

EURIPIDES

Euripides (c. 484–406 BCE) was the youngest of the three tragic playwrights whose plays remain today. Although he first competed in the City Dionysia in 455 BCE, and won his first victory in 441 BCE, he won only four victories in his lifetime and left Athens about the year 408 BCE for the court of King Archileus of Macedon, where he died. We do not know why Euripides won so infrequently, but his tragedies are much more bitter and ironic than those of Aeschylus or Sophocles, brilliantly unfolding the selfish capriciousness of gods and heroes alike. Of the roughly ninety plays Euripides is thought to have written, eighteen survive, and most of these were written and produced during the war with Sparta: *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Heracleidae*, *Hippolytus*, *Cyclops* (a satyr play), *Heracles*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Helen*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *The Trojan Women*, *Ion*, *The Suppliant Women*, *Orestes*, *Electra*, *The Phoenician Women*. Three additional plays—*Iphigeneia at Aulis*, *The Bacchae*, and *Alcmaeon at Corinth* (now lost)—were written in Macedon and brought to Athens by the playwright's son Euripides the Younger. This trilogy, produced after Euripides' death, won him his final prize at the City Dionysia.

MEDEA

Although many Greek tragedies center on female characters—think of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, for example, or Sophocles' *Antigone*—Euripides was famous in Athens for centering his tragedies so frequently on women. Euripides was hardly a feminist in any modern sense, yet more than his contemporaries, he used his tragic heroines to explore the relationship between gender and the other conceptual, political, social, and esthetic categories organizing Athenian life.

Like all roles in the Athenian theater, the role of Medea was played by a male actor; nonetheless, in many ways *Medea* illustrates Euripides' skeptical and ironic regard for conventional attitudes, and his tendency toward a more sensational form of tragic action. Like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Medea* is a tragedy of revenge, in which Medea poisons her husband Jason's newly married wife and her father, Creon, and in the play's climactic moment executes her own children from her marriage with Jason. What sometimes seems most monstrous to modern readers and audiences is that Medea herself—in one of Euripides' most striking uses of the *machina*—flees Corinth alive at the end of the play, rising above the *skene* in a dragon-drawn chariot, draped in the bodies of her dead children, taunting and reviling the impotent Jason. That is, modern audiences sometimes feel that Medea herself should die at the play's close if *Medea* is to be a truly tragic drama, as though by dying Medea would be "punished" for her revenge in some appalling vision of tragic "justice." But Euripides seems uninterested in such a moralized version of tragedy. Indeed, as Aristotle implies in *The Poetics*, tragedy is a deeply dialectical, contradictory way of representing human experience: tragedy arises from the unresolvable tension between pity and fear, from the relationship between the hero's actions (remembering that the tragic hero is neither a "paragon of virtue" nor inherently wicked) and their terrible, somehow fitting consequences. And while Aristotle praises Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* as the best-constructed tragedy, he also remarks that Euripides "is felt by the audience to be the most tragic, at least, of the poets." To grasp Euripides' sense of tragedy means placing Medea's execution of the children within the context of the action as a whole, an act that brings her history to bear in one exacting deed, an act like Agamemnon's treading on the carpet or Oedipus' blistering interrogation of the ancient shepherd.

At the play's opening, Medea is an outcast, a foreign exile in Corinth, and the play repeatedly stresses Medea's otherness—she is an Eastern exotic, she has little respect for

Greek culture and its institutions, and she is a sorceress as well. Medea is consistently shown to be a figure of willful passion, brought into exile through her love for Jason. Falling in love with Jason when he went to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece, Medea used her sorcery to help Jason gain the Fleece, betraying her father and killing her brother in the bargain. When the play opens, Jason has returned to Greece with Medea and their children; in Corinth, however, Jason decides to marry the daughter of King Creon. Creon, no doubt recognizing that Medea and her children will pose a constant threat to his own line of succession, has ruled that Medea and her children must again be sent into exile.

Yet as Medea suggests to the Chorus, the indignity that Jason has thrust upon her—being doubly exiled, from her country and from her marriage—is in an important sense merely an extension of the state of all women in Greek culture. For once women “buy a husband and take for our bodies / A master,” they are exiled from their own homes, and from the mastery of their own lives. Inasmuch as women are represented as creatures of passion, they are “exiled” as well from the organizing principles of the Greek state: reason, the law, and legitimate society are identified in the play as the preserve of men. Euripides makes Jason the spokesman for these values. When Jason first confronts Medea, he takes pride in his talents as a speaker, listing his arguments in support of taking a new wife almost as though he were arguing in the courtroom or conducting a philosophical demonstration. But while Oedipus, for instance, uses the strategies of philosophic inquiry to discover the truth, Jason’s arguments seem to conceal the truth—he is betraying Medea and their children, after all—behind a smokescreen of sophistic rhetoric. Having brought Medea into exile, Jason argues that she is fortunate merely to “inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways / How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.” Yet the law that Jason praises seems designed to enable him to act out his own “sweet will”—taking a second wife—while it prevents Medea from acting on hers. And the more Jason insists that he is acting reasonably, the more unreasonable his arguments become; he becomes increasingly irritable, and finally insulting: “you women have got into such a state of mind / That, if your life at night is good, you think you have / Everything.” Euripides’ treatment of Jason is typical of his tendency to present an ironic view of the heroes of Greek mythology. Here, in making Jason the representative of Greek values—reason, law, justice—Euripides suggests the limits of those values. For the Chorus clearly sees Jason’s “reason” as a self-indulgent pretense: “though you have made this speech of yours look well, / . . . / You have betrayed your wife and are acting badly.”

As Medea comes to recognize, both Jason and the masculine laws of Corinth are willing to betray her, to call her fidelity and love merely irrational, to force her again into exile. Having poisoned Creon and his daughter, Medea first claims to kill the children in order that they not be slain “by another hand less kindly to them.” But it is also clear that in killing the children, Medea revenges herself on Jason in the only way open to her; he has little regard for her love for him, but the children are his property, an extension of himself, of his identity. More importantly, the children are his successors, representing his continued presence in the world. For as Jason laments, Medea has contrived a punishment for him that no Greek woman would have dared: in leaving him childless, Medea transforms Jason into an exile like herself, prophesying that he will die “without distinction.”

Medea’s acts epitomize the ethical ambiguity that drives Greek tragedy. Agamemnon strides on the blood-red carpet, magisterially desecrating the honor of his family as he had once done in sacrificing Iphigeneia; Oedipus sentences the hidden criminal to exile, only to discover that he is the criminal he seeks. To force Jason into a childless exile, Medea commits the kind of crime that Jason has repeatedly drawn her to enact: she murders what she loves in order to insist on the priority and power of her love for him. As in other classical tragedies, the hero chooses to act in a way that is not only consistent with her past,

but a self-conscious reenactment of it. The *peripeteia*, the reversal that defines the tragic action, seems in many ways to be a kind of restoration as well, revealing destructive consequences that have been latent in the action from the beginning.

It should be clear that while Euripides interrogates the relationship between reason and passion, culture and nature, the rational and the irrational, science and magic, *Medea* does not finally disrupt or overturn this relationship. Nor does the play finally question the way that Greek culture gendered these categories as masculine and feminine, expressing the conceptual and political hierarchies of its own making as the "natural" outgrowth of some essential gender difference. Euripides exposes the destructive tension lurking in Greek conceptions of gender, power, and identity, but the language of tragedy is not the language of revolution. For although tragedy frequently exposes the values of its world as contradictory and destructive, it also accepts those values as somehow inevitable, unavoidable. Medea flees Corinth and the abusive Jason, but only by destroying herself in the same way she destroys Jason; Medea triumphs over Jason, but only by destroying her family and becoming an exile yet again. The only alternative that *Medea* offers to the way that Medea—and, she argues, all women—is positioned as an outsider, an "exile" to the governing categories of Greek life, is a deeper, more permanent isolation.

MEDEA

Euripides

TRANSLATED BY REX WARNER

CHARACTERS

MEDEA, *princess of Colchis
and wife of*
JASON, *son of Aeson,
king of Iolcus*
TWO CHILDREN *of Medea and
Jason*
CREON, *king of Corinth*

AEGEUS, *king of Athens*
NURSE *to Medea*
TUTOR *to Medea's children*
MESSENGER
CHORUS *of Corinthian women*
ATTENDANTS

SCENE: *In front of MEDEA's house in Corinth.*

Enter from the house Medea's NURSE.

