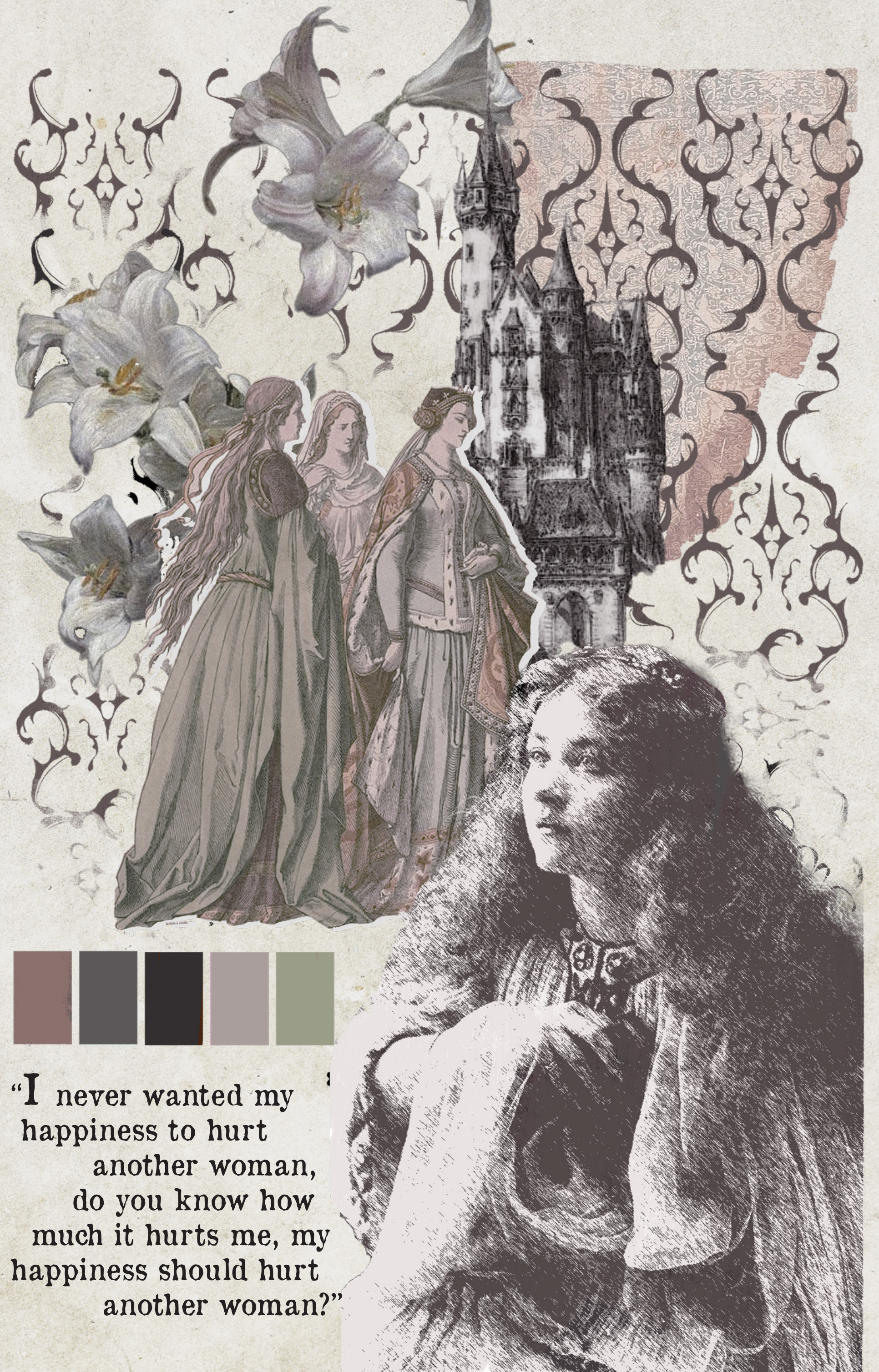
Kreon's motifs derive from gothic architecture. Geometric patterns create a sharper and more intimidating presence to his character.



