

Euripides' take on the classic "Revenge Drama". What does it feel like if you're a man, a hero even, and your ex-wife takes her revenge on you by obliterating your future?

MEDEIA

By Euripides

Translated by Andrew Wilson

For JULIET

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This play contains strong language from the start, descriptions of violence, adult themes, and scenes some people may find upsetting.

Characters

Trophos “Nurse” in the sense that she wet-nursed Medeia as a baby, and has been her attendant and companion ever since. Not a Greek. Elderly.

Paidagogos “Tutor”. Responsible for looking after, training and educating Medeia and Iason.s sons. They are probably about seven years old, and have passed beyond the care of a trophos. Elderly – as he was paidagogos probably to Iason.

Medeia Daughter of Aeetes, king of Kolchhis at the eastern end of the Black Sea – now in Georgia. Clearly “foreign”. Married to Iason, who she helped steal the Golden Fleece from her father. She escaped with him to Greece, where she tried unsuccessfully to help Iason reclaim Iolkos (now Volos) his family kingdom. Her “help” involved the murder of Iason’s uncle Pelias – hence the couple are *personae non gratae* in Iolkos. Early thirties?

Khoros 15 local women of Korinthos. Twenties and Thirties.

Kreon King of Korinthos (Corinth), father of the princess who is marrying Iason. Sixties.

Iason “Jason”. Sent by his uncle Pelias to fetch the Golden Fleece from a distant land – a ruse to keep him from claiming kingship of Iolkos (modern Volos). He got it, with Medeia’s help – but did not become king of Iolkos. Hence he came as a refugee with Medeia to Korinthos, where he has ingratiated himself with the royal family, and divorced Medeia to marry the (unnamed) daughter of the king. Forties.

Aegeus son of Pandion, king of Athens. He’s on his way home from the Oracle at Delphi, which he has consulted about his childlessness. He’s travelled via Korinthos, because he’s going to see his old friend Pittheus, king of Troizen, whom he hopes might understand the oracle’s answer. Fifties.

Angelos “Messenger”. One of Iason’s domestic slaves, who is a witness to the deaths of the princess (unnamed in the play) and her father, king Kreon.

Pronunciation note: Medeia = meh’ – day – uh; Iason = ee – ah ‘- son; Pelion, the mountain = Peh’ lee-on; Pelias, the king of Iolkos = Peh- lee’- arse; Kreon – not crayon! Kreh’ – own, with short ‘eh’; Aegeus = Aye’ – gewss.

*The names must **not** sound familiar – but alien, as if the story is happening in a world which is strange to us (it is!). We should be struck by the differences from our world, but then amazed by the similarities to it.*

Proper names are kept Greek, and alien sounding. Hellas, not Greece , Hellene, not Greek.

Text is mainly Diggle’s OCT.

The verse should not be ignored and treated as if prose. The blank verse is part of the alienation effect (Verfremdungseffekt). Actors should always follow the natural stress of the words, however, but be aware that every line has only the 5 stressed syllables – a 6th will sometimes form the 1st beat of the next line. Choral odes should ideally be sung – it’s important for the meaning to come across, and not be obscured by music.

PROLOGUE

Scene: outside a modest house in Corinth. An elderly lady comes out.

TROPHOS

How much I wish that bloody boat had not
Scraped through those black ship-crushing Rocks. I wish
The Argo had never reached our land of Kolkhis;
I wish that bloody pine-tree on the slopes
Of Pelion had never been cut down
And crafted into oars. The pick of Hellas
Then could not have rowed away to fetch
That Golden Fleece for Pelias. And she,
My lady Medeia would not have sailed
On it to those grim towers of Iolkos, Besotted
with her love for Iason.
And she would not have made Pelias's
Innocent daughters kill their father, and
She would not now be living here today
With a husband and her boys in Korinthos.
She was popular with the people here,
At first, and she tried hard to do what's right
By Iason. A wife who has no 'differences'
With her husband can be sure she'll stay safe.
But now everyone is an enemy,
Her love's been dealt a fatal blow. For now
He has betrayed his own children as well
As my lady, Iason has. He's bedded
A royal, daughter of Kreon, the king.
Poor Medeia, so shamed and insulted!
She's in a frenzy, mad about his oath
Betrayed, the broken contract, the solemn
Commitments dishonoured. She calls upon

The gods as witnesses to Iason's
Cold treachery. She will not eat. She just
Lies there, making her body suffer pain
To punish herself. All day long and every
Day she is the same sad mess of tears;
Since first she learned about the wrong her man
Had done her. She just sprawls face-down, she will
Not lift her head. When friends try to get through
To her, they might as well be talking to a stone
Or to the waves on the seashore. She cannot
Hear them. Sometimes she just turns her head
Away – how pale she looks! - hating herself
And weeping for her father whom she loved,
Her land, and her home she betrayed to run Off
with a man who now despises her.
It's all gone bad, she knows the bitter fate
She chose when she abandoned her homeland.
She hates her children; cannot stand the sight Of
them. I fear she's got some dreadful scheme
In mind. A woman such as her commands respect.
A man who makes a foe of her will not
Be celebrating victory without a fight.
But here's the boys, fresh from their run: they know
Nothing of what is in their mother's mind.
The young don't often notice others' pain!

[A man comes running towards the house, puffing a bit. He's followed by two boys, Medea's sons. They've all been running or playing some kind of sport. He's their trainer and personal tutor. As fellow slaves, they indulge in routine banter with each other]

PAIDAGOGOS

Hail, ancient one! My lady's prize antique!

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Why are you loitering out here in tears?
Wallowing in self-pity? While you leave
Medeia all alone? Is this allowed?

TROPHOS

So, it's the creaky old retainer who
Iason keeps to school his sons!
Good slaves are sympathetic when bad things
Befall their masters. I was overwhelmed
By what my lady's suffering, I felt
I had to tell the world what pain she's in.

PAIDAGOGOS

She has not stopped her wretched moaning, then?

TROPHOS

It must be nice to be like you. Not yet.
She's only just begun. There's more to come.

PAIDAGOGOS

How stupid! [*as Trophos looks upset by the word*] Said with all respect to her.
[*Mysteriously*] But If she really knew what's still to come ...

TROPHOS

Don't patronise me, fool. What do you mean?

PAIDAGOGOS

Nothing at all! Sorry I am I spoke.

TROPHOS

Don't keep me in the dark. Sweetheart, we're slaves
The both of us. I'll not tell anyone.
That's what you need to hear before you speak.

PAIDAGOGOS

I was pretending not to listen, but
I overheard someone ... I'd gone to, where
The old boys sit and play at draughts. you know,
The Fountain of Peirene ... he let slip ...

[Pay – reh' - neh]

These boys and their mother ... the orders were ...
Would be deported from Korinthos, by
An edict of Kreon, the king. But if
This news is true or false, I do not know.
I really hope for their sake it is not.

TROPHOS

Iason would let this happen to his boys?
We know he's quarrelled with their mother, but ...?

PAIDAGOGOS

Old ties make way for new! He is
This family's friend no more, is Iason.

TROPHOS

We're drowning. There's a new flood come, and still
The last one's water has yet to subside.

PAIDAGOGOS

Listen. Medeia must not be informed.
Keep your mouth shut. No word to anyone.

TROPHOS

That's your papa, boys, so now you can see
What sort of man your father is. A total ...
Never you mind. I know my place. But he
Is proved a traitor to the ones who loved him.

PAIDAGOGOS

Surprised? Who does not put their own needs first?
It's human nature. Lure of sex trumps all
Affection for these boys of his. It's clear.

TROPHOS

Inside, boys. It's all going to be fine.

[As they move towards the house, to the Paidagogos]

You must keep them apart, as far away
As possible: don't let them near their mother,

In the state she's in. I have already caught
Her staring at them like an angry bull, as if
She's planning ...something... She'll go on raging.
As well I know, until she's found a target
To focus on. Let's hope for all our sakes
She hits her enemies, and not her friends.

[Hysterical screams are heard from inside the house.]

MEDEIA [offstage]

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I just can't bear it. Too much pain! Too much!
I want it all to end. I want to be dead!

TROPHOS

That's what I mean. My boys, my precious ones,
Your mother's working her emotions up,
Building up her anger. Quick! Get inside.
Don't let her see you. Don't go near.
Keep well away! She's like a wild creature, Watch
out! Beware! She hates the world, her mind's
Out of control. Go now! Quick! Quick! Get in!