NURSE: How I wish the Argo never had reached the land
Of Colchis, skimming through the blue Symplegades,
Nor ever had fallen in the glades of Pelion
The smitten fir-tree to furnish oars for the hands
5 Of heroes who in Pelias' name attempted
The Golden Fleece! For then my mistress Medea
Would not have sailed for the towers of the land of Iolcus,
Her heart on fire with passionate love for Jason;
Nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias
10 To kill their father, and now be living here
In Corinth with her husband and children. She gave
Pleasure to the people of her land of exile,
And she herself helped Jason in every way.
This is indeed the greatest salvation of all—
15 For the wife not to stand apart from the husband.
But now there's hatred everywhere, Love is diseased.
For, deserting his own children and my mistress,
Jason has taken a royal wife to his bed,
The daughter of the ruler of this land, Creon.
20 And poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the
Vows they made to each other, the right hands clasped
In eternal promise. She calls upon the gods to witness
What sort of return Jason has made to her love.
She lies without food and gives herself up to suffering,
25 Wasting away every moment of the day in tears.
So it has gone since she knew herself slighted by him.
Not stirring an eye, not moving her face from the ground,
No more than either a rock or surging sea water
She listens when she is given friendly advice.
30 Except that sometimes she twists back her white neck and
Moans to herself, calling out on her father's name.
And her land, and her home betrayed when she came away
with
A man who now is determined to dishonor her.
Poor creature, she has discovered by her sufferings
35 What it means to one not to have lost one's own country.

She has turned from the children and does not like to see
them:

I am afraid she may think of some dreadful thing,
For her heart is violent. She will never put up with
The treatment she is getting. I know and fear her
Lest she may sharpen a sword and thrust to the heart, 40
Stealing into the palace where the bed is made,
Or even kill the king and the new-wedded groom,
And thus bring a greater misfortune on herself.
She's a strange woman. I know it won't be easy
To make an enemy of her and come off best. 45
But here the children come. They have finished playing.
They have no thought at all of their mother's trouble.
Indeed it is not usual for the young to grieve.

*(Enter from the right the slave who is the TUTOR to Medea's two small
children. The CHILDREN follow him.)*

TUTOR: You old retainer of my mistress' household,
Why are you standing here all alone in front of the 50
Gates and moaning to yourself over your misfortune?
Medea could not wish you to leave her alone.
NURSE: Old man, and guardian of the children of Jason,
If one is a good servant, it's a terrible thing
When one's master's luck is out; it goes to one's heart. 55
So I myself have got into such a state of grief
That a longing stole over me to come outside here
And tell the earth and air of my mistress' sorrows.
TUTOR: Has the poor lady not yet given up her crying?
NURSE: Given up? She's at the start, not halfway through her 60
tears.
TUTOR: Poor fool—if I may call my mistress such a name—
How ignorant she is of trouble more to come.
NURSE: What do you mean, old man? You needn't fear to
speak.
TUTOR: Nothing. I take back the words which I used just now.
NURSE: Don't, by your beard, hide this from me, your 65
fellow-servant.

If need be, I'll keep quiet about what you tell me.
TUTOR: I heard a person saying, while I myself seemed
Not to be paying attention, when I was at the place
Where the old draught-players sit, by the holy fountain, 70
That Creon, ruler of the land, intends to drive
These children and their mother in exile from Corinth.
But whether what he said is really true or not
I do not know. I pray that it may not be true.

1 Argo Jason's ship on the expedition of the Argonauts, sent by Pelias, king of Iolcus in Thessaly (Jason's uncle, who had usurped the throne), to Colchis on the Black Sea. The Symplegades were clashing rocks, one of the obstacles along the way. Pelion is a mountain in Thessaly. Medea was a princess of Colchis who fell in love with Jason and followed him back to Greece

NURSE: And will Jason put up with it that his children
75 Should suffer so, though he's no friend to their mother?

TUTOR: Old ties give place to new ones. As for Jason, he
No longer has a feeling for this house of ours.

NURSE: It's black indeed for us, when we add new to old
Sorrows before even the present sky has cleared.

80 TUTOR: But you be silent, and keep all this to yourself.
It is not the right time to tell our mistress of it.

NURSE: Do you hear, children, what a father he is to you?
I wish he were dead—but no, he's still my master.
Yet certainly he has proved unkind to his dear ones.

85 TUTOR: What's strange in that? Have you only just discovered
That everyone loves himself more than his neighbor?
Some have good reason, others get something out of it.
So Jason neglects his children for the new bride.

NURSE: Go indoors, children. That will be the best thing.
90 And you, keep them to themselves as much as possible.
Don't bring them near their mother in her angry mood.
For I've seen her already blazing her eyes at them
As though she meant some mischief and I am sure that
She'll not stop raging until she has struck at someone.
95 May it be an enemy and not a friend she hurts!

(MEDEA is heard inside the house.)

MEDIA: Ah, wretch! Ah, lost in my sufferings,
I wish, I wish I might die.

NURSE: What did I say, dear children? Your mother
Frets her heart and frets it to anger.
100 Run away quickly into the house.
And keep well out of her sight.
Don't go anywhere near, but be careful
Of the wildness and bitter nature
Of that proud mind.

105 Go now! Run quickly indoors.
It is clear that she soon will put lightning
In that cloud of her cries that is rising
With a passion increasing. O, what will she do,
Proud-hearted and not to be checked on her course,
110 A soul bitten into with wrong?

(The TUTOR takes the CHILDREN into the house.)

MEDEA: Ah, I have suffered
What should be wept for bitterly. I hate you,
Children of a hateful mother. I curse you
And your father. Let the whole house crash.

115 NURSE: Ah, I pity you, you poor creature.
How can your children share in their father's
Wickedness? Why do you hate them? Oh children,
How much I fear that something may happen!
Great people's tempers are terrible, always
120 Having their own way, seldom checked.
Dangerous they shift from mood to mood.
How much better to have been accustomed
To live on equal terms with one's neighbors.
I would like to be safe and grow old in a
125 Humble way. What is moderate sounds best,
Also in practice is best for everyone.
Greatness brings no profit to people.

(Enter, on the right, a CHORUS of Corinthian women. They have come
to inquire about MEDEA and to attempt to console her.)

CHORUS: I heard the voice, I heard the cry
Of Colchis' wretched daughter. 130

Tell me, mother, is she not yet

At rest? Within the double gates

Of the court I heard her cry. I am sorry

For the sorrow of this home. O, say, what has happened? 135

NURSE: There is no home. It's over and done with.

Her husband holds fast to his royal wedding,

While she, my mistress, cries out her eyes

There in her room, and takes no warmth from

Any word of any friend. 140

MEDEA: O, I wish

That lightning from heaven would split my head open.

Oh, what use have I now for life?

I would find my release in death

And leave hateful existence behind me. 145

CHORUS: O God and Earth and Heaven!

Did you hear what a cry was that

Which the sad wife sings?

Poor foolish one, why should you long.

For that appalling rest? 150

The final end of death comes fast.

No need to pray for that.

Suppose your man gives honor

To another woman's bed.

It often happens. Don't be hurt.

God will be your friend in this. 155

You must not waste away

Grieving too much for him who shared your bed.

MEDEA: Great Themis, lady Artemis, behold

The things I suffer, though I made him promise,

My hateful husband. I pray that I may see him, 160

Him and his bride and all their palace shattered

For the wrong they dare to do me without cause.

Oh, my father! Oh, my country! In what dishonor

I left you, killing my own brother for it. 165

NURSE: Do you hear what she says, and how she cries

On Themis, the goddess of Promises, and on Zeus,

Whom we believe to be the Keeper of Oaths?

Of this I am sure, that no small thing

Will appease my mistress' anger. 170

CHORUS: Will she come into our presence?

Will she listen when we are speaking

To the words we say?

I wish she might relax her rage

And temper of her heart. 175

My willingness to help will never

Be wanting to my friends.

But go inside and bring her

Out of the house to us,

And speak kindly to her: hurry,

Before she wrongs her own. 180

This passion of hers moves to something great.

159 Themis . . . Artemis goddesses: Themis was the goddess of justice; the virgin Artemis would be sensitive to the plight of

NURSE: I will, but I doubt if I'll manage
 To win my mistress over.
 185 But still I'll attempt it to please you.
 Such a look she will flash on her servants
 If any comes near with a message.
 Like a lioness guarding her cubs,
 It is right, I think, to consider—
 190 Both stupid and lacking in foresight
 Those poets of old who wrote songs
 For revels and dinners and banquets.
 Pleasant sounds for men living at ease;
 But none of them all has discovered
 195 How to put to an end with their singing
 Or musical instruments grief,
 Bitter grief, from which death and disaster
 Cheat the hopes of a house. Yet how good
 If music could cure men of this! But why raise
 200 To no purpose the voice at a banquet? For *there* is
 Already abundance of pleasure for men
 With a joy of its own.

(The NURSE goes into the house.)