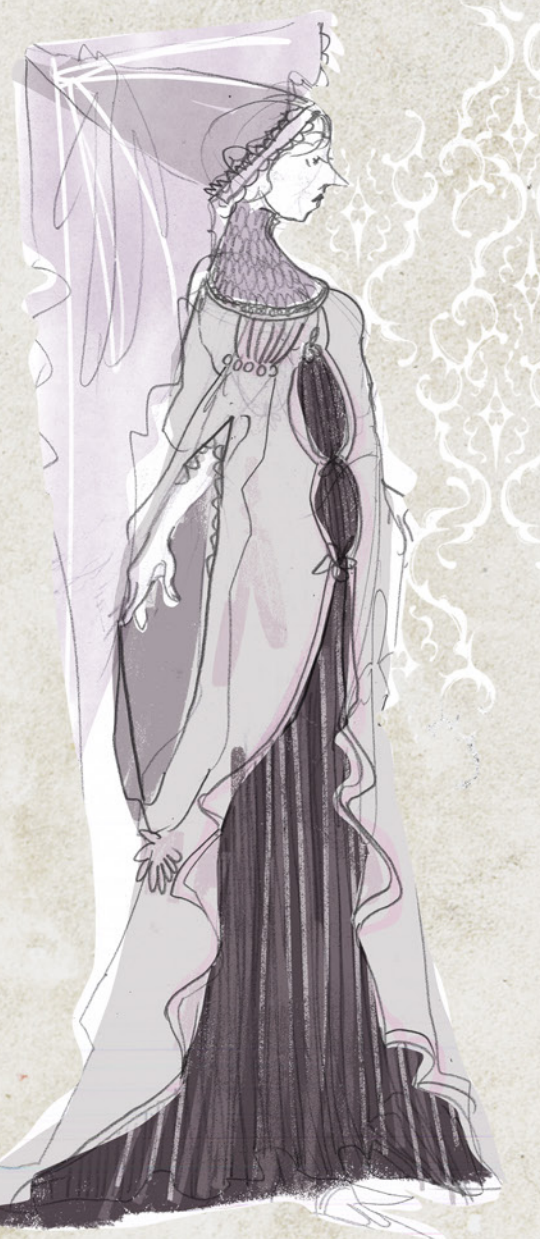
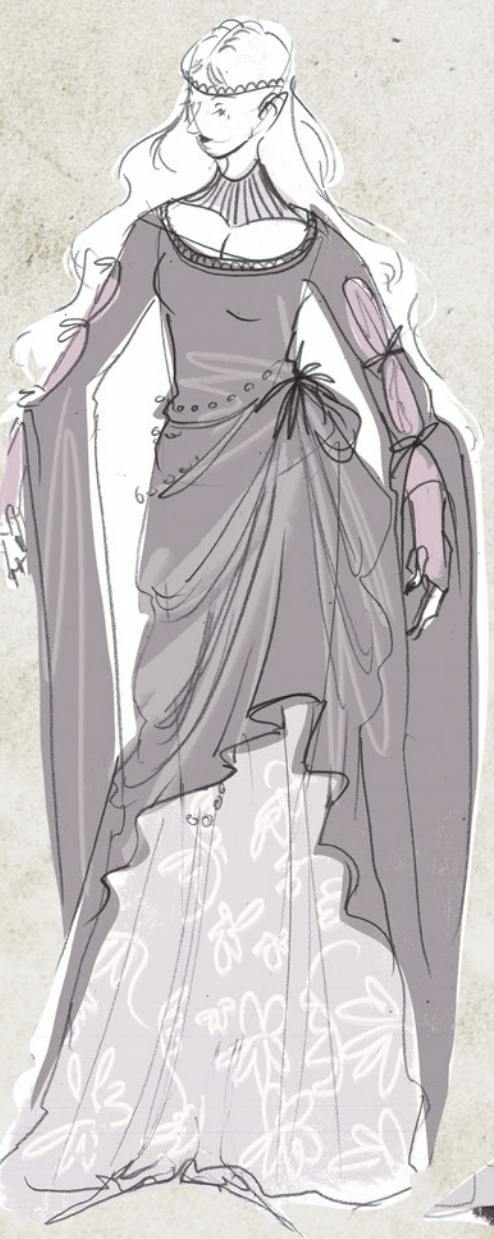
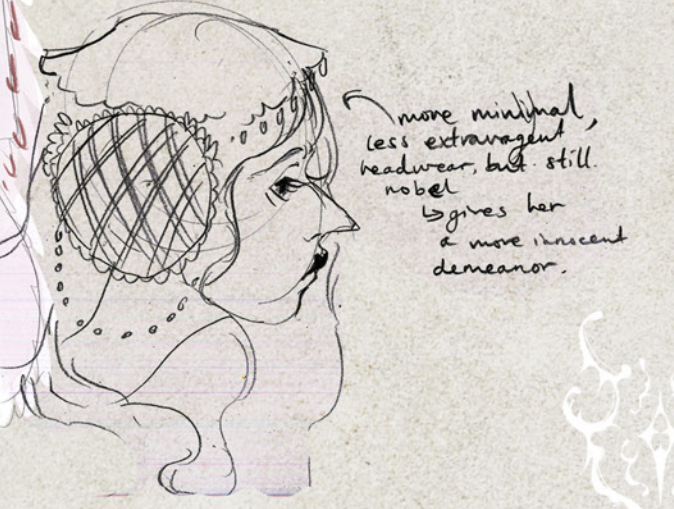
Glauke