[The boys go inside, with the paidagogos]

A mighty storm is on its way. Lightning
Is due to strike. There'll be a cloudburst soon.
What will she do – a woman with such pride,
With such emotions, hurt so fatally?

[A terrifying scream is heard]

MEDEIA [offstage]

Intolerable! Intolerable suffering!
I have a right to scream, to yell, to shout it to the world.
You children are done for, finished.
They hate your mother – all of them, your father most of all.
Fuck them, fuck the whole fucking family.

TROPHOS

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Their father's act
Was despicable –what has it to do
With your two sons? Why do you hate them so?
Dear boys. I pray it will not happen. Please,
Please god I'm wrong in what my fears foretell.
She's a princess, do not forget. Royals
Are used to giving orders, not to being
Told what they must do. It's very hard
For a princess, once she's unleashed her passion,
To rein it in once more, restore control.
Living with folks who're like yourself is best.
I'd rather mix with ordinary people,
And grow old, safe and sound with them in peace.
To be a normal person – that not only
Sounds just right, you live a better life
From day to day. There's no advantage comes
With having more. More trouble's all you get,
When some god picks on you and takes offence.

PARODOS.

[The KHOROS enter. They are local women, friends of Medeia.]

KHOROS

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I heard a scream. I heard a shout.
The Asian girl, there is no doubt
She's not calmed down. That's no surprise
From right outside, I heard her cries.
This family's pain affects me too
Medeia's a good friend and true.

TROPHOS

This house exists no more. It's gone.
He's absent, in a royal bed,

She's in her room wasting away.

Not one of us who love her so

Can say a thing to comfort her.

MEDEIA [*within*]

[*She screams*] My head! I feel

a lightning bolt Is splitting it.

Why am I here?

I want to leave it all behind,

Say no to life, give up and die.

KHOROS

Do you hear her? Gods, life-giving powers,

Zeus, Earth, and Light? The song of pain A

wife, a woman shamed, sings out?

[*They turn to call to Medeia inside the house*]

So eager to lie in the bed

Which others dread, the bed of death!

Who but a crazy person seeks

To end her life before it's time?

Please! No more talk like this, no more!

Your husband fancies someone new?

No need to tear him limb from limb!

The gods are on your side, and they

Will make sure justice will be done.

Why make yourself sick weeping for a man?

MEDEIA [*within*]

Themis, goddess of Justice! Law!

And Artemis! You goddesses who guard

The innocent, and who make sure

That women get the help they need.

Well, are you watching? Can't you see

How I am suffering? Abused,

Despite the promise that he made,
The oath he swore to me? That man,
That piece of excrement, that turd,
My husband? I just want to see
Them both, him and his sweetheart,
And the palace where they screw
Reduced to smithereens, to dust,
To pay for all the wrong they did
To me. My home! My native land!
My father! I abandoned you ...
I killed my brother, did that thing - Why?
Why I ask myself? For what?

TROPHOS

You hear now what she's saying, how she calls
Upon Themis, and Zeus? On Zeus, who is
The guarantor of oaths and promises Men
make? There's not the slightest chance
My lady will cool down, or quench her wrath.

KHOROS

Perhaps if she came out where we could see her
And talk to her, she might tone down her rage This
rage that's eating at her heart and soul?
I'm always there for friends. I'm keen to help.
Won't you go in and ask her to come out?
Tell her we are her friends, but hurry, please!
She might do something bad to those indoors.
Pain like hers can lead to who knows what.

TROPHOS

I'll do it. But I fear I won't persuade her.
I'll make an effort – worth a try at least.
But. The looks she gives us slaves! She's like

A lioness with new-born cubs, or else
She eyes us like a bull about to charge,
If one of us should dare approach, or try
To speak or tell her what it is we fear.
You'd not be wrong to say that folks of old
Were stupid and lacked common sense – those who
Created songs for parties, feasts, and times
Of joy and happiness, but no one thought
Of using music or sweet sounds to stop The
hateful misery of human pain.
The pain which ruins families, and brings
Them tragedy and death. And yet music
Could be much better used to heal our woes.
What need of music after dining well?
No point! You're full, you're happy anyway.

KHOROS

I've been hearing sounds, shrill piercing sounds, her voice
Denouncing him, the traitor to her bed,
Her non-husband, and calling out to Zeus'
Daughter, Themis, for Justice, to uphold
The oath that dragged her from her home to Hellas,
A land unknown – the secret journey which
She made then in the dark, escaping by
The narrow passage through the Bosphoros.

FIRST EPISODE

[The doors open, and Medeia strides confidently out. Her demeanour is quite unlike what we've been expecting. She's calm and totally reasonable. She's attended by two female slaves]

MEDEIA

No need to talk behind my back, my dears:
I've come to face you. Some people **are** snobs,

It's true: maybe behind closed doors, though often
Quite brazenly. But others are labelled
Stuck-up because they just prefer to keep
Themselves to themselves - it's unfair. No one
Looks past the stereotype - they don't know you,
But one look is enough for them to know they hate you.
What did I ever do to them? Someone
Like me, an immigrant, tries to fit in,
It's obvious. Even the locals must Make
efforts to conform - I don't object. This
new predicament comes as a shock.
It's shattered me. My life is over, friends,
Life without joy is living death. My husband
Was my life - he knows he was. But now
He's proved himself the lowest man alive.
We women would be better off as cattle,
Than as we are - a lowly subspecies
Of the human race. For first - at great expense –
We buy ourselves a husband – what then is
A dowry if it's not a down-payment
On marriage? - but then **he** owns **us**, of course!
Especially our bodies! Thus two wrongs
Make a worse wrong. And secondly, the big
Question - will the man we get be all right, or
A total write-off? We can't rid ourselves
Of him, it's not respectable; we can't
Refuse him, either, it's not possible.
Someone like me, not trained up in your ways,
A stranger to your culture and traditions,
Needs magic powers to keep a husband sweet,
In bed, especially. And if our man's

Not violent, and patiently endures
The chore of wedlock – we're the envy of
Our friends! But If he's something else – then death
Would be a better fate. A man who's bored
Of what's available at home, can find
A welcome somewhere else. A woman, though,
Can only have one source of comfort. Men
Say that we live a life of ease at home
All day, while they go off to war. They do
Not understand. For me, I'd rather hold
A shield in line of battle, with my mates,
Three times than have to go through childbirth once.
The rules are not the same for you and me.
We are not equal. You have this city,
A family home, you can enjoy your life,
Spend time with friends. But I am on my own, Stateless,
and violated by my husband.
I'm loot, I'm plunder from a foreign land.
I have no mother, no brother, no kin
To ask to help me in my desperate state.
What I need now from you is only this.
Your silence. If some plan is found to make
My husband pay for these bad things he's done,
Say nothing. Women are timid creatures,
Most of the time. War, weapons, make us scared.
But if someone defiles our marriage bed,
We'll want his blood as much as any man.
KHOROS
I'll do it. You have justice on your side
Medeia. You should punish your husband.
You're in such agony from what he's done.

I understand.

[The king, Kreon, is seen approaching, with numerous attendants]

But that's king Kreon I

See on his way. Now he'll reveal your fate.

KREON

You there, Medeia, sullen sour-puss fuming

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Because her husband chose to leave her! I've

Ordered you off my land – you are banished!

And take your brace of brats with you. There can

Be no appeal. I will myself enforce

The judgment I have given. I shall not

Be budging from this spot right here, until

You've been deported from this land of ours,

And safely lodged outside our frontiers.

MEDEIA

Aiai! *[a scream of rage]*

[to herself] I see my life of pain and suffering is done.

My enemies now have the wind full in

Their sails. Not even the most skilful helmsman Could

change the ship's course now – it's headed

Straight for the rocks. I still must have my say, though:

[to Kreon] What is the offence for which you banish me?

KREON

I fear you. Let's not beat about the bush.

I fear you'll do my daughter fatal harm.

There are many reasons why I feel this way:

You're clever and you have the skill to plan

And execute a wicked deed. You're angry,

Because your husband left an empty bed.

I hear reports of how you mutter threats,

That you're concocting some fatal mischief
Involving bride and bridegroom and what's more
The father of the bride. I'm getting in
My own retaliation first. I'd rather Make
you my enemy today, than weaken
And tomorrow pay the price of leniency.