CHORUS: I heard a shriek that is laden with sorrow,
 Shrilling out her hard grief she cries out
 205 Upon him who betrayed both her bed and her marriage.
 Wronged, she calls on the gods,
 On the justice of Zeus, the oath sworn,
 Which brought her away
 To the opposite shore of the Greeks
 210 Through the gloomy salt straits to the gateway
 Of the salty unlimited sea.

(MEDEA, attended by servants, comes out of the house.)

MEDEA: Women of Corinth, I have come outside to you
 Lest you should be indignant with me; for I know
 That many people are overproud, some when alone,
 215 And others when in company. And those who live
 Quietly, as I do, get a bad reputation.
 For a just judgment is not evident in the eyes
 When a man at first sight hates another, before
 Learning his character, being in no way injured;
 220 And a foreigner especially must adapt himself.
 I'd not approve of even a fellow-countryman
 Who by pride and want of manners offends his neighbors.
 But on me this thing has fallen so unexpectedly.
 It has broken my heart. I am finished. I let go
 225 All my life's joy. My friends, I only want to die.
 It was everything to me to think well of one man,
 And he, my own husband, has turned out wholly vile—
 Of all things which are living and can form a judgment
 We women are the most unfortunate creatures.
 230 Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required
 For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies
 A master; for not to take one is even worse.
 And now the question is serious whether we take
 A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape
 235 For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage.
 She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners.
 And needs prophetic power, unless she has learned at home,

And if we work out all this well and carefully.
 And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke. 240
 Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die. 241
 A man, when he's tired of the company in his home, 242
 Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom—
 And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.
 But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone. 245
 What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time
 Living at home, while they do the fighting in war.
 How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand
 Three times in the front of battle than bear one child.
 Yet what applies to me does not apply to you. 250
 You have a country. Your family home is here.
 You enjoy life and the company of your friends.
 But I am deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of
 By my husband—something he won in a foreign land.
 I have no mother or brother, nor any relation 255
 With whom I can take refuge in this sea of woe.
 This much then is the service I would beg from you:
 If I can find the means or devise any scheme
 To pay my husband back for what he has done to me—
 Him and his father-in-law and the girl who married him— 260
 Just to keep silent. For in other ways a woman
 Is full of fear, defenseless, dreads the sight of cold
 Steel; but, when once she is wronged in the matter of love,
 No other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood.
 CHORUS: This I will promise. You are in the right, Medea, 265
 In paying your husband back. I am not surprised at you
 For being sad.

But look! I see our King Creon
 Approaching. He will tell us of some new plan.

(Enter, from the right, CREON, with attendants.)

CREON: You, with that angry look, so set against your husband.
 Medea, I order you to leave my territories 270
 An exile, and take along with you your two children,
 And not to waste time doing it. It is my decree,
 And I will see it done. I will not return home
 Until you are cast from the boundaries of my land.
 MEDEA: Oh, this is the end for me. I am utterly lost. 275
 Now I am in the full force of the storm of hate
 And have no harbor from ruin to reach easily.
 Yet still, in spite of it all, I'll ask the question:
 What is your reason, Creon, for banishing me?
 CREON: I am afraid of you—why should I dissemble it?— 280
 Afraid that you may injure my daughter mortally.
 Many things accumulate to support my feeling.
 You are a clever woman, versed in evil arts.
 And are angry at having lost your husband's love.
 I hear that you are threatening, so they tell me, 285
 To do something against my daughter and Jason
 And me, too. I shall take my precautions first.
 I tell you, I prefer to earn your hatred now
 Than to be soft-hearted and afterward regret it.
 MEDEA: This is not the first time, Creon. Often previously 290
 Through being considered clever I have suffered much.
 A person of sense ought never to have his children
 Brought up to be more clever than the average.
 For, apart from cleverness bringing them no profit,
 It will make them objects of envy and ill-will. 295

They'll think you foolish and worthless into the bargain;
 And if you are thought superior to those who have
 Some reputation for learning, you will become hated.
 300 I have some knowledge myself of how this happens;
 For being clever, I find that some will envy me,
 Others object to me. Yet all my cleverness
 Is not so much.

Well, then, are you frightened, Creon,
 That I should harm you? There is no need. It is not
 305 My way to transgress the authority of a king.
 How have you injured me? You gave your daughter away
 To the man you wanted. Oh, certainly I hate
 My husband, but you, I think, have acted wisely;
 Nor do I grudge it you that your affairs go well.
 310 May the marriage be a lucky one! Only let me
 Live in this land. For even though I have been wronged,
 I will not raise my voice, but submit to my betters.

CREON: What you say sounds gentle enough. Still in my heart
 I greatly dread that you are plotting some evil,
 315 And therefore I trust you even less than before.
 A sharp-tempered woman, or, for that matter, a man,
 Is easier to deal with than the clever type
 Who holds her tongue. No. You must go. No need for more
 Speeches. The thing is fixed. By no manner of means
 320 Shall you, an enemy of mine, stay in my country.

MEDEA: I beg you. By your knees, by your new-wedded girl.
 CREON: Your words are wasted. You will never persuade me.
 MEDEA: Will you drive me out, and give no heed to my prayers?
 CREON: I will, for I love my family more than you.

325 MEDEA: O my country! How bitterly now I remember you!
 CREON: I love my country too—next after my children.
 MEDEA: O what an evil to men is passionate love!
 CREON: That would depend on the luck that goes along with it.
 MEDEA: O God, do not forget who is the cause of this!

330 CREON: Go. It is no use. Spare me the pain of forcing you.
 MEDEA: I'm spared no pain. I lack no pain to be spared me.
 CREON: Then you'll be removed by force by one of my men.
 MEDEA: No. Creon, not that! But do listen, I beg you.
 CREON: Woman, you seem to want to create a disturbance.

335 MEDEA: I will go into exile. This is not what I beg for.
 CREON: Why then this violence and clinging to my hand?
 MEDEA: Allow me to remain here just for this one day,

So I may consider where to live in my exile.
 And look for support for my children, since their father
 340 Chooses to make no kind of provision for them.
 Have pity on them! You have children of your own.
 It is natural for you to look kindly on them.
 For myself I do not mind if I go into exile.
 It is the children being in trouble that I mind.

345 CREON: There is nothing tyrannical about my nature,
 And by showing mercy I have often been the loser.
 Even now I know that I am making a mistake.
 All the same you shall have your will. But this I tell you,
 That if the light of heaven tomorrow shall see you,
 350 You and your children in the confines of my land,
 You die. This word I have spoken is firmly fixed.
 But now, if you must stay, stay for this day alone.
 For in it you can do none of the things I fear.

CHORUS: Oh, unfortunate one! Oh, cruel!
 Where will you turn? Who will help you? 355
 What house or what land to preserve you
 From ill can you find?
 Medea, a god has thrown suffering
 Upon you in waves of despair.

MEDEA: Things have gone badly every way. No doubt of that 360
 But not these things this far, and don't imagine so.
 There are still trials to come for the new-wedded pair,
 And for their relations pain that will mean something.
 Do you think that I would ever have fawned on that man
 Unless I had some end to gain or profit in it? 365
 I would not even have spoken or touched him with my hands.
 But he has got to such a pitch of foolishness
 That, though he could have made nothing of all my plans
 By exiling me, he has given me this one day
 To stay here, and in this I will make dead bodies 370
 Of three of my enemies—father, the girl, and my husband.
 I have many ways of death which I might suit to them,
 And do not know, friends, which one to take in hand;
 Whether to set fire underneath their bridal mansion,
 Or sharpen a sword and thrust it to the heart. 375
 Stealing into the palace where the bed is made.
 There is just one obstacle to this. If I am caught
 Breaking into the house and scheming against it,
 I shall die, and give my enemies cause for laughter.
 It is best to go by the straight road, the one in which 380
 I am most skilled, and make away with them by poison.
 So be it then.

And now suppose them dead. What town will receive me?
 What friend will offer me a refuge in his land,
 Or the guaranty of his house and save my own life? 385

There is none. So I must wait a little time yet,
 And if some sure defense should then appear for me,
 In craft and silence I will set about this murder.
 But if my fate should drive me on without help, 390
 Even though death is certain, I will take the sword
 Myself and kill, and steadfastly advance to crime.
 It shall not be—I swear it by her, my mistress,
 Whom most I honor and have chosen as partner,
 Hecate, who dwells in the recesses of my hearth—
 That any man shall be glad to have injured me. 395

Bitter I will make their marriage for them and mournful,
 Bitter the alliance and the driving me out of the land.
 Ah, come, Medea, in your plotting and scheming
 Leave nothing untried of all those things which you know.
 Go forward to the dreadful act. The test has come 400
 For resolution. You see how you are treated. Never
 Shall you be mocked by Jason's Corinthian wedding,
 Whose father was noble, whose grandfather Helius.

You have the skill. What is more, you were born a woman,
 And women, though most helpless in doing good deeds, 405
 Are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers.