Glauke is the image of 'perfection' and innocence, the stereotypical princess that the prince swoons over. The audience won't be surprised that Jason would fall for an obedient young woman in royalty. Although Medea is more distraught by Jason's actions, Glauke isn't necessarily taking on the same mindset, she still tries to convince Medea that grieving over a man isn't worth it as they will always find a way to break your heart in the end.

Costume wise, Glauke will stick out from the rest of the characters dark and gothic demeanour and take on a paler, brighter colour palette to reflect her character as the innocent princess. She will still take on silhouettes of that seen in late medieval/ renaissance nobility to emphasise her status. Pattern in reflection of her character could be explored including symbols of innocence and peace within motifs of her design. This could include imagery such as lilies and doves but in the form of a historically accurate print that is seen in remaining textiles of the period.



Pristine and feminine. Highlighting Glauke's innocence and perfection through lighter colours while still taking on styles seen in nobility to show her status.



Nurse

The nurse works for Medea as a housekeeper and plays the role of the caregiver for Medea's children. She always puts Medea first and even refers to Medea as her princess at one point. The nurse aches and grieves for Medea's situation of betrayal and supports her until it goes too far.

The Nurse is someone who believes the more wealth and high status you have as a person, the greater the destruction which is caused on your life from loss, especially something close to you. Because of this, the Nurse is more modest and less showy compared to the rest of the cast. She prioritises those around her before herself and tries her best to help settle Medea.

Her colour palette will almost be completely monochromatic of shades from black to white to show her clear intentions and modesty as a character. Other characters in the cast may still have the monotone feeling to their costumes, but they have hints of colour like dark reds to reflect their anger or evil. The maid the opposite as she doesn't intend on causing destruction.



“Misery piled on misery and mair of it, new agony afore the first has done its worst”

Exploring modest and simple aspects the to the Nurse's clothes. Yet adding practical elements. I'm inspired by belts with hanging pouches seen in paintings and frescoes throughout the 13th - 15th century.