MEDEIA

Pheu! Pheu! *[cries of rage and frustration]*
So once again it is my reputation, That
harms me and has me condemned,
And, Kreon, damages me beyond belief.
No one who's born intelligent should ever
Have their children taught to excel, go past
The average or display their cleverness!
Some disadvantages are obvious:
Apart from those, among their peers
They excite so much hate and prejudice.
If you apply fresh insight to a problem,
The ignorant question your knowledge,
And undermine your expertise. While those
Who think they're clever and have brains Will
vilify you, if you publicly
Are seen as brighter than they are. I know
All this from harsh experience, since I
Am clever and a woman too. Some envy
Me, while others find me 'difficult' –
Perhaps I'm not quite wise enough! But you,
You fear me! Why? That something I may do
Could spoil your family harmony?
That's not my style, don't be afraid of me,
I'm no opponent of the monarchy!

In fact, how **have** you wronged me? All you did
Was give your daughter to the one your heart
Told you was right! It's true I hate my husband:
But you acted in good faith, I am sure.
Enjoy your wedding, and good luck to you. Let
me stay, please, here in this land. I promise
I'll say no more about my grievances:
Your argument has won the day. I yield!

KREON

Your words sound reassuring; deep inside though
You're up to something! I still don't trust you.
In fact, I trust you much less than before.
Man or woman, the quiet ones are deadlier!
Much easier when passion's on display.
Leave now! Chop chop! Go! No more arguments!
You have been ruled a hostile presence here.
It's done. No rhetoric of yours can change
My mind and let an enemy remain.

[Medeia falls to her knees.]

MEDEIA

No!
I'm on my knees! Don't spoil your daughter's wedding!

KREON

You're wasting words. You'll never persuade me.

MEDEIA

Just throw me out? Ignore my prayers? No shame?

KREON

I have a choice. My family or you!

MEDEIA

My home, my country, how I miss you now!

KREON

I must protect **my** country – and my daughter too.

MEDEIA

Love! What huge problems you create for men!

KREON

For some, I see, it does, but not for all.

MEDEIA

Zeus! Can't you see who is to blame in this?

KREON

Shoo!

Out of my way. You've bothered me too long.

MEDEIA

Bother! Bother? To you that's all this is?

KREON

Men! Now! This is an order. Take her off!

[Kreon's men grab her]

MEDEIA *[as she struggles]*

No need for force! Just listen to me, please.

KREON

You are obstructing justice still, it seems.

MEDEIA

I will go. There is no question that I won't.

KREON

What then? You should not still be here! Remove her!

MEDEIA

Just let me stay today, that's all my plea,

To pack, plan out our move, prepare Things

for the boys. Their father will not help; He

won't exert himself to keep them safe.

Be kind to them. You've children of your own.

You love them? Then be good to mine as well.

I'm tough – I will survive my banishment.

But they must share it – that's what makes me weep.

KREON

I am a king, but not a natural tyrant.

Softheartedness has ruined me before.

And now, my dear, I know I am about

To make the same mistake again. However,

You shall get what you want. But let me say

That if tomorrow's holy dawn still sees

You and your children here within my lands

You will be killed. This is my final word.

[So stay your extra day, if stay you must:

Not time enough to make my fears come true.]

KHOROS

Poor wretched creature, what a fate

Awaits you, sad victim of hate.

Where will you go? Is there a friend

A place, a home to bring an end

To all your pain? Someone to save

You from the coming tidal wave?

MEDEIA

It's a complete disaster. Who'll deny it?

But do not for an instant think that things

Will stay this way. The Games will soon begin:

The newly-weds will meet their match, and their

In-laws along with them will taste defeat. Do you

think I would have crawled to him, unless It was

a cunning ruse to let me win?

Would I have soiled my hands by touching him?

Would I have even spoken to the man?

But he was taken in, the stupid fool;

He could have thwarted all my plans if he'd

Deported me – but no, he’s let me stay
For one more day, and that is quite enough:
Three enemies I shall make corpses of – The
father and the daughter and my husband.
I have in mind a thousand ways for them To die:
My friends, I don’t know which to choose!
Should I just torch the marital home, d’you think?
Or sneak inside the house while they’re asleep
And with a dagger stab them in the guts?
There’s only one thing stops me. If I’m caught
While breaking in – or in the act: I’m dead.
And how my enemies will laugh at me!
The simplest way is best, which is the one That
comes most naturally to those like me,
Who’re cunning. I’ll just poison them. That’s it!
OK, they’re dead. What then? Where could I go?
Who’d welcome **me**, give me asylum, and A
place to live, guarantee my safety?
No one. I’ll have to wait awhile maybe.
Perhaps there’ll come someone in shining armour
To save me. If he does, I’ll go through with
My stealthy murder plot. But if no help
Appears, and I’m deported without hope,
I’ll screw my courage up and then I’ll grab
A sword and kill them. If I die, so what?
By my own goddess, Hecate, for whom [Heh cat’ air]
I have a private altar in my home,
My inspiration, partner in my work,
I swear no enemy of mine, can pierce
The very inmost essence of my being,
And hope to get away with it unscathed.

Their marriage? I shall sour and poison it,
Its bitterness shall make them truly sick,
Sick they're together, sick they exiled me.
Come on, Medeia! Summon all your skill,
Your science and your organising brain!
Into battle! Be brave! Don't fear the test!
Your situation's clear. You can't accept
The mocking laughter of the seed of Sisyphos,
Loving it now Iason's one of them.
Your father was royal, your grandfather's
The Sun in heaven! Remember who you are!
We are women, and by nature not that good
At being good. But when there comes the test
Of being bad – we're experts, quite the best.

[siss' -oo -foss]

FIRST STASIMON**KHOROS**

Downhill no longer rivers flow,
And where did all tradition go?
It's men, not women, you can't trust
When god-sworn oaths just turn to dust.
Now all our world will be reversed
And women's life no more be cursed.
The female sex will be renowned;
New praise for women will be found.

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Let's scrap then those old-fashioned rhymes
Obsessing with our female crimes.
There's been no woman poet's voice:
Apollo - male god! – made that choice.
Or else we'd have a hundred verses

Condemning men with women's curses.

Our story's not a mystery

We too are famed in history!

Madly in love, you left your shore,

Your home, to brave the Black Sea's roar.

To live with strangers; and the cost

Has been your marriage – now you've lost

Your man, your bed, you're forced to flee,

Poor wretch, from here, a refugee.

Now oaths are broken. Hellas' shame

Revealed. Flown now is her good name.

Poor love, it's sadly all in vain

There's no way to escape your pain.

A new queen has your husband wed:

She rules the roost, not just the bed.

SECOND EPISODE

[Enter Iason. He gets straight to the point.]

IASON

Irrational anger, as I have observed

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Often enough, is hard to battle with.

You had a chance to make this land your home –

All that was needed was just to accept The

Authorities' decisions graciously.

But like a fool you sounded off, and so

You've been deported. I don't mind at all!

Go on abusing Iason if you wish.

But as for what you've said about the royal

Family! Well! Be thankful all you got Was
banishment. I tried to calm them down And
plead with them to let you stay. But no!
You would not stop your senseless slandering.
Hence your expulsion from their land.
Nevertheless, despite all that you've done, I've
come, I won't let down a friend in need.
I have your interests at heart, my dear.
I want to make sure that you and the boys
Are not pushed out without some cash,
And are supplied with everything you need.
Exile can be a very awkward time,
And even though I know you hate my guts,
I still refuse to bear you any grudge.

MEDEIA

You spineless rat! To do full justice to
Your cowardice I'd need a stronger word.
So you are here. You've come. You've shown your face.
The enemy I hate the most. It is
Not guts, it's nothing brave or bold
To look a friend you have betrayed straight in
The eye: it is the worst disease that can
Infect a man: two-faced hypocrisy!
I'm glad you're here. I shall feel so much better
Once I have had my say; and seen you suffer
Agony from listening to my words. I saved
your skin, as every seaman knows who Sailed
on the good ship Argo under you:
When you were sent to tame fire-breathing bulls,
And plough the field to sow the seeds of death,
I saved you then, and when I scotched the snake

That never slept, whose endless coils enwrapped
The Golden Fleece; I helped you do the deed
From whose success your current fame derives.
When I'd betrayed my father and my home,
I came with you back to Hellas, to Iolkos:
Stupid, I know, but I was so in love.
I had Pelias killed by his own girls -
Uniquely painful death – and made his house
Extinct. And after all I did for you, You
piece of work, you cheated me, betrayed Me,
took another woman as your wife!
But you had sons already! If you'd not had
An heir to carry on your family name,
I might have understood your urge to breed.
Are there new rules? Do oaths mean nothing now?
Am I to understand you think the gods
Have had a revolution, and have made
New laws, new principles for men to learn?
You broke your oath. You knew precisely
What it meant. Look at this foolish hand
Of mine! You always held it when we made
Our promises. The times you begged me on
Your knees! A fool I must have been to trust
A rat. To think of all those dreams I had!
So now advise me. Pretend to be my friend.
Where should I go? "Back where you come from." Home?
Oh dear, I ruined that to go with you. "Pelias'
girls might let you live with them." Oh dear,
I killed their father. Maybe not.
That's how it is. My friends are enemies:
The ones back home I never should have hurt.

