Analytical Assignment #4 (Textual Interpretation)

Instructions
This assignment has three parts, in which you will:
   a) Post to Bb a response to the prompt – due by midnight on Tuesday, 10/11 (20 pts)
   b) Participate in a conversation in class on Wednesday, 10/12 (10 pts)
   c) Complete and return the required essay via SafeAssign by Monday, 10/17 (70 pts)

The focus of this assignment is deeper understanding of the portrayal of Medea in Euripides’ play. The primacy of a female character as star of the play, plus the importance of the nurse and the female chorus, suggest that this play has something to say about the role of women in society.

Please read through this whole assignment before beginning part 1. The final product is due via SafeAssign sometime on Monday, October 17. Thank you.

Goals
This assignment addresses four of the intellectual goals listed on the syllabus:

1) situate Greek and Roman myths in the cultural framework of the people who told them
2) understand and use a technical vocabulary for ancient literature
3) discern among and evaluate competing claims or approaches to myths or to the problems they explore
4) understand myth’s context in and dependence on the culture and individual who tell it
5) recognize myths at work and play in your own culture and life
6) be able to cite properly ancient texts, ancient artworks and material remains, and secondary sources

Strategies
Please read through the questions before you begin the first part. Then spend some time with the Medea, particularly the passages noted in parts 1-3 below.

Part 1: Online
Before midnight on Tuesday, Oct 11, post a response on Bb in your small group to this prompt.

Some people call Euripides’ Medea a feminist play, while others call it a misogynist play. What does the word “feminist” mean when we use it to interpret an ancient text? What does “misogynist” mean as a literary-critical term? (this part should be 2-3 sentences; please don’t use a dictionary entry for the word “feminism”).

Next, in 4-6 sentences, explain whether you think Medea is a feminist play or a misogynist play and why you think so. Then list 2 pieces of evidence from the play you would use from the text to support your point. Please include citations (line numbers). The 2 quotations cannot come from the same speech or scene. Keep in mind that some passages could potentially be used to argue either side depending upon interpretation; you need to be specific in showing why you think their chosen passages support one reading or another given the context. Be prepared to discuss your chosen passages in class the next day (therefore, remember which passages you chose and bring your text).
Part 2: In class
In your small group on Friday, Oct 14, discuss your understanding of the words “feminist” and “misogynist” when applied to a work of literature. The move onto your interpretations of the play. Start with “Medea is a feminist play” and share your reasons and textual support for this position. Next, move to “Medea is a misogynist play” and share your reasons and textual support. (15 minutes) For the second half of class, I will put on the screen for plenary discussion one scholar’s reading of the play’s commentary on women.

Part 3: Turn in
Sometime on Monday, Oct 17, please turn in a short essay agreeing or disagreeing with this statement by the scholar Douglas Cairns:¹

“Euripides’ Medea does not subvert Athenian male stereotypes. It revels in them.”

Your essay should assume a reader who has read the play, and so should not re-tell plot, except when a plot detail serves your argument. Your essay should include at least 3 distinct quotations from the play; no two may come from the same speech, but you can use two from a scene should this be the best support for your case.