

## ARGONAUTICA

### III

Erato, tell me, standing by my side,  
How, aided by the passion of his bride,  
Medea, Jason brought the fleece from there  
To Colchis. Aphrodite's power you share  
For charming unwed maidens – hence your name  
Of love. Thus in thick reeds those men of fame  
In ambush hid. However, they were spied  
By Hera and Athene who, aside  
From Zeus and the other gods, in a chamber weighed  
Their options. Hera, first to speak, assayed 10  
Athene: "Zeus's daughter, let me see  
Your counsel first. What's to be done? Tell me  
Of some device to take the golden fleece  
Away from Aeëtes and back to Greece.  
Or shall they sway the king with gentleness  
Of speech? For he is full of haughtiness.  
There is no scheme that ought to stay untried."  
She spoke. Athene speedily replied:  
"Hera, these things I too was pondering  
As you spoke out. As yet, though, not a thing 20  
Has struck me that will help these noble men,  
Though I've weighed many strategies." So then  
Both fixed their eyes upon the ground as they  
Brooded apart. Then Hera straightaway  
Expressed the thoughts she had: "Pray come with me  
To Aphrodite that together we  
Might get her to persuade her son to dart  
One of his shafts at the enchantress' heart,  
Aeëtes' daughter, causing love to spring  
In her for Jason. That's the very thing! 30  
Her schemes will bring the fleece to Greece," said she.  
Athene liked this clever strategy  
And gently answered: "Hera, born to learn  
No lessons from the darts which make folk burn,  
I know no love-charms but, if what you say  
Contents you, I'll agree in every way,  
Though you must speak first at our rendezvous."  
She spoke and they set off, journeying to  
Kypris' large home, which her lame husband wrought  
When first from Zeus, to be his wife, he brought 40  
The goddess. To the court they came and there  
They stood beneath the gallery, just where

The goddess had prepared Hephaestos' bed,  
 But he had gone, as soon as night had fled,  
 To his forge and anvil on a floating isle,  
 In a broad cave, where he in many a style  
 And with the blast of flame had shaped much art;  
 Upon an inlaid seat she sat apart,  
 Facing the door, her snow-white shoulders cloaked  
 With locks that with a golden comb she stroked, 50  
 About to braid their length. She saw them there  
 And called them in, ceasing to comb her hair,  
 And rose and sat them down. When she'd done that,  
 Starting to bind her uncombed locks, she sat  
 As well, then smiled and hailed them craftily:  
 "Dear friends, what brings you here so tardily?  
 You were not frequent visitors before,  
 Since you are goddesses superior  
 To all of us. Why come now? This address  
 Hera rejoined: "You mock us. But distress 60  
 Disturbs us. *Argo*, Jason's ship, is moored  
 Upon the River Phasis, and on board  
 Are all the other heroes. For each one  
 We greatly fear – the labour to be done  
 Is close at hand – but more specifically  
 We fear for Jason. That man I will free  
 Even if he to Hades were to sail  
 To rescue Ixion from his golden gaol  
 Of fetters, while my limbs possess the might,  
 That Pelias, having dodged an evil plight, 70  
 May not make mock – for his pomposity  
 Denied me sacrifice. Yet previously  
 Was Jason loved by me: at the gateway  
 Of the Anaurus' flood I made essay  
 Of mortal righteousness, and there he met  
 Me, coming from the hunt. The snow had wet  
 The peaks and lengthy ridges, down which poured  
 The torrents that, cascading, rolled and roared.  
 I had assumed the similarity  
 Of an old crone and, thus, he pitied me: 80  
 He hoisted me and carried me straight through  
 The strong tide on his back - I will value  
 Him always for that. Pelias will not pay  
 For his outrage unless you pave the way  
 For Jason's safe return." She spoke. At that  
 Was Cypris rendered dumb as she looked at  
 The pleading Hera, she with awe and dread

Was struck, and thus with friendly words she said:  
 "Queen, goddess, may there be no viler thing  
 Than is Cypris if, at your hankering, 90  
 I undervalue you in word or deed,  
 Whatever my weak hands can do. I need  
 No favour in return." Hera replied  
 With prudence: "Our quest you need not provide  
 With might. No, call your boy-child quietly  
 To captivate with love's intensity  
 For Jason young Medea. I surmise  
 That, should she kindly aid him, being wise  
 In guile, with ease he'll snatch the fleece of gold  
 And sail to Iolkus." This was Cypris told, 100  
 Who said to both of them: "You he will heed  
 Rather than me: bold-faced he is indeed,  
 But there will be some small shame in his eyes  
 Before you, while he will not recognize  
 My worth but always in contentiousness  
 Disdains me. Angry at his naughtiness,  
 His bow and his ill-sounding darts I mean  
 To break within his sight. For he has been  
 So angry that he threatens that, if I  
 Do not keep off him while he makes a try 110  
 At stifling his temper, he will do  
 Me mischief." Thus she spoke, and then those two  
 Smiled, looking at each other. Cypris, though,  
 Said in vexation: "Others find my woe  
 Amusing. I should not tell it to all –  
 I know it all too well – but, since you call  
 It pleasant, I'll appeal to and beguile  
 The boy. He'll not deny me." With a smile,  
 Then Hera took her by her slender hand  
 And gently said: "O goddess from the land 120  
 Of Cythera, do just that immediately.  
 Do not be angry at your progeny:  
 He will not vex you now." That's what she said.  
 She left her seat and, with Athene, sped  
 Back home. Then Cypris went to search the ground  
 In the Olymplan glens, and then she found  
 The boy among Zeus's large apple-trees,  
 Apart but not alone – Ganymedes  
 Was with him, whom Zeus once brought through the air  
 To live among the gods, for he was fair 130  
 And Zeus was smitten. They were gambling  
 With golden dice, which is a common thing  
 For boys together. Eros stood upright