[Ee'-ol-koss

I made them enemies to be a friend
To you. And in their stead, I have Hellene girls
Who think I'm so blessed to have caught a husband
Such as you – so wonderful and true.
Sad bitch – now thrown out from this land,
Without a friend, a single mother with
Her orphaned brats. How proud the newly-wed, Whose
children, and whose wife who saved his skin, Are
desperate outcasts begging in the streets!
O Zeus! Why, when you've shown us how to tell
When coins are fake, have you not made it clear
Which are real men, and which are worthless duds?

KHOROS

What fearsome rage! It's hard to pacify
The anger of two lovers who're at war.

IASON

I should have honed my speaking skills, methinks!
It calls for all my seamanship to steer To
safety through your perfect storm of words.
I need to furl my sails, ride out the squall.
They hurt, but women's words are only wind.
The proud foundation of your argument
Is: you did me a favour. But I say
The only one who kept me safe throughout
Was Aphrodite, no god else nor man.
Your mind's creative, but it takes no brain
To see the truth, that Eros, god of lust,
With well-aimed darts, forced you to save my life.
But I shan't be a pedant on this point ...
Yes, you were helpful. Sometimes. I'll admit.
But you gained so very much more than you gave
In saving me. Let me be very clear.

[Afro-dee'-teh]

[Eh' – roce]

You live in Hellas, not some foreign land –
My first point – you enjoy the rule of law,
Not subject to the random use of force.
Here you are famous; everyone in Hellas
Knows what a clever girl you are. If you
Still lived in Bongo-bongo land, no one
Would ever have even heard of you. I know
I'd rather be a celebrity, well-known,
Than have a pile of gold at home, or have A
singing voice better than - Orpheus!
So much for your 'labours' on my behalf.
I've won that duel of words that you began!
I turn now to the disrespect you've shown
Me and the royal marriage which I planned.
I shall show first how thoughtful I have been,
How sensible, and second, how I've proved
A massive friend to you and my two boys.

[As Medeia starts to protest]

Be quiet! Please don't interrupt! When I
Moved here from Iolkos, I brought with me
A heap of problems that were hard to solve. What
bigger stroke of luck could an exile land,
Than marriage to the daughter of the king?
I wasn't bored with making love to you,
As you make out, I wasn't smitten by
Some new infatuation, not at all!
Nor had I eyes on some child-breeding prize:
I've got two sons, thank you, that's quite enough.
No, my ambition is a decent life,
Not going short of anything. I know
How a poor man's cold-shouldered by his friends.

I'd like to raise my children as befits
My status and my background. And produce
More sons as brothers to my sons with you,
Thus binding all our offspring close, and make
Us one big happy family. Why not? You've got
your children: now there is a chance
For them to gain from those I hope to have!
It wasn't such an awful plan, was it?

[When Medeia reacts unfavourably, Jason erupts in fury]

Eh? That's since sex is all you care about!
This is the bottom line: for women if
They're satisfied in bed, then all is well.
But if their love-life isn't what they want,
They turn from lovers into snarling beasts.
It's such a pity men can't father sons
Some other way: without a female! Then
There'd be one bad thing less for humankind!

KHOROS

A pretty speech, and one that follows all the rules
Of oratory, Iason, but no offence,
If I speak out of turn: it's my belief
You're in the wrong; you cheated on your wife.

MEDEIA

I'd like to contradict the common view.
A crooked man who uses clever words,
Abusing privilege, should be condemned.
For him no punishment's severe enough!
So confident his rhetoric can mask
The criminal ideas he has in mind!
He does not get past me, and nor do you.
Don't come to me with your sophisticated

Speechifying, you sack of wind. One word
Destroys you: persuasion. If you had been
A decent man you could have tried persuasion,
Discussing it with me, before you slithered
Off to consummate your furtive romp.

IASON

Quite a discussion we'd have had! Your input
Would have helped so much! You can't control
Your bitterness, your temper, even now!

MEDEIA

The truth is this. You're getting on, you felt
An Asian wife was an embarrassment.

IASON

I thought I made it clear, the deal I made,
The marriage with the daughter of the king,
Was not to get a wife, but, as I said,
I wanted to protect you, fathering
Royal children, siblings to my own sons:
Thus guaranteeing our security!

MEDEIA

Security, prosperity! You make
Me sick! Don't give me that old crap.

IASON

One day you'll realise how fortunate You are,
and change your tune. Why do you still
Insist on making out what's good is bad?

MEDEIA

So now you're making fun of me. You have
Your future sorted. I have none. Kicked out!

IASON

Your choice. There's no one else to blame but you.

MEDEIA

Oh yes! I took a lover and deserted you!

IASON

You cursed the royal family. That was wrong.

MEDEIA

Your family too will not escape my curse.

IASON

We won't go into that just now. But if

There's anything the boys or you would like

Me to provide at my expense to ease

You on your way, then all you have to do

Is ask. I'll spare no efforts to arrange

An introduction to some friends of mine,

Who'll see you right. My sweet, you would be mad

If you reject my help. Control yourself,

Calm down, and see how much you stand to gain.

MEDEIA

Save your money. There's no way I'd go near

A friend of yours, or take their hospitality.

A bad man's tainted gift can do no good.

IASON

I call upon the gods to witness how

My one intention's always been to help

You and the boys, how wilfully you spurn

My kindness and reject my friendly

Overtures. You will be sorry soon.

[As Jason storms out]

MEDEIA

Fuck off. You're wasting precious time out here.

You're hungry for the adoring kisses of

Your new wee wifey. Off you go. Get in.

I ask the gods, remember what I say.
This union that looks to you so fair
Will end, perhaps, in chaos and despair.

SECOND STASIMON

KHOROS

Love that comes on fierce and strong
Can lead a man to doing wrong.
Intense passion can ruin his name,
And he deserves to feel the shame. But
Love that comes on gentle and sweet
Can still knock you off your feet.
Please, I pray you, Queen of Love
Don't shoot at me from up above
I never want to feel your dart
That makes a lover break her heart.

I pray I'll love with self-control;
That calms - so help me gods - my soul.
Don't make me prisoner to desire
I want no quarrels when the fire
Of lust offers forbidden charms
And tempts me to a lover's arms.
Goddess, don't give me war in bed;
But sweet concord with the man I wed.
For me a quiet life is best
That's when you know you're truly blest.

My country, my home, I love you so!
Unbearable to have to go
Away from you and live alone

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Without a city of one's own.
Helpless and friendless, a life of pain Death
when it came would be a gain.
I would much rather welcome death,
Than lose my home and still have breath.

I don't rely on other people's tales,
I'm here, a witness, as your marriage fails.
There is no place for you, no friend
Who's there for you, who'd maybe lend
A helping hand, or sympathise
With how you're cruelly victimised.
One who betrays a friend, whose heart is mean,
Will not among my friends be seen.

THIRD EPISODE

[Aegeus, king of Athens, an elderly man, is seen making his way towards Medeia during the latter part of the Khoros' song. He is accompanied by numerous attendants carrying baggage]

AIGEUS

Medeia, hello! How are you, dear? What joy
To greet a friend – is there a better thing than that?

663

MEDEIA

Hello to you, Aegeus, son of Pandion *[Pan-DEE- own]*
The Wise, from Athenai! How come you're here? *[A- THAIR – nye]*

AIGEUS

I've come from Delphoi, Phoibos' Oracle. *[del – FOI; FOI-boss]*

MEDEIA

What took you to that famous seat of prophecy?

AIGEUS

To find out how I might produce an heir.

MEDEIA

Dear gods, have you been childless all this time?

AIGEUS

Quite so. The gods have given us no luck!

MEDEIA

You have a wife? Or do you sleep alone?

AIGEUS

I'm not without a wife to share my bed.