CHORUS: Flow backward to your sources, sacred rivers;
 And let the world's great order be reversed...
 It is the thoughts of men that are deceitful,
 Their pledges that are loose. 410

Story shall now turn my condition to a fair one,
Women are paid their due.
No more shall evil-sounding fame be theirs.

Cease now, you muses of the ancient singers,
415 To tell the tale of my unfaithfulness;
For not on us did Phoebus, lord of music,
Bestow the lyre's divine
Power, for otherwise I should have sung an answer
420 To the other sex. Long time
Has much to tell of us, and much of them.

You sailed away from your father's home,
With a heart on fire you passed
The double rocks of the sea.
And now in a foreign country
425 You have lost your rest in a widowed bed,
And are driven forth, a refugee
In dishonor from the land.

Good faith has gone, and no more remains
In great Greece a sense of shame.
430 It has flown away to the sky.
No father's house for a haven
Is at hand for you now, and another queen
Of your bed has dispossessed you and
Is mistress of your home.

(Enter JASON, with attendants.)

435 JASON: This is not the first occasion that I have noticed
How hopeless it is to deal with a stubborn temper.
For, with reasonable submission to our ruler's will,
You might have lived in this land and kept your home.
As it is you are going to be exiled for your loose speaking.
440 Not that I mind myself. You are free to continue
Telling everyone that Jason is a worthless man.
But as to your talk about the king, consider
Yourself most lucky that exile is your punishment.
I, for my part, have always tried to calm down
445 The anger of the king, and wished you to remain.
But you will not give up your folly, continually
Speaking ill of him, and so you are going to be banished.
All the same, and in spite of your conduct, I'll not desert
My friends, but have come to make some provision for you,
450 So that you and the children may not be penniless
Or in need of anything in exile. Certainly
Exile brings many troubles with it. And even
If you hate me, I cannot think badly of you.

MEDEA: O coward in every way—that is what I call you,
455 With bitterest reproach for your lack of manliness,
You have come, you, my worst enemy, have come to me!
It is not an example of overconfidence
Or of boldness thus to look your friends in the face,
Friends you have injured—no, it is the worst of all
460 Human diseases, shamelessness. But you did well
To come, for I can speak ill of you and lighten
My heart, and you will suffer while you are listening.
And first I will begin from what happened first.
I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it.
465 Who was a shipmate of yours aboard the Argo.

When you were sent to control the bulls that breathed fire
And yoke them, and when you would sow that deadly field.
Also that snake, who encircled with his many folds
The Golden Fleece and guarded it and never slept,
I killed, and so gave you the safety of the light. 470
And I myself betrayed my father and my home,
And came with you to Pelias' land of Iolcus.
And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom,
I killed him, Pelias, with a most dreadful death
475 At his own daughters' hands, and took away your fear.
This is how I behaved to you, you wretched man,
And you forsook me, took another bride to bed,
Though you had children; for, if that had not been,
You would have had an excuse for another wedding.
Faith in your word has gone. Indeed, I cannot tell 480
Whether you think the gods whose names you swore by then
Have ceased to rule and that new standards are set up,
Since you must know you have broken your word to me.
O my right hand, and the knees which you often clasped
485 In supplication, how senselessly I am treated
By this bad man, and how my hopes have missed their mark!
Come, I will share my thoughts as though you were a
friend.

You! Can I think that you would ever treat me well?
But I will do it, and these questions will make you
Appear the baser. Where am I to go? To my father's?
490 Him I betrayed and his land when I came with you.
To Pelias' wretched daughters? What a fine welcome
They would prepare for me who murdered their father!
For this is my position—hated by my friends
At home, I have, in kindness to you, made enemies 495
Of others whom there was no need to have injured.
And how happy among Greek women you have made me
On your side for all this! A distinguished husband
I have—for breaking promises. When in misery
I am cast out of the land and go into exile,
500 Quite without friends and all alone with my children,
That will be a fine shame for the new-wedded groom,
For his children to wander as beggars and she who saved
him.

O God, you have given to mortals a sure method
Of telling the gold that is pure from the counterfeit; 505
Why is there no mark engraved upon men's bodies,
By which we could know the true ones from the false ones?

CHORUS: It is a strange form of anger, difficult to cure,
When two friends turn upon each other in hatred.

JASON: As for me, it seems I must be no bad speaker. 510
But, like a man who has a good grip of the tiller,
Reef up his sail, and so run away from under
This mouthing tempest, woman, of your bitter tongue.
Since you insist on building up your kindness to me.
My view is that Cypris was alone responsible 515
Of men and gods for the preserving of my life.
You are clever enough—but really I need not enter
Into the story of how it was love's inescapable
Power that compelled you to keep my person safe.
520 On this I will not go into too much detail.

- In so far as you helped me, you did well enough.
 But on this question of saving me, I can prove
 You have certainly got from me more than you gave.
 Firstly, instead of living among barbarians,
- 525 You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways,
 How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.
 And all the Greeks considered you a clever woman.
 You were honored for it; while, if you were living at
 The ends of the earth, nobody would have heard of you.
- 530 For my part, rather than stores of gold in my house
 Or power to sing even sweeter songs than Orpheus,
 I'd choose the fate that made me a distinguished man.
 There is my reply to your story of my labors.
 Remember it was you who started the argument.
- 535 Next for your attack on my wedding with the princess:
 Here I will prove that, first, it was a clever move,
 Secondly, a wise one, and, finally, that I made it
 In your best interests and the children's. Please keep calm.
 When I arrived here from the land of Iolcus,
 Involved, as I was, in every kind of difficulty,
- 540 What luckier chance could I have come across than this,
 An exile to marry the daughter of the king?
 It was not—the point that seems to upset you—that I
 Grew tired of your bed and felt the need of a new bride;
 Nor with any wish to outdo your number of children.
- 545 We have enough already. I am quite content.
 But—this was the main reason—that we might live well,
 And not be short of anything. I know that all
 A man's friends leave him stone-cold if he becomes poor.
 Also that I might bring my children up worthily
- 550 Of my position, and, by producing more of them
 To be brothers of yours, we would draw the families
 Together and all be happy. You need no children.
 And it pays me to do good to those I have now
 By having others. Do you think this a bad plan?
- 555 You wouldn't if the love question hadn't upset you.
 But you women have got into such a state of mind
 That, if your life at night is good, you think you have
 Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
 You will consider your best and truest interests
- 560 Most hateful. It would have been better far for men
 To have got their children in some other way, and women
 Not to have existed. Then life would have been good.
- CHORUS: Jason, though you have made this speech of yours
 look well,
- 565 Still I think, even though others do not agree,
 You have betrayed your wife and are acting badly.
- MEDEA: Surely in many ways I hold different views
 From others, for I think that the plausible speaker
 Who is a villain deserves the greatest punishment.
- 570 Confident in his tongue's power to adorn evil,
 He stops at nothing. Yet he is not really wise.
 As in your case. There is no need to put on the airs
 Of a clever speaker, for one word will lay you flat.
 If you were not a coward, you would not have married
- 575 Behind my back, but discussed it with me first.
- JASON: And you, no doubt, would have furthered the proposal,
 If I had told you of it, you who even now
 Are incapable of controlling your bitter temper.
- MEDEA: It was not that. No, you thought it was not respectable
- JASON: Make sure of this: it was not because of a woman
 I made the royal alliance in which I now live.
 But, as I said before, I wished to preserve you
 And breed a royal progeny to be brothers
 To the children I have now, a sure defense to us. 585
- MEDEA: Let me have no happy fortune that brings pain with it,
 Or prosperity which is upsetting to the mind!
- JASON: Change your ideas of what you want, and show more
 sense.
 Do not consider painful what is good for you.
 Nor, when you are lucky, think yourself unfortunate. 590
- MEDEA: You can insult me. You have somewhere to turn to.
 But I shall go from this land into exile, friendless.
- JASON: It was what you chose yourself. Don't blame others for it.
- MEDEA: And how did I choose it? Did I betray my husband?
- JASON: You called down wicked curses on the king's family. 595
- MEDEA: A curse, that is what I am become to your house too.
- JASON: I do not propose to go into all the rest of it;
 But, if you wish for the children or for yourself
 In exile to have some of my money to help you,
 Say so, for I am prepared to give with open hand, 600
 Or to provide you with introductions to my friends
 Who will treat you well. You are a fool if you do not
 Accept this. Cease your anger and you will profit.
- MEDEA: I shall never accept the favors of friends of yours,
 Nor take a thing from you, so you need not offer it. 605
 There is no benefit in the gifts of a bad man.
- JASON: Then, in any case, I call the gods to witness that
 I wish to help you and the children in every way,
 But you refuse what is good for you. Obstinate
 You push away your friends. You are sure to suffer for it. 610
- MEDEA: Go! No doubt you hanker for your virginal bride,
 And are guilty of lingering too long out of her house.
 Enjoy your wedding. But perhaps—with the help of God—
 You will make the kind of marriage that you will regret.
- (JASON goes out with his attendants.)
- CHORUS: When love is in excess 615
 It brings a man no honor
 Nor any worthiness.
 But if in moderation Cypris comes,
 There is no other power at all so gracious.
 O goddess, never on me let loose the unerring 620
 Shaft of your bow in the poison of desire.
 Let my heart be wise.
 It is the gods' best gift.
 On me let mighty Cypris
 Inflict no wordy wars or restless anger 625
 To urge my passion to a different love.
 But with discernment may she guide women's weddings,
 Honoring most what is peaceful in the bed.
 O country and home,
 Never, never may I be without you, 630
 Living the hopeless life,
 Hard to pass through and painful,
 Most pitiable of all.
 Let death first lay me low and death
 Free me from this daylight, 635
 There is no sorrow above

I have seen it myself,
Do not tell of a secondhand story.
640 Neither city nor friend
Pitied you when you suffered
The worst of sufferings.
O let him die ungraced whose heart
Will not reward his friends,
645 Who cannot open an honest mind
No friend will be of mine.