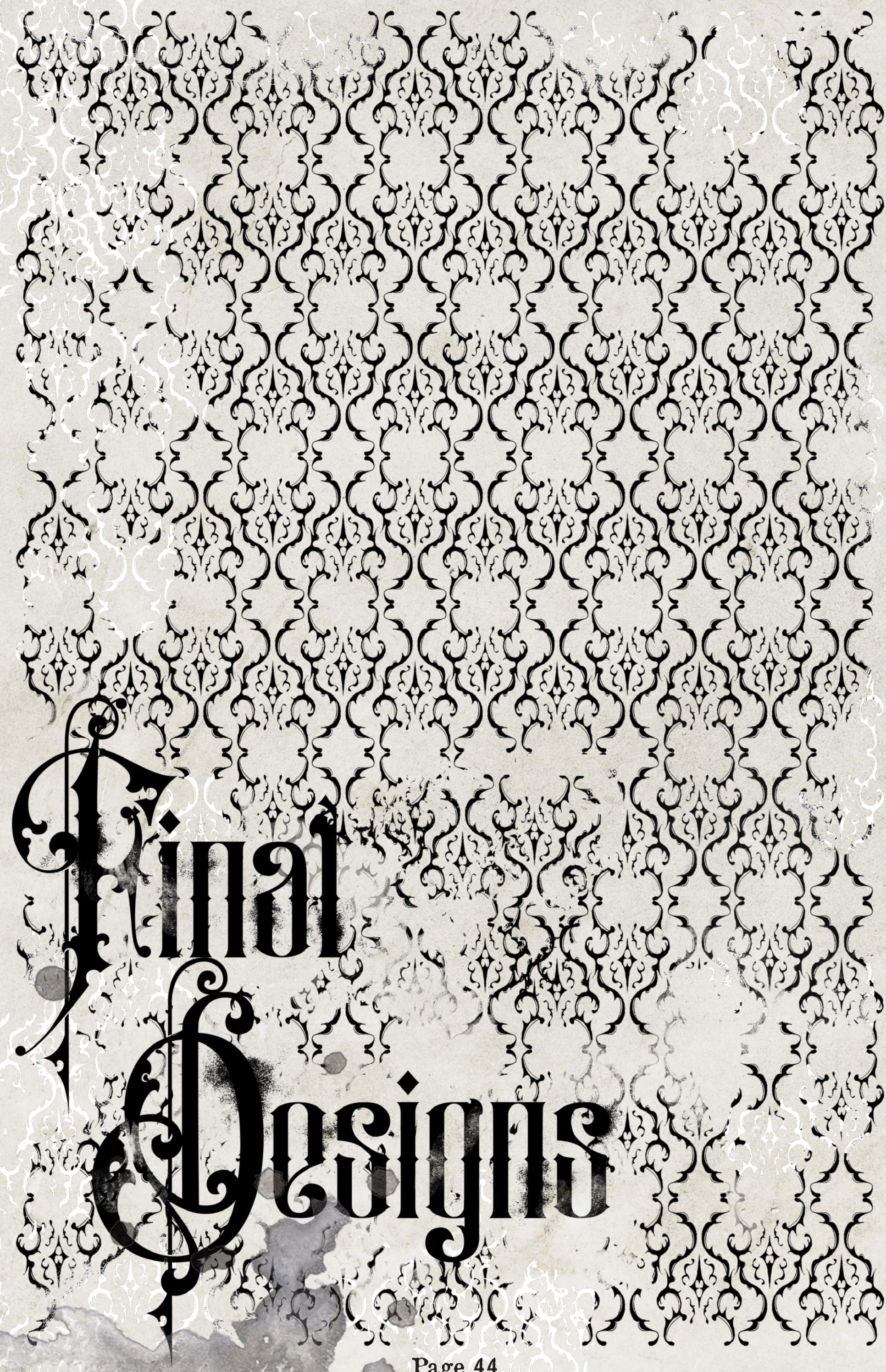


I'm interested in exploring the idea of the son imitating Jason and wearing his cloaks that are too big for him. This will help emphasise Medea's fear of her son growing up to become just like Jason.



Developing the feeling of a child in adults clothing, wearing his father's clothes. The Son wears both clothes his size while aspects such as a cape could have been taken from Jason's wardrobe. I like how this creates a playful and innocent feeling to the character.