MEDEIA

What did Apollo say about children?

AIGEUS

Some mumbo jumbo hard to understand.

MEDEIA

Is it all right to tell me what he said?

AIGEUS

Of course: maybe a mind like yours can work it out.

MEDEIA

What did he say? If I'm allowed to hear.

AIGEUS

"Just keep your bottle tightly corked, until ..."

MEDEIA

Until you've done what? Until you get where?

AIGEUS

Until I'm safely back in my own home.

MEDEIA

Then why have you stopped off in Corinth, then?

AIGEUS

There is a man called Pittheus, he's the king ...

[PIT- thehooze]

MEDEIA

Of Troizen, Pelops' son they say. A sage.

[TROY -dzehn, PEH - lops]

AIGEUS

I want his views about the oracle.

MEDEIA

A clever man – an expert in this field.

AIGEUS

And my dearest friend. We fought together once.

MEDEIA

Good luck to you – may all your dreams come true!

AIGEUS

You look so pale and ill. What's going on?

MEDEIA

Aigeus, I have a husband who's the vilest...

AIGEUS

What is it? Tell me what's upsetting you.

MEDEIA

Iason wrongs me, though I've done him no wrong.

AIGEUS

What sort of wrong? Give me a clearer picture.

MEDEIA

He has replaced me with another wife.

AIGEUS

How dare he treat you so disgracefully!

MEDEIA

It's so. I and my children are pushed out.

AIGEUS

Is he "in love" – or out of love with you?

MEDEIA

"A love supreme." No love left for his friends!

AIGEUS

Forget him. If he's as awful as you say –

MEDEIA

In love, indeed! With royal power and rank.

AIGEUS

Who sanctions this? Who'd dare? Enlighten me.

MEDEIA

Kreon, the royal master of this land.

AIGEUS

I'm not surprised you're so upset, my dear.

MEDEIA

It's killed me. Now this deportation order...

AIGEUS

Issued by whom? There's yet another crime?

MEDEIA

Kreon has ordered me to be 'removed'.

AIGEUS

And Iason lets him? I am truly shocked!

MEDEIA

He pretends that he's upset, but lets it pass.

[She need not actually kneel – the “kneeling” is a figure of speech.]

I'm on my knees now humbly begging you;

I'm at your mercy, please have sympathy,

Show me compassion, show me pity, please!

Don't sit and watch as I'm thrown out without

A thing. Let me come as a guest of yours

In your home country: if you do, you'll have,

I swear to god, your wish for children granted, An

heir to ensure you won't die unfulfilled.

You'll realise what a treasure you unearthed

When you found me: I'll cure your childlessness.

I'll make you father of a family.

I know the drugs that can do this for you.

AIGEUS

I'm keen to do all this for you, my dear.

Two reasons why: I'm grateful to the gods,

To start with, then to you for your good news:

I'm going to be a father. I confess
This is a subject where I don't know much!
This is my plan. If you can get yourself
To Athenai, my home, I'll try my best
To provide the shelter that you crave; that's fair.
I can't, however, undertake to help You
get away from here. But if you come To
Athenai, you'll have your sanctuary.
No one shall get his hands on you, no one.
But you must find your own way out of here.
I can't afford to alienate my friends.

MEDEIA

That's fine. But if you'd swear a solemn oath
Then that would really make me feel secure.

AIGEUS

You trust me, don't you? Is there some problem?

MEDEIA

I do. But Pelias and Kreon too Are
enemies. And if you swear, you will
Have a defence if they come after me:
You had to do it, could not let me go,
Bound by your oath to me you had no choice.
That would persuade them. I'm in such a weak
Position: my enemies hold the cards – Money
and privilege and royal power.

AIGEUS

From what you say you've got it all planned out.
Should you wish to proceed I'll not object.
But your idea is best for both of us:
I'll have a good excuse to show your enemies,
You'll have a stronger case. Which god to use?

MEDEIA

Swear by the Earth, the ground we stand upon,

And the Sun-god Helios, my father's father –

[HAIR-lee-oss]

Include the other gods as well. Why not?

AIGEUS

What shall I swear to do, or not to do?

MEDEIA

That you yourself will never throw me out

From your country, and if my enemies

Should try to do so, you will not give way

As long as you have life and influence.

AIGEUS

I swear by Earth and by the radiant Sun,

And all the gods, I'll do all that you asked.

MEDEIA

That's fine. And if you don't, what punishment?

AIGEUS

What all who disrespect the gods receive.

MEDEIA

Goodbye, bon voyage. Everything is fine.

I'll come to you as soon as possible,

If all works out. I've got some things to do.

KHOROS

My Maia's son Hermes escort you to where

[MY-ah; HAIR- maze]

Your homeland awaits you, and when you get there

May you find happiness, children and heirs

A good man like you should be freed from all cares.

MEDEIA

O Zeus, Justice of Zeus, o radiant Sun!

Today I shall be sealing victory

Over my enemies: we're on our way!

Today I hope to make my enemies pay,
And get what they deserve. This lovely
man Has plugged the weak spot in my
strategy: An escape route was missing from
my plan

A harbour, an anchorage to steer towards:

Now when I get to Athenai, I'm safe! The
time has come to tell you all what I

Intend to do. You will not be amused.

I'll send one of my girls to Iason,

Requesting that he comes to visit me. When

he arrives, I'll soft-soap him and say,

That all is fine with me, it's all OK.

I'll ask him to allow my sons to stay – Not
that I'd leave them in this land of hate – My
plan is to kill the daughter of the king. I'll
send my boys to her with wedding gifts, A
pretty dress, a golden diadem.

But when she gets my gifts and tries them on

She'll die in agony, and anyone

Who even touches her is also - dead.

There's a poison that I'll paint the presents with.

All is straightforward up until this point.

But then...? !

[She utters a horrifying cry expressing pain – and determination]

That cry's for what I must do next.

My sons, my children must be killed. And I

Must kill them! There's no one can save their lives.

When I have wiped out Iason's family

Completely, I shall leave this land behind,

A fugitive, wanted for ghastly crimes.
There'll be no laughter from my enemies At
my expense, no mockery, my friends.
That's it. That's all I want from life. No more.
I have no home, no place where I belong.
I threw that all away the day I left My
father's house, talked into it by a man
From Hellas; with god's help, he'll pay, in full.
He will not see the sons I had with him
Again alive. Nor will he father any sons With
her, his newly-wed, his bride, as she,
The poisonous slut, must poisoned be – and die.
Did you think I was weak and powerless?
An obedient, submissive wife? Not quite.
I hurt my enemies and help my friends:
That rule by which **men** win renown!

KHOROS

As you have shared this with me, it is clear:
If this is what you plan, you need my help!
To stop you violating natural laws:
I beg you , do not do the things you said!

MEDEIA

Sorry. I know that your advice makes sense,
But you have not experienced pain, like mine.

KHOROS

How can a wife endure to kill her sons?

MEDEIA

When no other act can make her husband **feel**?

KHOROS

But you will yourself feel abject misery!

MEDEIA

So what? There won't be a debate on this!

[To an attendant]

Just go and summon Iason, right now.

I've always known you to be trustworthy:

Say nothing of what I intend to do.

You're a loyal servant - and a woman too.

THIRD STASIMON

KHOROS

The people of Athenai have always been blest,

824

Descendants of immortal gods as they are.

Their land too is sacred, a well-guarded nest

That has never been conquered. It's known from afar

For knowledge and wisdom, its citizens walk

Under bluest of skies, their pride plain to see.

Which is why the nine Muses, according to talk, Made

Athenai the birthplace of sweet Harmony!

To Athenai's river, its clear-flowing streams,

They say Aphrodite comes down for a drink,

[a-froh-DEE-the]

And fills the whole countryside then as it seems

With perfume and sweet-scented breeze. And the pink

Garland of roses she wears in her hair

Smells divine as the goddess sends Love, to enhance

The arts and the skills that are already there,

Love working with wisdom leaves nothing to chance!

How can such a city

So friendly to guests

With its waters so holy

Now open its gates
To a killer of children,
Let a criminal in?

How exactly will you stab them?
How much blood do you think there'll be?
Imagine what it's like to murder ...
No, do not, do not, I beg you
Do not kill them, your own sons.

Could your hands really do it?
Could your mind really choose it?
Could your heart really bear it?
Would you really dare it?
Would you really risk it?
How will you look at them,
Make yourself murder them? They're
on the floor screaming -
Won't you be weeping?
Picture it!