(Enter AEGEUS, king of Athens, an old friend of MEDEA.)

AEGEUS: Medea, greeting! This is the best introduction
Of which men know for conversation between friends.
MEDEA: Greeting to you too, Aegeus, son of King Pandion.
650 Where have you come from to visit this country's soil?
AEGEUS: I have just left the ancient oracle of Phoebus.
MEDEA: And why did you go to earth's prophetic center?
AEGEUS: I went to inquire how children might be born to me.
MEDEA: Is it so? Your life still up to this point is childless?
655 AEGEUS: Yes. By the fate of some power we have no children.
MEDEA: Have you a wife, or is there none to share your bed?
AEGEUS: There is. Yes, I am joined to my wife in marriage.
MEDEA: And what did Phoebus say to you about children?
AEGEUS: Words too wise for a mere man to guess their
meaning.
660 MEDEA: It is proper for me to be told the god's reply?
AEGEUS: It is. For sure what is needed is cleverness.
MEDEA: Then what was his message? Tell me, if I may hear.
AEGEUS: I am not to loosen the hanging foot of the wineskin . . .
MEDEA: Until you have done something, or reached some
country?
665 AEGEUS: Until I return again to my hearth and house.
MEDEA: And for what purpose have you journeyed to this
land?
AEGEUS: There is a man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.
MEDEA: A son of Pelops, they say, a most righteous man.
AEGEUS: With him I wish to discuss the reply of the god.
670 MEDEA: Yes. He is wise and experienced in such matters.
AEGEUS: And to me also the dearest of all my spear-friends.
MEDEA: Well, I hope you have good luck, and achieve your
will.
AEGEUS: But why this downcast eye of yours, and this pale
cheek?
MEDEA: O Aegeus, my husband has been the worst of all to me.
675 AEGEUS: What do you mean? Say clearly what has caused this
grief.
MEDEA: Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.
AEGEUS: What has he done? Tell me about it in clearer words.
MEDEA: He has taken a wife to his house, supplanting me.
AEGEUS: Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that.
680 MEDEA: Be sure he has. Once dear, I now am slighted by him.
AEGEUS: Did he fall in love? Or is he tired of your love?
MEDEA: He was greatly in love, this traitor to his friends.
AEGEUS: Then let him go, if, as you say, he is so bad.
MEDEA: A passionate love—for an alliance with the king.
685 AEGEUS: And who gave him his wife? Tell me the rest of it.
MEDEA: It was Creon, he who rules this land of Corinth.
AEGEUS: Indeed, Medea, your grief was understandable.
MEDEA: I am ruined. And there is more to come: I am
banished.

AEGEUS: Banished? By whom? Here you tell me of a new
wrong.

MEDEA: Creon drives me an exile from the land of Corinth. 690
AEGEUS: Does Jason consent? I cannot approve of this.
MEDEA: He pretends not to, but he will put up with it.
Ah, Aegeus, I beg and beseech you, by your beard
And by your knees I am making myself your suppliant,
695 Have pity on me, have pity on your poor friend,
And do not let me go into exile desolate,
But receive me in your land and at your very hearth.
So may your love, with God's help, lead to the bearing
Of children, and so may you yourself die happy.
700 You do not know what a chance you have come on here.
I will end your childlessness; and I will make you able
To beget children. The drugs I know can do this.
AEGEUS: For many reasons, woman, I am anxious to do
This favor for you. First, for the sake of the gods,
705 And then for the birth of children which you promise,
For in that respect I am entirely at my wits' end.
But this is my position: if you reach my land,
I, being in my rights, will try to befriend you.
But this much I must warn you of beforehand:
710 I shall not agree to take you out of this country;
But if you by yourself can reach my house, then you
Shall stay there safely. To none will I give you up
But from this land you must make your escape yourself,
For I do not wish to incur blame from my friends.
715 MEDEA: It shall be so. But, if I might have a pledge from you
For this, then I would have from you all I desire.
AEGEUS: Do you not trust me? What is it rangles with you?
MEDEA: I trust you, yes. But the house of Pelias hates me,
And so does Creon. If you are bound by this oath,
720 When they try to drag me from your land, you will not
Abandon me; but if our pact is only words,
With no oath to the gods, you will be lightly armed,
Unable to resist their summons. I am weak,
While they have wealth to help them and a royal house.
725 AEGEUS: You show much foresight for such negotiations.
Well, if you will have it so, I will not refuse.
For, both on my side this will be the safest way
To have some excuse to put forward to your enemies,
And for you it is more certain. You may name the gods.
730 MEDEA: Swear by the plain of Earth, and Helios, father
Of my father, and name together all the gods . . .
AEGEUS: That I will act or not act in what way? Speak.
MEDEA: That you yourself will never cast me from your land,
Nor, if any of my enemies should demand me,
735 Will you, in your life, willingly hand me over.
AEGEUS: I swear by the Earth, by the holy light of Helios,
By all the gods, I will abide by this you say.
MEDEA: Enough. And, if you fail, what shall happen to you?
AEGEUS: What comes to those who have no regard for heaven.
740 MEDEA: Go on your way. Farewell. For I am satisfied.
And I will reach your city as soon as I can,
Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end.

(AEGEUS goes out.)

CHORUS: May Hermes, god of travelers,
Escort you, Aegeus, to your home!
And may you have the things you wish
745 So eagerly; for you

Appear to me to be a generous man.

MEDEA: God, and God's daughter, justice, and light of Helios!

Now, friends, has come the time of my triumph over

750 My enemies, and now my foot is on the road.

Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.

For this man, Aegeus, has been like a harbor to me

In all my plans just where I was most distressed.

To him I can fasten the cable of my safety

755 When I have reached the town and fortress of Pallas.

And now I shall tell to you the whole of my plan.

Listen to these words that are not spoken idly.

I shall send one of my servants to find Jason

And request him to come once more into my sight.

760 And when he comes, the words I'll say will be soft ones.

I'll say that I agree with him, that I approve

The royal wedding he has made, betraying me.

I'll say it was profitable, an excellent idea.

But I shall beg that my children may remain here:

765 Not that I would live in a country that hates me

Children of mine to feel their enemies' insults,

But that by a trick I may kill the king's daughter.

For I will send the children with gifts in their hands

To carry to the bride, so as not to be banished—

770 A finely woven dress and a golden diadem.

And if she takes them and wears them upon her skin

She and all who touch the girl will die in agony;

Such poison will I lay upon the gifts I send.

But there, however, I must leave that account paid.

775 I weep to think of what a deed I have to do

Next after that; for I shall kill my own children.

My children, there is none who can give them safety.

And when I have ruined the whole of Jason's house,

780 I shall leave the land and flee from the murder of my

Dear children, and I shall have done a dreadful deed.

For it is not bearable to be mocked by enemies.

So it must happen. What profit have I in life?

I have no land, no home, no refuge from my pain.

My mistake was made the time I left behind me

785 My father's house, and trusted the words of a Greek,

Who, with heaven's help, will pay me the price for that.

For those children he had from me he will never

See alive again, nor will he on his new bride

Beget another child, for she is to be forced

790 To die a most terrible death by these my poisons.

Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited,

A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite,

One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;

For the lives of such persons are most remembered.

795 CHORUS: Since you have shared the knowledge of your plan
with us,

I both wish to help you and support the normal

Ways of mankind, and tell you not to do this thing.

MEDEA: I can do no other thing. It is understandable

For you to speak thus. You have not suffered as I have.

800 CHORUS: But can you have the heart to kill your flesh and
blood?

MEDEA: Yes, for this is the best way to wound my husband.