And greedily was holding very tight  
 Many dice in his left hand close to his chest,  
 His cheek with rosy colour sweetly blessed.  
 The other crouched nearby, both taciturn  
 And sad. The two he had he threw in turn,  
 Made angry by Eros's laughing tone.  
 He lost those, too, then wandered off alone, 140  
 Helpless and empty-handed, unaware  
 Of the approach of Cypris. Standing there  
 Before him, she now held him by the chin  
 And said: "You dreadful rogue, why do you grin  
 In triumph? Did you cheat and sinfully  
 Defeat the innocent lad? Come, do for me  
 A task I'll tell you of, and that fine toy  
 Of Zeus I'll give you (when he was a boy  
 With boyish ways in the Idaean cave,  
 His dear nurse Adrasteia made and gave 150  
 It to him). It is a well-rounded ball.  
 You'll get no better love-gift, not at all,  
 From Hephaestus. All its zones are gold, and round  
 Each one of them a double seam is bound.  
 Each stitch is hidden; over everything  
 Is a dark-blue spiral. Toss it – it will zing  
 Just like a flaming star. This gift from me  
 You'll get, but you must charm the progeny  
 Of Aeëtes with an arrow from your bow  
 With love for Jason. You must not be slow 160  
 Or else I'll thank you less." He heard her say  
 These words and revelled, then he cast away  
 All of his toys. He grasped her eagerly  
 And clung on to her robe. He made a plea  
 To give it him at once. But she then drew  
 His cheeks to her and cordially, too,  
 She, smiling, said: "I swear, by you and me,  
 I'll give this present – no chicanery –  
 If that Medea's heart will be injected  
 With love by you. She spoke. Then he collected 170  
 His dice, then counted all of them, then flung  
 Them in his mother's shining lap, then hung  
 Around his frame his quiver which he'd leant,  
 With its gold sash, against a trunk, then went  
 With his bow straight through the apple-trees which bear  
 Much fruit near Zeus's hall, high in the air  
 Passing through Olympus' gates. Twin poles on high,  
 The highest peaks on earth, held in the sky  
 Steep mountains where the sun, with its first rays,

Begins to redden. He could cast his gaze 180  
 From here upon life-giving earth as well  
 As sacred streams, the peaks, the ocean's swell,  
 As through the air he flew. A marshy part  
 Of the river held the heroes all apart  
 In ambush on their benches, meeting there  
 In council. Jason spoke. The very air  
 Was hushed as they attended silently,  
 Row upon row in place: "What pleases me,  
 My friends, I'll tell you; and you all must do  
 The task in hand, common to all the crew, 190  
 As is free speech: let him who locks away  
 His views know that it's he alone this day  
 Who thwarts the army's safe return to Greece.  
 The rest, stay with your arms, enjoy some peace  
 Upon the ship, but I'll be on my way  
 To the palace of Aeëtes to assay  
 The man with words to see if cordially  
 He'll give the fleece to us or not – if he  
 Trusts in his power, he will snub our quest.  
 The sons of Phrixus and, among the rest, 200  
 Two others I'll take with me. Since we know  
 His former badness, whether we should go  
 To battle or devise some other scheme  
 In lieu of battle-cries shall be our theme.  
 Till we test him with words, let us not wrest  
 The fleece from him by force: it is far best  
 To win him verbally. For frequently  
 That's often met a need, when potency  
 Could hardly win: apt mellowness and ease  
 Prevailed. When his stepmother's knaveries 210  
 And father's plan to sacrifice him, he  
 Escaped, Aeëtes' hospitality  
 The noble Phrixus had. The wickedest  
 Of men – yes, all – revere Zeus's behest  
 (For he's the god of strangers)." With one voice  
 The youths cheered what he said. No other choice  
 Of action could be heard among the men.  
 He called upon the sons of Phrixus then,  
 Telamon and Augeias. He held the wand  
 Of Hermes. Then at once they passed beyond 220  
 The reeds and water onto the dry land  
 And where the plain rose up – I understand  
 They call it Circe's. There, line after line  
 Grow many willows, and, attached with twine,  
 Corpses hung from their tops – at this late date

It's still considered evil to cremate  
 Dead men by the Colchians, while burial  
 And monuments are likewise criminal.  
 Instead, wrapped in untanned oxhides, they are  
 Suspended from the trees some distance far 230  
 From the city, thereby making earth and air  
 Share equal portions, for the women there  
 Are buried – that's their law. As on they went,  
 In kindly thoughtfulness Queen Hera sent  
 A heavy mist throughout the town that they  
 Might not be seen, as they went on their way,  
 By the vast horde of Colchians. Then again,  
 When they came to the city from the plain  
 And the palace of Aeëtes, she diffused  
 The mist. They stood at the entrance, quite bemused 240  
 At the king's courts, the broad gates and, around  
 The walls in rows, the columns, while they found,  
 High up, a stone cornice resting upon  
 Its bronze triglyphs. In silence they passed on  
 Beyond the threshold. There were vines nearby,  
 Blooming with dark-green foliage on high;  
 Four ever-flowing fountains stood below  
 (Hephaestus had acquired them). A flow  
 Of milk gushed out of one, another teemed  
 With wine, while odiferous oil outstreamed 250  
 From a third, the fourth poured water which became,  
 At the Pleiads' setting, warm, yet that selfsame  
 Liquid, when they arose, would bubble out  
 Of the hollow rock, a crystallised, icy spout.  
 In the palace of Cytanian Aeëtes  
 Craftsman Hephaestus had built all of these  
 Wonderful things. Bulls he had made, their feet  
 Of bronze, their mouths as well – a scorching heat  
 Breathed out of them. He'd also forged a plough  
 Of rigid adamant in one piece, a vow 260  
 Of thanks to Helios, who took him upon  
 His chariot to rest, when he was wan  
 From fighting. There was built an inner square  
 With well-built doors and chambers here and there;  
 On either side there was a gallery,  
 Cunningly fashioned, and, diagonally,  
 There were yet higher homes that faced each other.  
 Aeëtes and his wife lived in another,  
 The loftiest. Another housed his son  
 Apsyrtus, born to a Caucasian, 270  
 The nymph Asteropodeia, before he

Took young Eidyia into matrimony,  
 Tethys' and Ocean's youngest girl. The name  
 Phaëthon was chosen, since his fame  
 Outstripped all other young men, by the sons  
 Of the Colchians, and then the other ones  
 Housed servants and the two girls of the king –  
 They came upon Medea wandering  
 From room to room, seeking Chalciope,  
 Her sister, who was kept in custody 280  
 By Hera, unaccustomed to frequent  
 The halls before because all day she'd spent,  
 As priestess, at the shrine of Hecate.  
 She saw them and cried out. Chalciope  
 Picked up the sound at once. Their yarn and thread  
 The maids threw at their feet, then out they sped  
 In droves. When she saw in that company  
 Her sons, she raised her hands in ecstasy.  
 They greeted her likewise; in joy they swept  
 Her up in their embrace and then she wept 290  
 And said: "So it was not your destiny  
 To travel far and leave me heedlessly  
 And cause me grief. Ah, what a mad desire  
 To travel far to Greece set you afire  
 At your father Phrixus' urging! As he died,  
 He caused my heart sorely to sorrow. Why'd  
 You go to the city of Orchomenus,  
 Whatever that is, and cause calamitous  
 Grief to your mother, for the property  
 Of Athamas?" She spoke. Then finally 300  
 Aeëtes ventured out, his wife as well,  
 Hearing Chalciope. Then such a swell  
 Of people now were thronging the courtyard.  
 Some slaves with a huge bull were working hard,  
 Some chopping kindling, some bringing to boil  
 Bath-water. None of them left off his toil  
 That served the king. Then, through the murky air,  
 Unseen, flew Eros, causing everywhere  
 Confusion, as a gadfly on a herd  
 Of heifers (oxherds call it by the word 310  
*Myops*) brings havoc. Once he'd strung his bow,  
 From his quiver a virgin arrow, full of woe,  
 He took beneath the lintel. Speedily,  
 Unseen, he crossed the threshold, cannily  
 Looking about, then, gliding nearer to  
 The son of Aeson, notched the cord and drew  
 The bow apart with both his hands, let go