You will not be able
To harden your heart
Let their blood
 Flood
 Gush
 Spurt Splash
Stain your hands red.

FOURTH EPISODE

IASON

I'm here. By your command. Although you hate me,

866

It would have seemed petty if I'd refused.

I'm all ears. What is it now you want from me?

MEDEIA

Iason, I beg you, please ignore the things I said.

You've always put up with my moods before,

Its normal when a couple share such love.

I've given myself a serious talking-to:

Told myself off. "You silly cow, o why

Are you so crazy? Why abuse the guy

Who takes such care to make your life complete?

Why make yourself so beastly to the elite

And to your husband who does all he can -

That link by marriage to the ruling clan,

So there'll be brothers for your little boys.

You can control that temper—why make noise?

And such a fuss? The gods have been so kind,

Producing all you need. Just keep in mind

Your darling boys: a refugee without a place

Will need to call on every friendly face!" Thinking

it through, I realised what a fool

I'd been, and how pointless that anger was.

So now I'm grateful. Thanks. I understand

How clever you have been, my champion,

Arranging this new bond, and me – how crass!

I should have been a partner in your scheme,

Your wedding-planner! I'd have loved to help

To get the bedroom ready for your bride!

Women! What are we like? Not quite as bad

As sometimes we seem! Do not compete with us

At being weak and childish – we're the champs.

Forgive me, I was in the wrong before.

I've worked it out. I'm in a better place!

[Medeia calls to the children, who are indoors. They come out, with the Paidagogos]

Boys, boys, come here, come out where we can see you.

Say hello to your father and join me

In giving him a hug. Our quarrel's over.

We are all friends once more. Where once Was

hate and anger, now we've made our peace.

Now shake his hand, and say goodbye! Go on.

[She gives an involuntary cry of pain. The boys run back to her]

Sorry. It was that something terrible

Just crossed my mind. It's private. Personal.

[They go back to their father, stretch out their arms to him again.]

Oh boys, the way you hold your arms outstretched –

As if to bid him a final farewell,

As you'd do one day, at his funeral.

[They run back to their mother.]

I can't help feeling fear, and can't control My

tears – I'm making you all wet with them!

I've made up with your dad. Why weeping still?

KHOROS

I too can't stop the tears that flood my eyes:

Please let it not go on, this awful thing.

IASON

Thank you, dearest, for this. Not that I blame

Your earlier tirade. It's natural for

A woman to resent a second wife.

But your mind's now taken a more balanced view:

You took your time, but now you recognise

My way is best. Sensible girl. Well done!

And as for you, my sons, your papa has,
With the gods behind him, been very busy Planning
a secure future for you both.

I foresee the day when you - and your brothers -
Will be the elite, the leaders of Korinthos, As
men! I can't wait! Grow up quick! Your pa
And his friends among the gods will do the rest.

I long to see my strapping lads full grown,
Stronger, more powerful than my enemies!

[Medeia is in floods of tears]

You there! What are you crying for, again?
Turning away? Why won't you look at me?
Surely you're pleased with what I've said and done?

MEDEIA

It's nothing. The children worry me. That's all.

IASON

Chin up! I'm doing everything for them.

MEDEIA

I will be brave. I'm sure you'll do your best.
Sorry! Women are weak and prone to tears.

IASON

Why do the children make you weep so much?

MEDEIA

I gave them life! When you described their future,
I worried it might not turn out so well.
As for what you came to talk to me about:
Some things are settled; others need discussing.
The government say I'm to be removed –
And I can see that this is for the best;
I don't want to get in your way, or else

Annoy the royal family, living here.

I know they see me as a hostile threat.

I'm ready for my deportation hence.

My boys, though – I'd prefer them raised by you.

You could. By asking Kreon to let them stay.

IASON

I doubt that he'll agree. I can but try.

MEDEIA

Then why not ask your wife to plead with him?

Beg daddy not to have the boys removed.

IASON

That's great! I'm pretty sure she'll win him round.

She's good at that – like other women are.

MEDEIA

And I will do my bit to help you out.

I'll send the boys to her. They'll take her gifts!

They'll be unique! Like no one's had before.

[To an attendant]

Quick as you can! One of you girls, go fetch

The lovely things. And when they're in her hands –

Those treasures which my grandfather the Sun

Passed down to me - which I give her to honour

That very special man whose bed she shares,

Her happiness will beyond imagining.

[The attendant hurries back with boxes containing the precious things.]

Now take these wedding presents, boys, and give

Them to the special one, the happy bride.

[To Iason]

She'll love them, they're no less than she deserves!

IASON

You silly girl, why impoverish yourself?

Can you suppose the royal house has need
Of robes? Or can you think they're short of gold?
Keep it, don't give it all away. I know My
wife; she'll be convinced by what I tell her
More than by pretentious display of wealth.

MEDEIA

Don't tell me no! It's common knowledge: gifts
Are persuasive – to all, even the gods!
For mortals - gold outbids a thousand words.
The Force is with her now, the gods conspire
To shower blessings on the new young queen.
I'd sacrifice my life to save my sons
From deportation, not just gold. But come,
My darlings, go inside these stately halls,
Kneel down before your father's new-found wife,
Our queen, and when you give her these presents,
Ask her to let you stay. And this is vital:
She must accept the gifts with her own hands.
Go! Quick! I'm sure you'll do it beautifully.
When all is done, come back and tell your mum
The glorious news that she can't wait to hear.

*[The children leave carrying the boxes. Iason escorts them a little way, and then turns to Medea,
giving her a signal that the plan will work]*

FOURTH STASIMON

KHOROS

The children won't live. Now there can be no hope
They're headed for murder. They're now on the slope;
They'll offer the princess the treasures of gold,
But it's Death that her pretty young hands will unfold...
The youthful bride tries on the toxic gown,

976

Sets on her head the poisoned crown She
sees it gleaming richly in her hair,
How it will kill her she's quite unaware.

Convinced by the beauty, the unearthly aura,
Seduced by the glamour of gold, the tiara,
She's dressed as a bride but with Death as her groom.
She is trapped, she's already en route to the tomb
It's all set, her ruin can no longer wait;
It moves ever closer, her pitiful fate.

Iason, it was the king's daughter you wed
Now you are nothing, your marriage is dead. How
your sons will be taken you cannot yet see, Nor
how horrific your wife's death will be. You
planned and you dreamed of a better tomorrow
You creature of sadness. You image of sorrow.

I've tears for you also, sad mother and wife
Who'll murder the children to whom she gave life.
Your husband betrayed you, deserted your bed,
Went off with another, and made you see red.
He has broken his promise, the oath that he swore
Shares his bed with his new one, and shows you the door.

FIFTH EPISODE

[The tutor comes running out the house, in great excitement. The boys are with him.]

PAIDAGOGOS

Madam, they've had their banishment revoked!

1002

The bride, the princess took the gifts herself –

She was delighted. Peace has been declared!

What is it?

Why look so upset at this stroke of luck?

[MEDEIA lets out a cry of agony] Why

this reaction to my splendid news?

[MEDEIA cries out again].

Did I say something to upset you then?

Was what I said unwelcome? I'm confused!

MEDEIA

You gave the news you had to. Not your fault.

PAIDAGOGOS

But why the ashen face, the floods of tears?

MEDEIA

My dear old friend, so many reasons why!

The gods; my own bad choices, led to this.

PAIDAGOGOS

Look on the bright side! We shall see you back

One day – trust me, your sons will manage that.

MEDEIA

See back? But first I've others to see off. *[She sighs knowingly as if in self-pity]*

PAIDAGOGOS

You're not the only woman to lose children.

It's part of life. We learn to grin and bear it.

MEDEIA

Thank you. I will. Now get inside and do

What you do for the children every day.