CHORUS: And you, too. Of women you will be most unhappy.

MEDEA: So it must be. No compromise is possible.

(She turns to the NURSE.)

Go, you, at once, and tell Jason to come to me.

You I employ on all affairs of greatest trust.

805

Say nothing of these decisions which I have made.

If you love your mistress, if you were born a woman.

CHORUS: From of old the children of Erechtheus are

Splendid, the sons of blessed gods. They dwell

In Athens' holy and unconquered land,

810

Where famous Wisdom feeds them and they pass gaily

Always through that most brilliant air where once, they say,

That golden Harmony gave birth to the nine

Pure Muses of Pieria.

And beside the sweet flow of Cephisus' stream,

815

Where Cypris sailed, they say, to draw the water,

And mild soft breezes breathed along her path,

And on her hair were flung the sweet-smelling garlands

Of flowers of roses by the Lovers, the companions

Of Wisdom, her escort, the helpers of men

820

In every kind of excellence.

How then can these holy rivers

Or this holy land love you,

Or the city find you a home,

You, who will kill your children,

825

You, not pure with the rest?

O think of the blow at your children

And think of the blood that you shed.

O, over and over I beg you,

By your knees I beg you do not

830

Be the murderess of your babes!

O where will you find the courage

Or the skill of hand and heart,

When you set yourself to attempt

A deed so dreadful to do?

835

How, when you look upon them,

Can you tearlessly hold the decision.

For murder? You will not be able,

When your children fall down and implore you,

You will not be able to dip

840

Steadfast your hand in their blood.

(Enter JASON, with attendants.)

JASON: I have come at your request. Indeed, although you are

Bitter against me, this you shall have: I will listen

To what new thing you want, woman, to get from me.

MEDEA: Jason, I beg you to be forgiving toward me

845

For what I said. It is natural for you to bear with

My temper, since we have had much love together.

I have talked with myself about this and I have

Reproached myself. "Fool" I said, "why am I so mad?"

Why am I set against those who have planned wisely?

850

Why make myself an enemy of the authorities

And of my husband, who does the best thing for me

By marrying royalty and having children who

Will be as brothers to my own? What is wrong with me?

855 Let me give up anger, for the gods are kind to me.
Have I not children, and do I not know that we
In exile from our country must be short of friends?"
When I considered this I saw that I had shown
Great lack of sense, and that my anger was foolish.
860 Now I agree with you. I think that you are wise
In having this other wife as well as me, and I
Was mad. I should have helped you in these plans of yours,
Have joined in the wedding, stood by the marriage bed,
Have taken pleasure in attendance on your bride.
865 But we women are what we are—perhaps a little
Worthless; and you men must not be like us in this,
Nor be foolish in return when we are foolish.
Now, I give in, and admit that then I was wrong.
I have come to a better understanding now.

(She turns toward the house.)

870 Children, come here, my children, come outdoors to us!
Welcome your father with me, and say goodbye to him,
And with your mother, who just now was his enemy,
Join again in making friends with him who loves us.

(Enter the CHILDREN, attended by the TUTOR.)

We have made peace, and all our anger is over.
875 Take hold of his right hand—O God, I am thinking
Of something which may happen in the secret future.
O children, will you just so, after a long life,
Hold out your loving arms at the grave? O children,
How ready to cry I am, how full of foreboding!
880 I am ending at last this quarrel with your father,
And, look my soft eyes have suddenly filled with tears.

CHORUS: And the pale tears have started also in my eyes.

O may the trouble not grow worse than now it is!

JASON: I approve of what you say. And I cannot blame you
885 Even for what you said before. It is natural.
For a woman to be wild with her husband when he
Goes in for secret love. But now your mind has turned
To better reasoning. In the end you have come to
The right decision, like the clever woman you are.
890 And of you, children, your father is taking care.
He has made, with God's help, ample provision for you.
For I think that a time will come when you will be
The leading people in Corinth with your brothers.
You must grow up. As to the future, your father
895 And those of the gods who love him will deal with that.
I want to see you, when you have become young men,
Healthy and strong, better men than my enemies.
Medea, why are your eyes all wet with pale tears?
Why is your cheek so white and turned away from me?

900 Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?

MEDEA: It is nothing. I was thinking about these children.

JASON: You must be cheerful. I shall look after them well.

MEDEA: I will be. It is not that I distrust your words,
But a woman is a frail thing, prone to crying.

905 JASON: But why then should you grieve so much for these
children?

MEDEA: I am their mother. When you prayed that they might live
I felt unhappy to think that these things will be.
But come, I have said something of the things I meant
To say to you, and now I will tell you the rest.

Since it is the king's will to banish me from here— 910
And for me, too, I know that this is the best thing,
Not to be in your way by living here or in
The king's way, since they think me ill-disposed to them—
I then am going into exile from this land;
But do you, so that you may have the care of them, 915
Beg Creon that the children may not be banished.
JASON: I doubt if I'll succeed, but still I'll attempt it.
MEDEA: Then you must tell your wife to beg from her father
That the children may be reprieved from banishment.
JASON: I will, and with her I shall certainly succeed. 920
MEDEA: If she is like the rest of us women, you will.
And I, too, will take a hand with you in this business,
For I will send her some gifts which are far fairer,
I am sure of it, than those which now are in fashion,
A finely woven dress and a golden diadem. 925
And the children shall present them. Quick, let one of you
Servants bring here to me that beautiful dress.

(One of her attendants goes into the house.)

She will be happy not in one way, but in a hundred,
Having so fine a man as you to share her bed,
And with this beautiful dress which Helius of old, 930
My father's father, bestowed on his descendants.

(Enter attendant carrying the poisoned dress and diadem.)

There, children, take these wedding presents in your hands.
Take them to the royal princess, the happy bride,
And give them to her. She will not think little of them.
JASON: No, don't be foolish, and empty your hands of these. 935
Do you think the palace is short of dresses to wear?
Do you think there is no gold there? Keep them, don't
give them

Away. If my wife considers me of any value,
She will think more of me than money, I am sure of it.

MEDEA: No, let me have my way. They say the gods themselves 940
Are moved by gifts, and gold does more with men than words.
Hers is the luck, her fortune that which god blesses;
She is young and a princess; but for my children's reprieve
I would give my very life, and not gold only.
945 Go children, go together to that rich palace,
Be suppliants to the new wife of your father,
My lady, beg her not to let you be banished.
And give her the dress—for this is of great importance,
That she should take the gift into her hand from yours.
950 Go, quick as you can. And bring your mother good news
By your success of those things which she longs to gain.

*(JASON goes out with his attendants, followed by the TUTOR and the
CHILDREN carrying the poisoned gifts.)*

CHORUS: Now there is no hope left for the children's lives.
Now there is none. They are walking already to murder.
The bride, poor bride, will accept the curse of the gold,
Will accept the bright diadem. 955
Around her yellow hair she will set that dress
Of death with her own hands.

The grace and the perfume and glow of the golden robe
Will charm her to put them upon her and wear the wreath,
And now her wedding will be with the dead below, 960
Into such a trap she will fall,

Poor thing, into such a fate of death and never
Escape from under that curse.

You, too, O wretched bridegroom, making your match
with kings,

965 You do not see that you bring
Destruction on your children and on her,
Your wife, a fearful death.
Poor soul, what a fall is yours!

970 In your grief, too, I weep, mother of little children,
You who will murder your own,
In vengeance for the loss of married love
Which Jason has betrayed
As he lives with another wife.

(Enter the TUTOR with the CHILDREN.)

TUTOR: Mistress, I tell you that these children are reprieved,
975 And the royal bride has been pleased to take in her hands
Your gifts. In that quarter the children are secure.
But come,

980 Why do you stand confused when you are fortunate?
Why have you turned round with your cheek away from me?
Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?

MEDEA: Oh! I am lost!

TUTOR: That word is not in harmony with my tidings.

MEDEA: I am lost, I am lost!

TUTOR: Am I in ignorance telling you
Of some disaster, and not the good news I thought?

985 MEDEA: You have told what you have told. I do not blame you.

TUTOR: Why then this downcast eye, and this weeping of tears?

MEDEA: Oh, I am forced to weep, old man. The gods and I,
I in a kind of madness, have contrived all this.

TUTOR: Courage! You, too, will be brought home by your
children.

990 MEDEA: Ah, before that happens I shall bring others home.

TUTOR: Others before you have been parted from their
children.

Mortals must bear in resignation their ill luck.

MEDEA: That is what I shall do. But go inside the house,
And do for the children your usual daily work.

(The TUTOR goes into the house. MEDEA turns to her CHILDREN.)