And struck Medea, who was by this blow  
 Then rendered speechless. Eros laughingly  
 Flew back home from the high-roofed palace; she 320  
 Had been profoundly pierced, deep in the heart,  
 The bolt like flame. Her eyes would often dart  
 A flashing glance at Jason; from her breast  
 Her heart would thickly pant in its unrest;  
 Her memory was gone and in sweet ache  
 She melted, as a poor woman will take  
 Around a blazing brand some kindling  
 While spinning wool, that in the evening  
 She may have light within the house when she  
 Had been roused early; this small quantity 330  
 Of flame with wondrous blaze reduced to ash  
 Each stick of wood; so in a hidden flash  
 Destructive Eros round about her twined;  
 Her delicate cheeks, through her distracted mind,  
 Alternately grew sickly pale, then red.  
 After the servants had laid out a spread  
 And they had bathed, they revelled merrily  
 In meat and drink, and then accordingly  
 Aeëtes to his sons-in-law said: "You  
 Sons of Medea and of Phrixus, who 340  
 Was my most honoured guest, why are you back  
 In Aia? Were you put upon the rack  
 By Fate in your escape? You paid no mind  
 To me when your long journey I outlined.  
 When Helios my father hurried me  
 Behind his steeds I could not fail to see  
 Its length. My sister Circe to the west  
 He was conveying; so we came to rest  
 On the Tyrrhenian shore, where still today  
 She dwells, from Colchis many miles away. 350  
 What joy is there in words? Then lucidly  
 Say what befell you, who these men may be  
 Who travel with you, and where you touched shore  
 Upon your hollow ship." Argos, before  
 His kin in fear for the son of Aeson's quest,  
 Replied (for he was older than the rest)  
 With gentle words: "Aeëtes, she was split  
 By violent squalls, and then the crew was spit  
 On dry land by a wave in murky night  
 (We'd crouched under the beams) then to alight 360  
 On Euryalios Isle. We were rescued  
 By some god. In that island's solitude  
 Even the Arian birds that, before then,

Had dwelt there we could not find, for these men  
 Had driven them off when they had come ashore  
 The previous day. Then Zeus felt pity for  
 Our plight (or else some Fate), for he delayed  
 Them there, since straightaway a gift they made  
 Of plenteous food and clothes, once the renowned  
 “Phrixus” they heard, and your name, for they’re bound 370  
 For your own city. If you wish to know  
 Their quest, I’ll not withhold it. Longing so  
 To drive this man far from his property  
 And native land because in toughness he  
 Outstrips all of the house of Aeolus,  
 A king contrives a fruitless venture thus  
 For him and threatens Aeolus’s line  
 Will not break free from Zeus incarnadine  
 And his great wrath until the fleece is brought  
 To Greece. This ship Pallas Athene wrought, 380  
 Not one like those you might in Colchis see  
 (We chanced upon its worst epitome  
 Which blasts and fierce winds shattered). This, however,  
 Her bolts hold firm should every squall endeavour  
 To buffet her. She speeds before the breeze  
 As fast as when her oarsmen beat the seas  
 Unceasingly. So Jason chose the best  
 Of Greece’s heroes, sailing without rest  
 Through many towns across the angry foam  
 To your domain to take the fleece back home. 390  
 It shall be as you wish – to use duress  
 He is not here; payment of worthiness  
 He’ll give to you, for he has heard from me  
 Of the Sauromatae, your greatest enemy:  
 He’ll crush them to your sway. In answer to  
 Your wish to know their names and race, to you  
 I’ll tell all. This man, for whose sake did all  
 The others gather out of Greece, they call  
 Jason, grandson of Cretheus, who begat  
 His father Aison. If it’s genuine that 400  
 He’s of the lineage of Kretheus, he  
 Is our kin from the father’s family –  
 Both Athamas and Cretheus Aiolos  
 Begat, and Athamas begat Phrixos.  
 You’ve heard of Helios’ seed? Well then behold  
 Augeias. Here is Telamon, the bold  
 Aeacos’ son and Zeus’ grandson. The rest  
 With him can trace their lineage to the blessed  
 Immortals.” Thus spoke Argos. Nonetheless

This irked the king, angry tempestuousness 410  
 Causing his heart to rise, so testily  
 He spoke, his anger aimed especially  
 At Chalciope's sons. For it was his surmise  
 The *Argo* came because of them. His eyes  
 Flashed in his fury. "Sinners, disappear  
 At once, you and your tricks. Begone from here  
 Lest someone to his sorrow see the fleece  
 And Phrixus! You and these men came from Greece  
 Not for the fleece but kingly dignity –  
 My sceptre! Had my hospitality 420  
 Not fed your stomachs, then I would have cut  
 Your tongues and hands off, sending you with but  
 Your feet upon your way and hindering  
 Your setting forth again and perjuring  
 Yourselves before the blessed gods." Thus he  
 In his displeasure spoke. Then mightily  
 The heart of Telamon began to swell  
 Deep down and in his soul he longed to tell  
 A deadly tale to him in confrontation,  
 But Jason hindered him and, in placation, 430  
 Spoke in his stead: "Aeëtes, with this crew  
 Have patience, please. We have not come to you  
 To do what you surmise. Who'd cross the sea  
 So far to steal a stranger's property?  
 No, no, fate and a ruthless king's command  
 Compelled me. Grant our prayer and through the land  
 Of Greece I'll publish your great prominence.  
 We're ready now to pay swift recompense  
 In war, should you desire to overthrow  
 The Sauromatae or any other foe." 440  
 He spoke with words both mild and flattering.  
 Yet with a two-fold purpose did the king  
 Sit brooding. Should he slay them instantly  
 Or test their strength? The latter seemed to be  
 The better choice to him, so in reply  
 He said: "Why must you tell all, stranger? Why,  
 If you indeed are of the heavenly line,  
 Your stock thus not inferior to mine,  
 I'll give the fleece and gratify your will  
 Once you've been tested. For I bear no ill 450  
 To honest men, such as the one you say  
 Rules Greece. There'll be a contest to assay  
 Your strength which I can compass though it be  
 A lethal one. Two bulls belong to me,  
 Bronze-footed, grazing on Ares' plateau