[The Paidagogus goes in, leaving the children]

My boys, my babies. You now have a city

And a home, where you will stay, and live without

A mother. I must go a refugee

To somewhere else, and long before I've had

A mother's pleasure seeing your success;
You finding wives, your wedding days:
Baths, Torches, getting beds prepared!
My fault! I've made a choice I can't undo.
After all the searing pain of giving birth - My
babes, I nursed you both; but not for this.
I slaved and sweated blood; but not for this.
In those days I had such high hopes for you - *[She is beginning to sob]*
Hopes that you'd care for me when I got old, And
when I died, you'd bury me yourselves:
The fulfilment of a life that all would wish for.
But now, goodbye to that delightful notion.
I shall live out my lonely life in pain,
When you've been taken from me. And you two -
Will not again look at your mother with
Those eyes. Life takes you on a different route.
O god, those eyes. Why do you look like that At
me? Your smiles. The last I'll ever see.
[An agonised cry. She turns to the Khoros]
What am I going to do? I was fired up
To do this thing. But now I can't go on.
My heart just melts to see their trusting faces.
No, I could not. The plans I made are cancelled.
They are my children, I shall take them with me.
My purpose was to hurt my husband. Why?
When I would suffer twice as much myself?
[She turns away from the Khoros]
What am I thinking? Could I really bear
The mocking laughter of my enemies
If I took no revenge, just let them off!
I must be resolute. How feeble I

Must be to even think such cowardly thoughts.

Children, now go indoors. If any one Out
here feels too self-righteous to attend My
ceremony, then the problem's theirs.

I shan't be stopping work on their account.

The rest of the speech is deleted by some scholars – its authenticity has been queried for over a century!

[Another anguished sound]

My heart says something else. No, no, you can't!

You evil bitch, don't kill them, let them live!

What a joy it would be to have them there with me!

No way, no fucking way will I give up

My boys, to be abused by those I hate.

But anyway, it's done. There's no way out.

The princess already has the tiara on,

She's dressed – to die, already. It is done.

The path I'm on is one that breaks my heart;

The one I'll send the boys on is even More
heart-breaking. It's time to say goodbye.

Give me your hands, boys, and give me a hug.

I love those hands so much, I love that face:

How fine you look, and healthy, both of you.

May you do well in someone else's house; Our
home your father wrecked. To hold you close

Is beautiful – your skin so tender and

Your breath so sweet. Go! Go away! I am *[She ushers the children indoors]*

Not tough enough to look at you. I'm crushed

By the enormity of what I'm going to do.

What I intend to do is wrong, I know, But
anger mostly motivates men's crimes:

My anger kills the doubts I had betimes.

ANAPAESTIC INTERLUDE

KHOROS

I know that I'm woman, not much good,
But I've been thinking, more than women should,
That maybe some of us, give us our due,
Have some intelligence, not all, a few.

1081

My thoughts. Those couples who choose not to breed, Have
children, are much better off, indeed.
They'll never know if they have missed the pleasure:
They've surely missed the problems beyond measure.

Couples with children – if it's me you ask
Are always worrying, an endless task.
Will they be healthy, can you keep them neat?
As they grow up will there be food to eat?

What if he ends up as some useless lout, A
cruel reward for all that you put out?
Suppose it does in fact all turn out fine;
There's still one thing to terrify your mind.
The family's all grown up, you're doing well
Then suddenly there comes a wind from Hell: Despite
your care, just when you thought you'd won,
A sudden death has robbed you of your son.

The gods give mortals pain and grief galore
Producing children simply adds one more.

SIXTH EPISODE

MEDEIA

My friends, I'm nervous, having to wait so long
For news of what is happening inside.

Ah! Now I see one of Iason's men.

He's panting, in a hurry, red of face

Keen to report some dire catastrophe.

[A man rushes in. He's one of Iason's slaves.]

ANGELOS

Get out, Medeia, go, be off, away!

1122

On a boat, in a cart, or use your own two feet!

MEDEIA

Why the sudden need for such immediate flight?

ANGELOS

She's dead, the princess died moments ago.

Her father Kreon, too. You poisoned them!

MEDEIA

What brilliant news! Thank you so much.

My benefactor! Now my friend as well!

ANGELOS

What do you mean? Are you criminally insane?

Outrageous! You've destroyed the royal house!

You stand there gloating, bold as brass!

MEDEIA

I had my reasons which I'll not discuss

With you. Calm down, my friend, and tell me more.

How did they die? My pleasure's doubled, if

You say their deaths were truly horrible.

ANGELOS

When the two of them, your little boys, arrived

And stood beside their father in the hall

We slaves, who'd known what you were going through,

Were really pleased. There was a buzz at once,

Our thoughts were you and Iason had made up.
We made a fuss of them – kissing their hands,
Or nuzzling their hair. And I was so entranced
I found myself following them inside
The women's quarters. The princess, the one
We now look up to in your place, before
She saw the little twosome, your young lads, Had
fixed her love-sick gaze on Iason.
But when she saw them she was horrified, She
pulled her veil across her face, and turned
Away, trying hard not to look at them.
Your husband tried to soothe the young girl's rage,
And stop her tantrum, saying this: "Don't be Unpleasant
to our friends! Don't get upset.
Consider dear the ones your husband does:
Accept their presents, and make a request To
your father, to revoke the deportation. Won't
you do this to please me?" When she saw The
finery, she could not restrain herself.
She answered yes to all her husband asked.
Before he and the boys had left the room,
She seized the lovely dress. and put it on,
And set the gold tiara on her head, arranging
Her hair around it as she preened before
A mirror, giggling in delight to see
Her lifeless replica reflected back.
Then, standing up, she danced around the room,
Stepping out elegantly – no shoes on – She
loved her gifts so much. Time and again
She paused before the glass, admiring how Perfectly
the folds arranged themselves.

The scene that followed was a horror show.
Her colour changed. She shuddered, nearly fell
But made it to a chair and stopped herself
Collapsing to the floor. An elderly maid
Thinking it a panic fit, or seizure sent
By god – chanted a healing prayer, but then
She saw the white foam oozing from her lips,
The pupils swivelling in her staring eyes,
Her skin now pale and bloodless. The old woman
Let out a different cry, a dirge of death.
A girl ran off to fetch the king, another
The new bridegroom, to share the dreadful news.
As people scurried back and forth, the halls Re-echoed
with the noise. And all of this
Took not much longer than a sprinter takes To run
a hundred yards. She'd seemed unconscious
Incapable of speech, with staring eyes:
Then she came to and gave a hideous scream.
Two horrors were invading her at once:
From the gold tiara she'd placed on her head,
There gushed a greedy stream of fire,
Incredible to see: the pretty dress
Your children gave was gnawing at her flesh.
She got up from the chair and ran, ablaze,
Twisting her head from side to side, trying to
Dislodge the coronet, and drag it off her hair.
But stubbornly the band of gold refused to budge, Each
time she shook her head, the tongues of flame
Flared up again and twice as hungrily.
She gave up fighting, and fell to the floor.
Only a parent could have determined

Who she was. Where her eyes had been, the face – so
beautiful - was gone, while blood and fire
Working together streamed down from her skull.
Her flesh was melting from her bones, like resin
Trickling down a pine-tree's trunk. The poison
Was eating her with invisible jaws.
We couldn't bear to look. And all of us
Were scared to touch the corpse. What had occurred
Said "Do not touch!" But then all unaware
Her father rushing in fell on the corpse
Kissing it, hugging it, and shouting out:
"What happened to my girl? What devil slaughtered
You like this, so brutally. Who's robbed a man,
So old he should be dead himself, of his
One child? All I wish is to share your death."
When he'd expended all his tears, and tried
To make his aged body get back up again,
He found himself pulled down by the material
Of her dress, that stuck to him like ivy to a
tree: a hideous wrestling bout ensued.
He struggles to get up, she drags him down.
The more he tugs, the more he rips the flesh
Off from his ancient bones. His strength gave out
Quite soon. The poor old man gave up the ghost,
Too weak to combat so much pain. They lie
Now side by side, the father and his child.

[He turns to Medeia]

I've no interest in what becomes of you,
Medeia. You will have a plan, I'm sure,
To hide from justice. I have held my view
On human life for quite sometime. Nothing

Is real. Life is all illusion. I hesitate
to contradict the so-called Clever
ones with fancy theories: But they're
the biggest fools. No man Is happy,
not a single one of us.

Prosperity can come and go, and one
Can be more fortunate than another man.
But in the end no one finds happiness.

KHOROS

It seems that on this day a divine power
Has hit Iason with a blow not underserved.

MEDEIA

My friends, I am resolved to do the job
Quick as I can. First kill the children, then
Get clear away. Don't give an opportunity For
someone else, someone who hates the boys To
butcher them. They're doomed, in any case.
I gave them birth and I will give them death.
Be brave now. Steel yourself. Don't dither.
So why put off a deed that must be done?
It will still be a wicked, dreadful thing.
Come on now, force your hand to take the sword.
Take it. The fearful winning-post's in sight,
Don't draw back now, forget that they're the sons
You bore, how much you love them. For today,
Just one short day, don't think of them as yours.
Tomorrow weep. Although you're killing them
They're still the boys you love.
I'm so fucked up!