995 O children, O my children, you have a city,
You have a home, and you can leave me behind you,
And without your mother you may live there forever.
But I am going in exile to another land
Before I have seen you happy and taken pleasure in you,
1000 Before I have dressed your brides and made your marriage
beds

And held up the torch at the ceremony of wedding.
Oh, what a wretch I am in this my self-willed thought!
What was the purpose, children, for which I reared you?
For all my travail and wearing myself away?

1005 They were sterile, those pains I had in the bearing of you.
Oh surely once the hopes in you I had, poor me,
Were high ones: you would look after me in old age,
And when I died would deck me well with your own
hands;

A thing which all would have done. Oh but now it is gone,

Sad will be the life I'll lead and sorrowful for me.

And you will never see your mother again with

Your dear eyes, gone to another mode of living.

Why, children, do you look upon me with your eyes?

Why do you smile so sweetly that last smile of all?

Oh, Oh, what can I do? My spirit has gone from me,

Friends, when I saw that bright look in the children's eyes.

I cannot bear to do it. I renounce my plans

I had before. I'll take my children away from

This land. Why should I hurt their father with the pain

They feel, and suffer twice as much of pain myself?

No, no, I will not do it. I renounce my plans.

Ah, what is wrong with me? Do I want to let go

My enemies unhurt and be laughed at for it?

I must face this thing. Oh, but what a weak woman

Even to admit to my mind these soft arguments.

Children, go into the house. And he whom law forbids

To stand in attendance at my sacrifices,

Let him see to it. I shall not mar my handiwork.

Oh! Oh!

Do not, O my heart, you must not do these things!

Poor heart, let them go, have pity upon the children.

If they live with you in Athens they will cheer you.

No! By Hell's avenging furies it shall not be—

This shall never be, that I should suffer my children

To be the prey of my enemies' insolence.

Every way is it fixed. The bride will not escape.

No, the diadem is now upon her head, and she,

The royal princess, is dying in the dress, I know it.

But—for it is the most dreadful of roads for me

To tread, and them I shall send on a more dreadful still—

I wish to speak to the children.

(She calls the CHILDREN to her.)

Come, children, give

Me your hands, give your mother your hands to kiss them.

Oh the dear hands, and O how dear are these lips to me,

And the generous eyes and the bearing of my children!

I wish you happiness, but not here in this world.

What is here your father took. Oh how good to hold you!

How delicate the skin, how sweet the breath of children!

Go, go! I am no longer able, no longer

To look upon you. I am overcome by sorrow.

(The CHILDREN go into the house.)

I know indeed what evil I intend to do,

But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,

Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils.

(She goes out to the right, toward the royal palace.)

CHORUS: Often before

I have gone through more subtle reasons,

And have come upon questionings greater

Than a woman should strive to search out.

But we too have a goddess to help us

And accompany us into wisdom.

Not all of us. Still you will find

Among many women a few,

And our sex is not without learning.

This I say, that those who have never

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1065 In happiness have the advantage
Over those who are parents.
The childless, who never discover
Whether children turn out as a good thing:
Or as something to cause pain, are spared
1070 Many troubles in lacking this knowledge:
And those who have in their homes
The sweet presence of children, I see that their lives
Are all wasted away by their worries.
First they must think how to bring them up well and
1075 How to leave them something to live on.
And then after this whether all their toil
Is for those who will turn out good or bad,
Is still an unanswered question.
And of one more trouble, the last of all,
1080 That is common to mortals I tell.
For suppose you have found them enough for their living,
Suppose that the children have grown into youth
And have turned out good, still, if God so wills it,
Death will away with your children's bodies,
1085 And carry them off into Hades.
What is our profit, then, that for the sake of
Children the gods should pile upon mortals
After all else
This most terrible grief of all?

(Enter MEDEA, from the spectators' right.)

1090 MEDEA: Friends, I can tell you that for long I have waited
For the event. I stare toward the place from where
The news will come. And now, see one of Jason's servants
Is on his way here, and that labored breath of his
Shows he has tidings for us, and evil tidings.

(Enter, also from the right, the MESSENGER.)

1095 MESSENGER: Medea, you who have done such a dreadful thing,
So outrageous, run for your life, take what you can,
A ship to bear you hence or chariot on land.

MEDEA: And what is the reason deserves such flight as this?

MESSENGER: She is dead, only just now, the royal princess,

1100 And Creon dead, too, her father, by your poisons.

MEDEA: The finest words you have spoken. Now and hereafter
I shall count you among my benefactors and friends.

MESSENGER: What! Are you right in the mind? Are you not mad,
Woman? The house of the king is outraged by you.

1105 Do you enjoy it? Not afraid of such doings?

MEDEA: To what you say I on my side have something too
To say in answer. Do not be in a hurry, friend,
But speak. How did they die? You will delight me twice
As much again if you say they died in agony.

1110 MESSENGER: When those two children, born of you, had
entered in,
Their father with them, and passed into the bride's house,
We were pleased, we slaves who were distressed by your
wrongs.

All through the house we were talking of but one thing,
How you and your husband had made up your quarrel.
1115 Some kissed the children's hands and some their yellow
hair.

Our mistress, whom we honor now instead of you,
Before she noticed that your two children were there,
Was keeping her eye fixed eagerly on Jason. 1120
Afterwards, however, she covered up her eyes,
Her cheek paled, and she turned herself away from him,
So disgusted was she at the children's coming there.
But your husband tried to end the girl's bad temper,
And said "You must not look unkindly on your friends. 1125
Cease to be angry. Turn your head to me again.
Have as your friends the same ones as your husband has.
And take these gifts, and beg your father to relieve
These children from their exile. Do it for my sake."
She, when she saw the dress, could not restrain herself. 1130
She agreed with all her husband said, and before
He and the children had gone far from the palace,
She took the gorgeous robe and dressed herself in it,
And put the golden crown around her curly locks,
And arranged the set of the hair in a shining mirror, 1135
And smiled at the lifeless image of herself in it.
Then she rose from her chair and walked about the room,
With her gleaming feet stepping most soft and delicate,
All overjoyed with the present. Often and often
She would stretch her foot out straight and look along it. 1140
But after that it was a fearful thing to see.
The color of her face changed, and she staggered back,
She ran, and her legs trembled, and she only just
Managed to reach a chair without falling flat down.
An aged woman servant who, I take it, thought 1145
This was some seizure of Pan or another god,
Cried out "God bless us," but that was before she saw
The white foam breaking through her lips and her rolling
The pupils of her eyes and her face all bloodless.
Then she raised a different cry from that "God bless us," 1150
A huge shriek, and the women ran, one to the king,
One to the newly wedded husband to tell him
What had happened to his bride; and with frequent sound
The whole of the palace rang as they went running.
One walking quickly round the course of a race-track 1155
Would now have turned the bend and be close to the goal,
When she, poor girl, opened her shut and speechless eye,
And with a terrible groan she came to herself.
For a twofold pain was moving up against her.
The wreath of gold that was resting around her head 1160
Let forth a fearful stream of all-devouring fire,
And the finely woven dress your children gave to her,
Was fastening on the unhappy girl's fine flesh.
She leapt up from the chair, and all on fire she ran,
Shaking her hair now this way and now that, trying 1165
To hurl the diadem away; but fixedly
The gold preserved its grip, and, when she shook her hair,
Then more and twice as fiercely the fire blazed out.
Till, beaten by her fate, she fell down to the ground,
Hard to be recognized except by a parent. 1170
Neither the setting of her eyes was plain to see;
Nor the shapeliness of her face. From the top of
Her head there oozed our blood and fire mixed together.
Like the drops on pine-bark, so the flesh from her bones
Dropped away, torn by the hidden fang of the poison. 1175
It was a fearful sight; and terror held us all
From touching the corpse. We had learned from what had

Came suddenly to the house, and fell upon the corpse,
 And at once cried out and folded his arms about her,
 And kissed her and spoke to her, saying, "O my poor child,
 What heavenly power has so shamefully destroyed you?
 And who has set me here like an ancient sepulcher,
 Deprived of you? O let me die with you, my child!"
 And when he had made an end of his wailing and crying,
 Then the old man wished to raise himself to his feet;
 But, as the ivy clings to the twigs of the laurel,
 So he stuck to the fine dress, and he struggled fearfully.
 For he was trying to lift himself to his knee,
 And she was pulling him down, and when he rugged hard
 He would be ripping his aged flesh from his bones.
 At last his life was quenched, and the unhappy man
 Gave up the ghost, no longer could hold up his head.
 There they lie close, the daughter and the old father,
 Dead bodies, an event he prayed for in his tears.
 As for your interests, I will say nothing of them,
 For you will find your own escape from punishment.
 Our human life I think and have thought a shadow,
 And I do not fear to say that those who are held
 Wise among men and who search the reasons of things
 Are those who bring the most sorrow on themselves.
 For of mortals there is no one who is happy.
 If wealth flows in upon one, one may be perhaps
 Luckier than one's neighbor, but still not happy.