And breathing flame. I yoke them and we go  
 Through his severe four-acre field. With speed  
 I cleave it to its edge and cast the seed  
 In the furrows – not the corn of Mother Earth  
 But a dread serpent's teeth which then give birth 460  
 To armed men whom I slaughter with my spear  
 As they attack me from both front and rear.  
 At dawn I yoke my oxen and at close  
 Of day I cease to plough. If feats like those  
 You master, you shall take that very day  
 This fleece back to your king. I'll say you nay  
 Till then, you may be sure. The valorous  
 Should not surrender to the timorous."  
 He spoke, and Jason sat there silently,  
 His eyes fixed downward, his extremity 470  
 Leaving him helpless. Brooding long, his mind  
 Turned now this way, now that, he could not find  
 His courage for the deed (it seemed so vast).  
 With crafty words he answered him at last:  
 "Aeëtes, you restrict me with your plea  
 Of right. I'll take your challenge, though it be  
 A great one, even if it is the will  
 Of the gods that I should die: no harsher ill  
 Befalls a man than ruinous privation,  
 Which brought me, through a kingly proclamation, 480  
 To you." He spoke, with helplessness laid low.  
 Aeëtes, though, with words that fit a foe,  
 Replied: "Go to the meeting, since for sweat  
 You yearn, but if you shake with fear to set  
 The yoke upon the bulls or should you shy  
 From deadly harvesting, you'll see that I  
 Shall be the victor in all this: in fact  
 Another man may quake to interact  
 With a better." This was his abrupt response.  
 Then Jason rose up from his seat at once, 490  
 Augeias and Telamon too. Argos, as well,  
 Followed alone and gave a sign to tell  
 His brothers to remain. They left the hall,  
 And Jason's grace and beauty through them all  
 Shone out; the maid with sidelong glances cast  
 Her eyes on him and held her bright veil tight  
 To one side, while her heart was smouldering  
 With pain. Her soul, dream-like, was slithering  
 And flitting in his tracks. In sore distress  
 They left the palace. Now with speediness 500  
 Chalciope to her room had made repair

With all her sons, for she was taking care  
 To keep far from Aeëtes' indignation.  
 Medea went as well, in rumination  
 About those things the Loves arouse. To her  
 He still appeared – his clothes, his character,  
 His words, the way he sat, the way he went  
 Towards the door: it was her sentiment  
 That there was none like him, while constantly  
 His voice, the honeyed words he spoke would be 510  
 Upon her ears. For him she worried lest  
 The oxen or the king himself would best  
 And kill him, grieving as though he were slain  
 Outright already, while in her great pain  
 There trickled down her cheek a soft, sad tear.  
 She wept and softly spoke up loud and clear:  
 "Why am I melancholy? Should he die  
 The best or worst of all the heroes, I  
 Say let him meet his doom. Would that he  
 Were safe, however. o Queen Hecate, 520  
 And sailed back home unharmed. If the gods ordain,  
 However, that by oxen he'll be slain,  
 Let him know in this dread calamity  
 I'll take no pleasure. So oppressed was she  
 By love's bite. When the others left the town  
 And people by the path they'd travelled down  
 From the plain, Jason by Argos was addressed:  
 "Jason, you'll hate my plan but so oppressed  
 Are we that I don't think that we should shun  
 The contest. You have heard me talk of one 530  
 Young maid who practises some sorcery  
 Through Hecate's advice. It seems to me  
 That, if we trust in her, no longer will  
 We fear to be defeated thus. But still  
 I greatly dread my mother won't agree  
 To do this thing, but, since calamity  
 Is hanging over us, then back I'll go  
 To meet her." These kind words he answered so:  
 "If you believe in what you say, my friend,  
 I'll not refuse. Go to your mother, bend 540  
 Her ear with crafty words. Wretched indeed  
 Is hope of reaching Hellas if we need  
 To turn to women." Thus he spoke and then  
 They quickly reached the backwater. The men,  
 When they came close, made question joyfully,  
 And Jason answered disconsolately:  
 "My friends, there's anger in Aeëtes' soul

At us and we will never reach our goal,  
 Nor I nor you. He says on the lowland  
 Of Ares graze two bulls, bronze-footed and 550  
 Exhaling fire. This four-acre field  
 He bade me plough and said that he would yield  
 To me a serpent's seed, which he will take  
 Out of its jaws and which will later make  
 Earth-born, bronze-armoured men. That very day  
 I must subdue them. This without delay  
 I took upon me, for no better plan  
 Existed." Thus he spoke, and every man  
 Deemed it impossible, while silently  
 Regarding one another, tragedy 560  
 And helplessness oppressing them. But then  
 At last Peleus spoke up among the men  
 Who led the quest. He boldly stated: "It  
 Is time to plan our move. Yet benefit  
 Comes less from talk than might. If you're intent  
 On yoking Aeëtes' oxen, Jason, bent  
 On tackling this toil, to your vow you'll hold  
 And in your preparations yet be bold,  
 But if you do not trust implicitly  
 Her skill, don't go ahead nor try to see, 570  
 As you sit there, some other man to take  
 The task upon him. I shan't shrink or quake  
 Since merely death will be the bitterest  
 Of pain for me." He spoke, and Telamon's breast  
 Was stirred. He rose, agog, immediately,  
 Then Idas in his pride made Number Three,  
 Tyndareus' sons and Oineus' son as well,  
 A mighty man, though yet there did not dwell  
 Soft down upon his cheek, so did his breast  
 With courage swell. In silence sat the rest, 580  
 Taking no part. Then Argos instantly  
 Said to the men who hungered eagerly  
 For the contest: "Friends, it's we who in the end  
 Must act. My mother, I believe, will lend  
 Her timely aid. Now stay a short while more  
 On board, though eager, as you did before –  
 It's better to refrain than carelessly  
 To end up with a tragic destiny.  
 Aeëtes' halls have nurtured a young maid  
 Who learnt to master ably, with the aid 590  
 Of Hecate, the herbs that Nature grows  
 On land and in the flowing waters: those  
 Can quench a blast of endless flame, impede