FIFTH STASIMON

KHOROS

O Mother Earth! And you, Sun, with your radiant beams,
Which light the world up! Look! You see her! There she is!
Can you not stop the killer woman on her way
To lay her murderous hand upon the sons she bore?

1251

She is a daughter sprung from your own golden race:
We fear that mortal hands will spill the blood of gods.
O Light Divine, restrain her, stop her, hold her back -
Avenging Fiends made her a vicious murderess.

When you'd passed through the steel-blue clashing rocks and left
The sea that has no friends, you endured labour pangs:
For nothing! You produced a lovely family:
For nothing! Sad deluded wretch, what kind of rage,

Infected you? And sent you mad? When your response
Was bloody murder? One who kills a member of
Their family is cursed, polluted by the deed.
The gods torment that house of sin with pain for ever.

[A child's scream is heard from inside the house.]

KHOROS

You hear them screaming? You hear the children?
O you vile abominable bitch!

CHILD

I don't know what to do! There's nowhere to run ...

THE OTHER CHILD

I don't know either! She's going to kill us!

KHOROS

Should I go in? Ought one to try to save them?

CHILD

Yes, help! For god's sake! Do something! You must!

THE OTHER CHILD

She's coming at us! We are trapped. Her sword ...

KHOROS

Are you a stone, a lump of iron? Woman,
Revolting woman with your own hand you
Kill your babies, offspring of your womb!

One other woman, only one, That I
have heard of raised her hand To
kill the children she had borne.
Themisto, that was; she'd made a plan

[Theh-mee-STOH]

To kill her rival, Ino's, sons.

[EE-noh]

She didn't know the girl she shared
Her plotting with was Ino in disguise!
So Ino switched the children round:
Her owns sons thus it was Themisto killed.
She could not bear the truth when she found out:
She killed herself by leaping from a cliff,
A precipice and drowning in the sea.

After what's happened could anything be worse?
Women and sex, what horrors you have caused!

EXODOS

IASON

You there! You women standing by the house!
Is she whose loathsome handiwork this is Inside?
Or has Medeia cut and run?
She'll need to hide herself deep underground,
Or else sprout wings and fly into the clouds,

1293

To avoid the vengeance of the royal house.
Did she really think she could assassinate
A king? The king! And get away scot-free?
It's not her now though, it's the children I'm
Concerned about. Those she committed crimes
Against will see she's punished suitably.
It's the children I have come to take away
To save them from the king's relations,
Who'd gladly murder them to get revenge
And payment for their mother's dreadful crime.

KHOROS

Iason, you have no idea, poor man,
What evil still awaits you. Otherwise
You would never have said what you just did.

IASON

What? I suppose she plans to kill me too!

KHOROS

Your sons are dead. Their mother murdered them.

IASON [*A cry of anguish*]

What do you mean? It's you that have killed me!

KHOROS

Accept the fact. You have no sons. They're gone.

IASON

Where did she kill them? Somewhere in the house?

KHOROS

Open the door. You'll see your children dead.

IASON

Men, quickly, smash the locks, break down the door!

There are two hideous things I have to face.

As Iason's men batter the doors, Medea suddenly appears in the sky above the palace roof, in a chariot drawn by dragons. The corpses of her children lie beside her.

MEDEIA

Why are you trying to break down that door?
To find the corpses of your sons, and me
Whose handiwork it was? Don't waste your time.
If you have a request to make, speak up! Say
what you want. But there's as close as you
Will ever get. You can't touch us. We're free.
The Sun, my father's father, gave us this –
To keep us safe beyond our enemy's reach!

IASON

You are filth. The most repulsive creature, woman
Most hated by the gods and all mankind,
Not just by me, who sank so low, that she
Took up a sword to slaughter her own sons –
Their mother! Leaving me a childless wreck.
And this you did and dare to look upon
The sun, the earth, polluted by your acts?
Fuck you. I see what I did not before - My
mind was then distracted, now it's clear -
The hideous wrong you did, when I took you
Away from home in your barbarian land
To live in Hellas: that day you betrayed
Your father and the land which nurtured you.
The gods sent you to me as punishment.
Before you stepped aboard that lovely ship,
Argo, you'd killed your brother in his home.
And that was just the start. You married me,
You gave me sons, and then you murdered them!
Because bed and sex were all you thought about!
No Hellene girl could do what you have done:
Instead of one of them I married you –

My wedding day became my day of doom.
No woman! I had wed a wild animal More
bloodthirsty than that foul sea-monster
With her six heads and eighteen rows of teeth.
But I could curse you all day long and not Get
through to you: so hard, you have no shame.
Fuck off. Such pride you took in your profession!
Tough killer though you were, killing your sons
Makes you a shit-stain, outcast, pile of filth. Allow
me now to pity my own fate:
I'll have no new young wife to comfort me, The
sons I fathered and brought up, I'll never
See alive again. They're lost. You've taken them.

MEDEIA

I'd have been pleased to have a long debate
On all these things, but Father Zeus knows well What
I have done for you, with little thanks.
Never were you about to lead a pleasant life,
Once you had shamed my bed and laughed at me.
Nor was the princess, nor the one who gave her
To you, Kreon, about to get away With
having me deported from this land.
Call me a monster as often as you like:
It means that I've got through to you at last.

IASON

You are in pain yourself. You share my grief.

MEDEIA

To stop your laughter it is worth it, though.

IASON

My sons, how vile to have her as a mother!

MEDEIA

My sons, your father's weakness got you killed!

IASON

I am not the one with their blood on my hands.

MEDEIA

Your second wife! Your disrespect to me!

IASON

You had to kill the boys because of **sex**?

MEDEIA

You think to women that's a little thing?

IASON

To decent ones. It's you who make it big.

MEDEIA

Your boys are dead. Ha! I can see that hurt.

IASON

They live as vengeful ghosts to punish you.

MEDEIA

The gods know who this madness started with.

IASON

The gods know how contemptible you are.

MEDEIA

Keep hating! I can't stand your whining voice.

IASON

Nor can I yours. Let's separate, and go!

MEDEIA

Suits me. Anything you want while I'm still here?

IASON

The bodies. To bury them and mourn their deaths.

MEDEIA

No chance. I'm taking them to Hera's temple.

[HAIR-ah]

There on the Cape, I'll bury them myself,

So that no enemy can vandalise

Their tombs or dig them up. I'll start
A festival, where rituals shall be
Performed each year to expiate my crime. As
for myself, I'm off to Athenai;
Aegeus, Pandion's son, will welcome me.
You? Fittingly, you'll die a nobody,
And like a nobody, hit on the head, By a
piece of driftwood from your epic ship:
My love-story will reach its tragic end.

IASON

May the Erinyes who avenges children's blood
Destroy you! May Justice have blood for blood!

MEDEIA

What god, what power, is listening to you?
A lying rat! Who was it saved your life?

IASON

Fuck you! Fuck you! You filthy murderess!

MEDEIA

Go home. Your dead wife needs a burial!

IASON

I have to go, but without my two sons!

MEDEIA

Too early yet to mourn. Wait till you're old.

IASON

My lovely boys!

MEDEIA

Their mother loved them. You did not.

IASON

But you still killed them?

MEDEIA

Yes, to cause you pain.

IASON

O god, how much I wish that I could kiss
My darling boys and give them one last hug.

MEDEIA

So now, at last, you would communicate!
Show affection! Shame you rejected them! IASON
In god's name, please! Just let me hold my sons!
They were so young, and weak, and innocent.

MEDEIA

It's not to be. I cannot hear a word you say.
[Medeia's chariot is already moving away. Jason talks to the empty air.]

IASON

Zeus! Do you hear this? How I am cut off?
What I am suffering because of this – This
stain, this foul child-murdering bitch?
I'll have to cope with this the best I can,
Mourn, weep and call the gods as witnesses.
I call upon the gods to testify,
How you murdered my little boys and then
You stopped my hands from touching them
You would not let me bury their bodies.
O how I wish I'd never fathered them,
To see them lying dead, murdered by you.

[KHOROS

Zeus in Olympus keeps an eye on many things.
Some gods' decisions aren't what you'd expect.
Your preconceptions do not get fulfilled.
God finds a way to bring about surprise!
You'll read this play like that if you are wise.]

AMW Marshfield. 8th January 2020/