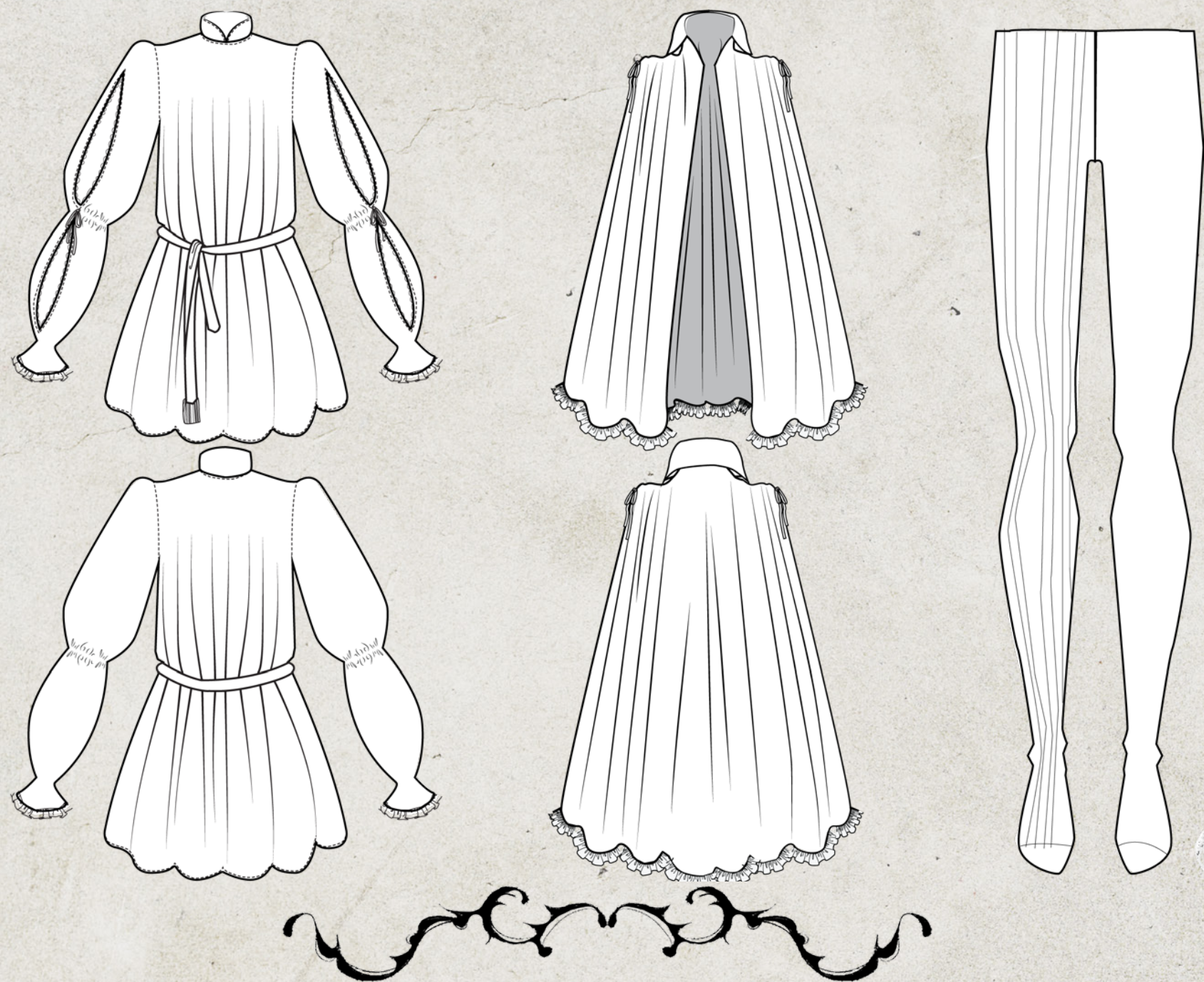






Medea

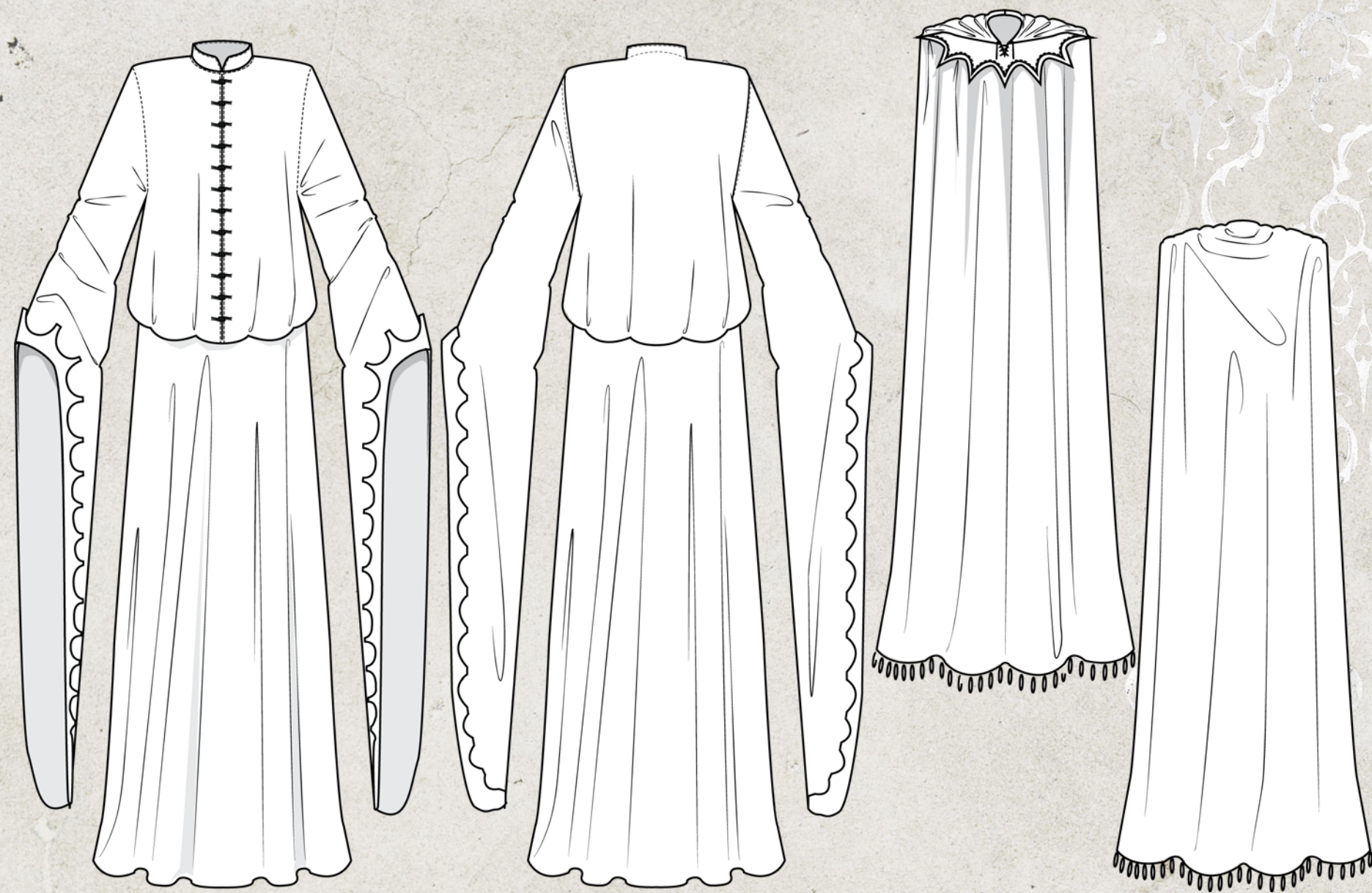






Chorus





Kreon





Glauke





Nurse





Child