At once the roaring rivers as they speed  
 Upon their way and exercise control  
 Over the holy moon from pole to pole  
 And all the stars. We thought of her as we  
 Went from the hall with the expectancy  
 My mother, her own sister, might prevail  
 Upon her now to offer some avail 600  
 For this contest. If this pleases you, this day  
 To make the trial I'll be on my way  
 Back to Aeëtes' palace. I'll succeed  
 Perhaps with some god's help." He spoke. Indeed  
 The gods gave him a sign of their goodwill:  
 As he fled from a mighty falcon's bill,  
 A dove, trembling with fear, fell from on high  
 Into the lap of Jason. From the sky  
 The falcon fell upon the figurehead,  
 Impaled. Prophetically then Mopsus said: 610  
 'My friends, this sign is heaven's divination  
 And there is only one interpretation:  
 We must seek out the maid and skilfully  
 Try to persuade her, and it seems to me  
 She'll not deny us if Phineus did say  
 That our return on Aphrodite lay.  
 This gentle bird of hers escaped his fate,  
 So by this falcon I prognosticate  
 My victory. My friends, invoke the shield  
 Of Cytherea and to Argos yield 620  
 Yourselves." These words were praised by the young men  
 Recalling Phineus's advice. But then  
 Idas, the son of Aphareus, of all  
 The only one, leapt up and, filled with gall,  
 Yelled: "Travellers with women, o for shame!  
 We call on Cypris, not the warlike fame  
 Of Ares, look to doves and hawks to stay  
 Away from toil! Don't think of war! Away!  
 Beguile weak girls!" He shouted eagerly.  
 Though many of his comrades quietly 630  
 Murmured, not one replied. Back down again  
 He sat in indignation. Jason then  
 Spoke his own mind with this encouragement:  
 "Since all approve this, let Argos be sent  
 Ashore. But we will leave the river and  
 In full view tie our hawsers to the land.  
 We should no longer hide, far from the shout  
 Of battle." Thus he spoke and summoned out  
 Argos at once with orders with all speed

To go back to the city and decreed 640  
 That they draw up their anchors and then row  
 A little from the marsh, and they did so.  
 At once Aeëtes held a convocation  
 With the Colchians far away from the location  
 Of the palace, where they'd sat before, so he  
 Could plan distress and ruthless treachery  
 For the Minyans. When the oxen tore asunder  
 Him who this heavy task had knuckled under,  
 He threatened that above the leafy height  
 He'd hew the oak-grove down and set alight 650  
 The ship with all its men, that they might vent  
 Their grief for being proudly insolent  
 In all their schemes. Though he had been distressed,  
 He would not have had Phrixus as a guest –  
 A man in warmth and grace beyond compare –  
 Had Zeus not sent a herald through the air,  
 Hermes, that he might meet a friendly host,  
 He stated, nor would pirates live to boast  
 That they were scatheless there – men resolute  
 On seizing others' goods, who plan astute 660  
 And wily schemes and with strident sorties  
 Burn peasants' stables. Also, penalties  
 Were due from Phrixus' sons for coming there  
 With sinners and taking, without a care,  
 His honour and his sceptre: earlier, he  
 Had from his father heard a prophecy  
 Most dreadful: Helios told him he must shun  
 The cunning tricks and tactics of each son  
 Of his and their crafty iniquity.  
 So, as they wished, by fatherly decree 670  
 He sent them to Achaia, far away:  
 His daughters caused no little fear – did they  
 Plan something vile? – and his male progeny,  
 Apsyrtus. But upon the family  
 Of Chalkiope this foul curse would be brought  
 And to these folk he spoke dread things, all wrought  
 In rage. He threatened to keep in his sight  
 The ship and all the crew that no-one might  
 Escape his death. Meanwhile, Argos, who'd gone  
 To Aeëtes' palace, on and on 680  
 His mother to entreat Medea's aid:  
 She'd thought to do this earlier, afraid,  
 However, lest she pointlessly should seek  
 To beg a maid who feared the fatal pique  
 Of her own father or, should her request

Be met, her deeds would all be manifest.  
 Deep sleep had soothed the maid, taking away  
 Her love-distress as on her couch she lay.  
 But fearful, crafty, grievous dreams appeared:  
 The foreigner had taken on, she feared, 690  
 The contest not to take away the fleece –  
 He had not travelled from his native Greece  
 To Aeëtes' town, she thought, for this – oh no,  
 He'd hither come to choose a bride and go  
 Back home: she fought the oxen easily,  
 She thought: her parents for their guarantee  
 Had no regard, for her they did not dare  
 To yoke the beasts but Jason, and from there  
 Arose between her father and these men  
 Contention of a doubtful issue: then 700  
 They told her that she should herself decide  
 What she should do and, setting them aside,  
 She chose the stranger. Wretched misery  
 Assailed them and they shouted angrily.  
 Sleep left her with a cry. Quaking with dread,  
 She leapt up, looking, as she lay in bed,  
 At those four walls and barely summoning  
 Her spirit as before and bellowing:  
 "Alas, these gloomy dreams have frightened me ;  
 I fear great ill comes from this odyssey 710  
 Of men. My heart is fluttering with fear  
 For the stranger. Let him far away from here  
 Among his own woo some Achaean maid;  
 Let maidenhood and life at home be laid  
 Upon me. Recklessly, however, I  
 No more shall stay aloof. No, I will try  
 My sister so that I may see if she  
 Will ask my help in the contest, misery  
 Assailing her for her own sons. This may  
 Quench all my grief. " That's what she had to say. 720  
 She rose, opened the door, barefoot and clad  
 In just one tunic and – for now she had  
 A yen to go and see her sister – went  
 Across the threshold. Standing there, she spent  
 A long time, checked by shame. She turned back then,  
 Then exited once more, then back again  
 She stole; her feet would go hither and yon  
 In vain; as often as she went straight on,  
 Shame kept her in the room. Shame held her fast,  
 Then bold love urged her on again. At last, 730  
 After three times of turning either way,

She fell upon her bed, in her dismay  
 Writhing. Just as a bride within her room  
 Sits grieving for her young husband to whom  
 Her parents and her brother gave her, nor  
 Yet has conversed with all her servants, for  
 Shame and reserve preclude such things. So she  
 Sits on her own and grieves; some tragedy  
 Has taken him before they can delight  
 In each one's body. At the very sight 740  
 Of the empty bed she weeps inaudibly,  
 Her heart on fire, lest the women see  
 And mock her. Thus Medea showed her woe.  
 A maid who served her saw her crying so  
 When she came near and told Chalciope  
 Who sat among her sons in reverie  
 On how to coax her sister. When she heard  
 The maid's strange tale, she trusted every word.  
 She rushed straight to her sister's room, alarmed;  
 She lay there in her grief, where she had harmed 750  
 Her cheeks by clawing. When she saw each eye  
 Tear-filled, she said to her: "Why do you cry,  
 Medea? What is wrong? What dire distress  
 Affects you? Has some god-inspired sickness  
 Assailed your body? Have you maybe heard  
 Your father tell you of some dreadful word  
 Of menace to my progeny and me?  
 Would that my parents' home I may not see,  
 The city neither; rather let me dwell  
 In this earth's limits, where there never fell 760  
 'Colchis' on human ears." That's what she said.  
 Chalciope with maiden shame blushed red;  
 Though keen to speak, she dared not. Now would speech  
 Rise up to her tongue's tip, now flit to reach  
 Her breast's abyss. It often searched about  
 To leave her lovely lips, but nought came out.  
 At last she spoke with guile, for she was pressed  
 By the swift Loves: "Chalciope, my breast  
 Is trembling for my children, for I dread  
 My father speedily will have them dead 770  
 Along with all the strangers. Recently,  
 While sleeping for a brief while, did I see  
 Such dreadful dreams. May some god see they go  
 Unrealized and you from dire woe  
 About your sons are free." Thus did she try  
 Her sister, hoping she would first supply  
 Succour. Her sister in oppressive pain