(Exit.)

CHORUS: Heaven, it seems, on this day has fastened many
 Evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them.
 Poor girl, the daughter of Creon, how I pity you
 And your misfortunes, you who have gone quite away
 To the house of Hades because of marrying Jason.

MEDEA: Women, my task is fixed: as quickly as I may
 To kill my children, and start away from this land,
 And not, by wasting time, to suffer my children
 To be slain by another hand less kindly to them.
 Force every way will have it they must die, and since
 This must be so, then I, their mother, shall kill them.
 Oh, arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back
 From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.
 Oh, come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the
 sword.

Take it, step forward to this bitter starting point,
 And do not be a coward, do not think of them,
 How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just for
 This one short day be forgetful of your children,
 Afterward weep; for even though you will kill them,
 They were very dear—Oh, I am an unhappy woman!

(With a cry she rushes into the house.)

CHORUS: O Earth, and the far shining
 Ray of the Sun, look down, look down upon
 This poor lost woman, look, before she raises
 The hand of murder against her flesh and blood.
 Yours was the golden birth from which
 She sprang, and now I fear divine
 Blood may be shed by men.

O heavenly light, hold back her hand,
 Check her, and drive from out the house
 The blood-begotten monster from the house of Hell!

Vain waste, your care of children;
 Was it in vain you bore the babes you loved,
 After you passed the inhospitable strait
 Between the dark blue rocks, Symplegades?
 O wretched one, how has it come,
 This heavy anger on your heart,
 This cruel bloody mind?
 For God from mortals asks a stern
 Price for the stain of kindred blood
 In like disaster falling on their homes.

(A cry from ONE OF THE CHILDREN is heard.)

CHORUS: Do you hear the cry, do you hear the children's cry?
 O you hard heart, O woman fated for evil!

ONE OF THE CHILDREN: (From within.) What can I do and how
 escape my mother's hands?

ANOTHER CHILD: (From within.) O my dear brother, I cannot tell.
 We are lost.

CHORUS: Shall I enter the house? Oh, surely I should
 Defend the children from murder.

A CHILD: (From within.) O help us, in God's name, for now we
 need your help.

Now, now we are close to it. We are trapped by the sword.

CHORUS: O your heart must have been made of rock or steel,
 You who can kill

With your own hand the fruit of your own womb.

Of one alone I have heard, one woman alone
 Of those of old who laid her hands on her children,
 Ino, sent mad by heaven when the wife of Zeus

Drove her out from her home and made her wander;
 And because of the wicked shedding of blood

Of her own children she threw
 Herself, poor wretch, into the sea and stepped away

Over the sea-cliff to die with her two children.
 What horror more can be? O women's love,

So full of trouble,
 How many evils have you caused already!

(Enter JASON, with attendants.)

JASON: You women, standing close in front of this dwelling,
 Is she, Medea, she who did this dreadful deed,
 Still in the house, or has she run away in flight?

For she will have to hide herself beneath the earth,
 Or raise herself on wings into the height of air,
 If she wishes to escape the royal vengeance.

Does she imagine that, having killed our rulers,
 She will herself escape uninjured from this house?

But I am thinking not so much of her as for
 The children—her the king's friends will make to suffer

For what she did. So I have come to save the lives
 Of my boys, in case the royal house should harm them

While taking vengeance for their mother's wicked deed.

CHORUS: O Jason, if you but knew how deeply you are
 Involved in sorrow, you would not have spoken so.

JASON: What is it? That she is planning to kill me also?

CHORUS: Your children are dead, and by their own mother's
 hand.

JASON: What! That is it? O woman, you have destroyed me!

CHORUS: You must make up your mind your children are no
 more.

JASON: Where did she kill them? Was it here or in the house?

CHORUS: Open the gates and there you will see them murdered.

JASON: Quick as you can unlock the doors, men, and undo
The fastenings and let me see this double evil,
My children dead and her—Oh her I will repay.

(His attendants rush to the door. MEDEA appears above the house in a chariot drawn by dragons. She has the dead bodies of the CHILDREN with her.)

MEDEA: Why do you batter these gates and try to unbar them,
Seeking the corpses and for me who did the deed?
You may cease your trouble, and, if you have need of me,
Speak, if you wish. You will never touch me with your hand,
Such a chariot has Helius, my father's father,
Given me to defend me from my enemies.

JASON: You hateful thing, you woman most utterly loathed
By the gods and me and by all the race of mankind,
You who have had the heart to raise a sword against
Your children, you, their mother, and left me childless—
You have done this, and do you still look at the sun
And at the earth, after these most fearful doings?
I wish you dead. Now I see it plain, though at that time
I did not, when I took you from your foreign home
And brought you to a Greek house, you, an evil thing,
A traitress to your father and your native land.
The gods hurled the avenging curse of yours on me:
For your own brother you slew at your own hearthside,
And then came aboard that beautiful ship, the Argo.

And that was your beginning. When you were married
To me, your husband, and had borne children to me,
For the sake of pleasure in the bed you killed them.
There is no Greek woman who would have dared such
deeds.

Out of all those whom I passed over and chose you
To marry instead, a bitter destructive match,
A monster, not a woman, having a nature
Wildier than that of Scylla in the Tuscan sea.
Ah! no, not if I had ten thousand words of shame
Could I sting you. You are naturally so brazen.
Go, worker in evil, stained with your children's blood.
For me remains to cry aloud upon my fate,
Who will get no pleasure from my newly wedded love,
And the boys whom I begot and brought up, never
Shall I speak to them alive. Oh, my life is over!

MEDEA: Long would be the answer which I might have made to
These words of yours, if Zeus the father did not know
How I have treated you and what you did to me.
No, it was not to be that you should scorn my love,
And pleasantly live your life through, laughing at me;
Nor would the princess, nor he who offered the match,
Creon, drive me away without paying for it.
So now you may call me a monster, if you wish,
A Scylla housed in the caves of the Tuscan sea.
I too, as I had to, have taken hold of your heart.

JASON: You feel the pain yourself. You share in my sorrow.

MEDEA: Yes, and my grief is gain when you cannot mock it.

JASON: O children, what a wicked mother she was to you!

MEDEA: They died from a disease they caught from their
father.

JASON: I tell you it was not my hand that destroyed them.

MEDEA: But it was your insolence, and your virgin wedding.

JASON: And just for the sake of that you chose to kill them.

MEDEA: Is love so small a pain, do you think, for a woman?

JASON: For a wise one, certainly. But you are wholly evil.

MEDEA: The children are dead. I say this to make you suffer.

JASON: The children, I think, will bring down curses on you.

MEDEA: The gods know who was the author of this sorrow.

JASON: Yes, the gods know indeed, they know your loathsome
heart.

MEDEA: Hate me. But I tire of your barking bitterness.

JASON: And I of yours. It is easier to leave you.

MEDEA: How then? What shall I do? I long to leave you too.

JASON: Give me the bodies to bury and to mourn them.

MEDEA: No, that I will not. I will bury them myself,
Bearing them to Hera's temple on the promontory;

So that no enemy may evilly treat them

By tearing up their grave. In this land of Corinth

I shall establish a holy feast and sacrifice

Each year for ever to atone for the blood guilt.

And I myself go to the land of Erechtheus

To dwell in Aegeus' house, the son of Pandion.

While you, as is right, will die without distinction,

Struck on the head by a piece of the Argo's timber,

And you will have seen the bitter end of my love.

JASON: May a Fury for the children's sake destroy you,
And justice, Requirer of blood.

MEDEA: What heavenly power lends an ear
To a breaker of oaths, a deceiver?

JASON: Oh, I hate you, murderess of children.

MEDEA: Go to your palace. Bury your bride.

JASON: I go, with two children to mourn for.

MEDEA: Not yet do you feel it. Wait for the future.

JASON: Oh, children I loved!

MEDEA: I loved them, you did not.

JASON: You loved them, and killed them.

MEDEA: To make you feel
pain.

JASON: Oh, wretch that I am, how I long

To kiss the dear lips of my children!

MEDEA: Now you would speak to them, now you would kiss
them.

Then you rejected them.

JASON: Let me, I beg you,
Touch my boys delicate flesh.

MEDEA: I will not. Your words are all wasted.

JASON: O God, do you hear it, this persecution,

These my sufferings from this hateful

Woman, this monster, murderess of children?

Still what I can do that I will do:

I will lament and cry upon heaven,

Calling the gods to bear me witness

How you have killed my boys and prevent me from

Touching their bodies or giving them burial.

I wish I had never begot them to see them

Afterward slaughtered by you.

CHORUS: Zeus in Olympus is the overseer

Of many doings. Many things the gods

Achieve beyond our judgment. What we thought

Is not confirmed and what we thought not god

Contrives. And so it happens in this story.