And fear was caught at what she said. Again  
 She spoke: "I, too, to set all this in motion,  
 Have come to you. Do you have any notion 780  
 That you may put to use? Swear now by Ge  
 And Ouranus that what I say may be  
 Our secret and you'll work with me. I pray  
 By the gods, yourself, your parents, too, that they  
 Will not before your very eyes be fated  
 Unjustly to be foully extirpated,  
 Or else with my dear sons may I die, too,  
 Then afterwards from Hades come to you,  
 A vengeful Fury." Thus she spoke. A tide  
 Of tears then coursed her cheeks. On either side 790  
 Her hands embraced both of her sister's knees,  
 She laid her head upon her breast, then these  
 Two women shared their grief. The distant sound  
 Of women sorrowing was heard around  
 The halls. Medea answered in the sting  
 Of anguish: "Wretched maid, what can I bring  
 To ease what you have spoken of to me,  
 Your Furies and your dire calamity?  
 Would I could help your sons. The potent vow  
 Of Colchis you urged me to swear just now 800  
 Be witness, great Ouranos, Mother Ge,  
 You shall not, while there is some strength in me,  
 Lack my support, should all the gods comply  
 With your appeals." She spoke, and in reply  
 Chalciope said: "Have you some device  
 To give the stranger who needs your advice,  
 Some ruse that he might win the tournament  
 And aid my sons? From him Argos was sent  
 To urge my help. I left him and came here."  
 She spoke. Medea's heart capered with cheer, 810  
 At once her fair cheeks flushed, here eyes aglow  
 Though wrapped in mist, and thus she answered: "O  
 Chalciope, as is to yours and you  
 Sweet and delightful, even so I'll do.  
 May I no longer see daylight, not live  
 A moment longer if I ever give  
 A thought to ought before what will set free  
 You and your sons, who are my family,  
 My brothers, kinsmen, young comrades. It's true  
 I am your sister, and your daughter, too, 820  
 Because, like them, you took me to your breast  
 When I was tiny, as Mother confessed  
 So often in the past. But hide this act

Of mine so that I may fulfil my pact  
 Without our parents' knowledge. At daybreak  
 Some sorcery to charm the bulls I'll take  
 To Hecate's temple." Then Chalciope,  
 That she might relay to her progeny  
 Her sister's aid, back to her room repaired.  
 Medea, left alone, was greatly scared 830  
 And wracked with guilt that she had hatched a plan  
 Against her father's will to help this man.  
 Night closed the earth. The sailors on the sea  
 Saw from their ships the stars of Helice  
 And of Orion, while a hankering  
 For sleep assailed those who were travelling  
 And the gatekeepers, and, her children gone  
 Across the Styx, a mother slumbered on;  
 No dogs barked in the town, there was no sound  
 Of men, and pitchy blackness all around 840  
 Was wrapped in silence. To Medea, though,  
 No sweet sleep came. The son of Aeson's woe  
 Kept her awake: she feared the bulls' fierce might  
 Through which his wretched doom was endless night  
 Upon the field of Ares, while her heart  
 Seethed fiercely as a beam of light may dart  
 Across a house, flung up from water splashed  
 From a cauldron or a bucket, swiftly flashed  
 And dancing here and there, a rapid whirl;  
 So whirled beneath the bosom of the girl 850  
 Her heart. Here eyes shed tears of sympathy  
 And in her soul there smouldered agony,  
 Round her fine nerves and neck where penetrate  
 The deepest pains, when never the Loves abate  
 From piercing shafts of torture. Now would she  
 Intend to give to him the sorcery  
 To charm the bulls, now would she change her mind  
 And plan herself to die, but then she'd find  
 Her thoughts had turned again – she would remain  
 Alive, not give the charms but bear the pain 860  
 In silence. Down she sat, still wavering,  
 And said: "Poor wretch, must all these troubles fling  
 Me back and forth? My heart's in misery  
 On every side, and there's no remedy.  
 A constant burn lives there. Would that a dart  
 From Artemis' swift bow had pierced my heart  
 Before I'd seen that man, before that band  
 Of my own sister's sons had reached the land  
 Of Greece. Some Fury or a god has brought

To us from thence this torture which has wrought 870  
 Full many a tear. In the contest may he die  
 If he must perish there. For how can I,  
 Without my parents knowing it, prepare  
 The charms? What story can I give them? Where  
 Is there a cunning, beneficial plan?  
 Should I give greeting when I see the man  
 Without his friends? Poor wretch, I can't foresee  
 That I shall rest from misery, though he  
 Be dead: when he's bereft of life, then woe  
 Will come; now shame, begone, begone, all glow. 880  
 Saved by my art, let Jason go away  
 And wander where he will, but on that day  
 When he's the victor in the contest, I  
 Shall die, either by fixing way up high  
 A rope to stretch my neck and swallowing  
 Destructive drugs. Still then people will fling  
 Their taunts at me. All cities far away  
 Will shout my destiny. My name shall play  
 In Colchian women's mouths and here and there  
 They'll mock me foully – 'that's the maid whose care 890  
 For a stranger was so great she died; that's she  
 Who shamed her home and parents; lunacy  
 Destroyed her.' What disgrace shall not adhere  
 To me? It would be better far right here,  
 Alas, to end my life this very night  
 Through some strange fate, for in this way I might  
 Avoid all taunts, thus never having wrought  
 Such dreadful shame." She spoke, and then she brought  
 A box wherein drugs that were remedies  
 And those that kill were kept. Upon her knees 900  
 She settled it and wept. Incessantly  
 The tears bedewed her bosom; copiously  
 They flowed as there she sat and at her fate  
 Wailed bitterly. She longed to designate  
 A fatal drug to taste. The box's string  
 She now untied, poor creature, hankering  
 To extricate the drug. But suddenly  
 Her heart was filled with dread anxiety  
 Concerning hateful Hades. Checking long  
 This urge, she sat while all around a throng 910  
 Of life's sweet cares appeared. She contemplated  
 The joys the living share and meditated  
 Her joyous friends, as maids are apt to do;  
 The sun now seemed much sweeter in her view  
 Than heretofore – for every joy she yearned.

The box she now put down, her judgment turned  
 By Hera. Wavering no more, daybreak  
 She longed to look upon that she might take  
 The charms to Jason as she'd vowed to do  
 And meet him face-to-face. Longing to view 920  
 The dawn, she often locked the bolts. Dayspring  
 Now shed its welcome light that it might bring  
 The people to the streets. Argos then told  
 His brothers to remain there to unfold  
 Medea's plans, though he himself turned round  
 And went back to the ship. Medea bound  
 Her golden hair, which fell in disarray  
 About her, when she first espied the day,  
 And bathed her tear-stained cheeks. Her skin now shone  
 With honeyed salve; a fine robe she put on, 930  
 Well clasped with brooches, and above her head  
 She placed a shining veil, and then she sped  
 Throughout the palace, heedless of the woes  
 That heaven sent to her and all of those  
 Which were to come. She called her maids to her –  
 The same age as herself, twelve maids there were,  
 Who in the fragrant chamber's portico  
 Would sleep, for whom it was not yet to know  
 A man – and ordered them to speedily  
 Yoke to the chariot mules that she might be 940  
 To the fair temple of Hecate conveyed.  
 While they prepared the chariot, the maid  
 Took from the hollow box the talisman  
 They call *Promethean* (if any man  
 Should smear himself with it at night when he  
 Makes sacrifice, appeasing Hecate,  
 The only-begotten maid, there will be no  
 Wound made upon him by a bronze sword's blow  
 Nor shall he flinch away from fire; that day  
 He'll prove superior in every way, 950  
 In prowess and in might). From earth it grew,  
 First-born, when the ravening eagle, as it flew,  
 Upon the vales of Caucasus let fall  
 Tortured Prometheus' blood-like ichor. All  
 Of one full cubit high it bloomed, in hue  
 Like the Corycian crocus, upon two  
 Stalks rising. But the root, within earth's bed,  
 Resembled new-cut flesh. She harvested  
 Its liquid, like a mountain-oak's dark juice,  
 And placed it in a Caspian shell for use 960  
 In her enchantment, after she had soaked

In seven endless rivers and invoked  
 Full seven times Brimo, youth-nurturing,  
 Queen of the dead, in Hades wandering,  
 In gloomy night, all clothed in black, and when  
 The Titanian root was cut, the dark earth then  
 Shook with a bellow; then Prometheus made  
 A heart-charged groan. She took the charm and laid  
 It in the fragrant band that circled round  
 Her lovely breast. She went outside and found 970  
 The speedy chariot which she mounted, two  
 Handmaids on either side; she drove straight through  
 The city, having seized the reins, one hand  
 Holding a well-made whip. The rest of the band  
 Of handmaids laid their hands upon the back  
 As they now ran over the ample track,  
 Their flimsy tunics all secured aloft  
 Above their snow-white knees. As by the soft  
 Parthenian waters or, bathed in the rills  
 Of River Amnisus, across the hills 980  
 Queen Artemis sped in her golden car  
 Behind her swift roes, coming from afar  
 That she may greet a tasty offering,  
 Her nymphs with her; some gathered at the spring  
 Of Amnisus, some gathered in the dales  
 And spring-packed peaks, as beasts kept low their tails  
 In fear at her approach, thus did they speed  
 Straight through the town. The people, taking heed  
 That they not look straight at the royal maid,  
 Made way for her. But when the streets, well-laid, 990  
 Of the city were behind them and the shrine  
 Beyond the plains was reached, down from the fine  
 Chariot she stepped at once impatiently  
 And to her maids said: "My iniquity  
 Is great: I was not heedful to restrain  
 From foreigners who wander our terrain.  
 The whole city is smitten with dismay;  
 None of the women who'd meet here each day  
 Is present. But since we alone are here,  
 Let us not spare to soothe our hearts with cheer 1000  
 By singing and let's pluck fair flowers that grow  
 Upon the tender grass and straightway go  
 Back home. You'll leave with many gifts that day  
 If you perform the thing for which I pray.  
 Argos has changed my mind, Chalciope  
 As well. But keep these words you hear from me  
 A secret lest my father hear what I

Have said. As for the stranger, who will try  
 To quell the bulls, I must receive, they state,  
 The gifts he brings to me and liberate 1010  
 Him from the fatal toil. This gladdened me.  
 I summoned him to come alone that we  
 Might portion out the gifts – mine he will bring  
 While I will give to him a different thing,  
 A deadly charm. When he comes, stand apart.”  
 She spoke, and this device pleased every heart.  
 Then was it that Argos rapidly drew  
 Jason from his comrades when he knew  
 From his brothers that Medea now had gone 1020  
 To Hecate’s holy shrine, then led him on  
 Across the plain, and in their company  
 Went also Mopsus, good at augury,  
 Ampycus’ son, who counselled well all men  
 Who travelled. Never had there been till when  
 The bride of Zeus made Jason on that day  
 A man like him, to see or have parlay  
 With. His comrades themselves, as they all gazed  
 Upon the son of Aeson, were amazed  
 To look upon those graces as they shone 1030  
 Out of the man, and as they journeyed on  
 Mopsus rejoiced, already reckoning  
 The end. There was a poplar, burgeoning  
 With leaves, upon the footpath and near by  
 The temple, whither cawing crows would fly  
 To roost. One, on the branches way up high,  
 Now shook her feathers and was heard to cry  
 Hera’s counsels: “You do not understand,  
 Poor seer, what *children* know – in all the land  
 No maid will speak sweet nothings to a beau  
 When strangers are about. Non-prophet, go, 1040  
 You witless thing! No generosity  
 From Cypris or the gentle Loves shall be  
 Breathed on you.” Thus did Hera reprehend,  
 And Mopsos smiled a smile that she should send  
 A bird-borne message, so he said: “Repair  
 To Hecate’s temple, son of Aeson, where  
 You’ll find Medea. Thanks to Cypris, who  
 Will in the contest be a help to you  
 (As Phineus, son of Agenor, foretold),  
 Medea will with kindness enfold 1050  
 You to her heart. Argos and I will wait  
 Right here till you return. Propitiate  
 The maid, yourself alone, and cleverly

Win her to you.” He spoke sagaciously.  
 Both praised him then. Despite Medea’s song,  
 She did not shift her thoughts; never for long  
 Did such amusement bring her much delight.  
 Perplexed, she faltered, though, so that her sight  
 Upon her handmaids wavered, and she tried  
 To see the far-off path, turning aside 1060  
 Her cheek. Her heart was often quivering  
 When she thought that she heard the hurrying  
 Of feet or else the wind. But by and by  
 Into her eager purview, striding high,  
 He came, like Sirius coming from the sea,  
 Which rises fine and clear, though misery  
 That’s infinite it brings to flocks. Thus fair  
 To see walked Jason. But a love-sick care,  
 Along with him, came to her. Her heart’s core  
 Then tumbled from her breast and, furthermore, 1070  
 Her eyes were misted, while a reddening  
 Suffused her burning cheeks. She could not bring  
 Her knees up, for her feet seemed bound to stay  
 Upon the ground. Her handmaids moved away  
 From them. They stood there, silent, face to face,  
 Like oaks or lofty pines which stand in place  
 Upon the mountains when there is no hint  
 Of wind, in silence, but will, without stint,  
 Murmur when winds breathe on them. Similarly  
 Would they converse, moved by the agency 1080  
 Of Love’s sweet breath. And Jason knew a woe  
 Sent down from heaven troubled her, and so  
 He said to her: “Pray tell to me, fair maid,  
 Why, since I’m here alone, are you afraid?  
 I’m not an idle boaster, as some are,  
 Nor was I when in my own land afar.  
 Don’t be abashed before me to enquire  
 About whatever is your heart’s desire  
 Or speak your mind. But to this hallowed place,  
 Where sin cannot be sanctioned, face to face 1090  
 We have arrived, therefore you must feel free  
 To ask and speak; and do not hoodwink me  
 With honeyed words, for at the first you swore  
 To your sister that the drugs I hankered for  
 You would bestow on me. I beg of you  
 By Hecate, my children, Lord Zeus, too,  
 Who holds his hand out to those who implore  
 And strangers also, for my need is sore  
 And I am both of these. Without avail

From you, in this fell test I'll not prevail. 1100  
 Later I'll show you my appreciation,  
 For that befits men of another nation.  
 I'll spread your name and make you glorious;  
 You'll be ennobled by the rest of us,  
 Their wives and mothers, too, on our return,  
 Who now perhaps sit on the shores and yearn  
 In grief for us. Their painful misery  
 You may dispel. Once in antiquity  
 Minoan Ariadne loosed the bond 1110  
 Of grim contests for Theseus in her fond  
 Indulgence, daughter of Pasiphaë  
 (Her father was the sun god who held sway  
 Up in the sky). When Minos quelled his spleen,  
 She boarded ship and sailed with Theseus, keen  
 To leave her native-land. She was held dear  
 Even by the gods; each night one sees appear  
 A starry crown up high, which people call  
 The Crown of Ariadne; like a ball  
 It rolls along, a holy constellation  
 All night. And thus the gods' appreciation 1120  
 Will you receive if only you'll redeem  
 This mighty host of heroes, for you seem,  
 By your allure, in gentle courtesy  
 To shine." He spoke, bestowing dignity  
 Upon her, and she cast her eyes aside  
 And sweetly smiled, her heart melted with pride  
 At his acclaim, then faced him, having no  
 Idea how she should start to speak, although  
 She yearned to blurt out all immediately.  
 She from her fragrant girdle willingly 1130  
 Pulled out the charm, which forthwith in delight  
 He took from her, and now her soul she might  
 Have drawn from out her breast in her elation  
 At his desire and made it a donation  
 To him. Such was Love's honeyed flames that gleamed  
 From Jason's golden head; her eyes now beamed,  
 So captivated was she. Through and through  
 Her heart grew melting-warm just like the dew  
 Upon the roses; by the bright sunrise  
 Made warm. Now would they shyly drop their eyes, 1140  
 Now drink each other in, beneath each brow  
 With rapture smiling. Finally, somehow  
 She managed: "Take heed now, that I may frame  
 Aid for you. Since my father, when you came,  
 Gave you the dragon's deadly teeth for you

To sow, wait till the night is split in two,  
 Wash in the endless stream, then move away  
 From all your comrades, dressed in the array  
 Of dark-blue clothes, and dig a rounded pit,  
 Thereafter slay a female lamb in it, 1150  
 Then sacrifice it whole, accumulate  
 A pyre above the pit and then placate  
 The only-begotten daughter of Perses  
 And pour the hive-stored industry of bees  
 From a cup, seek her goodwill and let no sound  
 Of steps behind you make you turn around,  
 Or barking dogs, in case you should undo  
 All rites; don't go back duly to the crew.  
 When dawn appears, moisten the charm, undress  
 And smear yourself with oil. Then will prowess 1160  
 And mighty strength be yours – you'll have to say  
 You're like the gods, not men. Then you must spray  
 Your spear, your shield, your sword. The earthborn men  
 Will not transfix you with their spear-points then,  
 Nor the flame of deadly bulls, which cruelly  
 Darts quickly onward. But you shall not be  
 This way for long – just one day. Do not quail,  
 However, from the contest. More avail  
 I'll tell you of. You must immediately,  
 After the bulls are yoked, your energy 1170  
 And strength apply to sow the stubborn land.  
 The Giants will be springing up to stand  
 Among the rows, the serpent's teeth now sown  
 Upon the dusky clods. Throw a large stone,  
 Unseen, should you observe a massive pack  
 Arising from the field, for they'll attack  
 Each other over it, as over food  
 Wild dogs will fight. Then join them in this mood.  
 From out of Aia you shall take the fleece  
 By this device away from here to Greece. 1180  
 Go where you please after you've left this place.”  
 She spoke and silently levelled her face  
 Towards the ground and wept exceedingly  
 And moistened her fair cheeks in misery,  
 For he'd sail far away and leave her there.  
 Taking his hand, she spoke in her despair,  
 For shame had left her eyes. “Should you reach home,  
 Remember me. Though far across the foam,  
 I will remember you. Pray tell to me,  
 Where is your home? Whither across the sea 1190  
 Shall you be bound? Will you perhaps go by

Wealthy Orchomenus? Or shall you ply  
 Your oars close to Aeaëa Island? Pray,  
 Tell of the daughter of Pasiphaë,  
 The noble maid you named, who is related  
 To my father.” Deadly Love insinuated  
 Himself, at what she spoke and at her tears,  
 In him as well. He said: “If all my fears  
 Are groundless and I conquer, I can say  
 That I shall not forget you night and day, 1200  
 Should I get home to Greece, so long as there  
 Is not a viler toil that I must bear  
 At Aeëtes’ hands. But if it pleases you  
 To know where is my home, I’ll tell you true,  
 As I feel bound to do. There is a land  
 Where all around it lofty mountains stand,  
 Rich in both sheep and pasture: in that place  
 Deucalion, a hero full of grace,  
 Was fathered by Prometheus, progeny  
 Of Iapetus, who was the first to be 1210  
 A city-founder and who shrines created  
 To the immortals and who delegated  
 Himself as ruler. Those who dwell nearby  
 Have called this land Haemonia, where my  
 City, Iolcus, stands, and many more;  
 Aiaia Isle is unknown on that shore.  
 It’s said that Minyas, son of Aiolus,  
 Left there and built the town Orchomenus,  
 Which borders Thebes. What is the use to tell  
 To you these petty details? – where I dwell, 1220  
 Of Minos’ progeny, fair and far-famed  
 (You asked of her, who is for Minos named)  
 As for her sake Minos was well inclined  
 To Theseus, may your father turn his mind  
 Benignly to us.” Thus he spoke, allaying  
 Her fears with those soft words that he was saying.  
 Her heart was stirred with anguish unrelenting  
 As she addressed him, grievously lamenting:  
 “No doubt in Greece such covenants as these  
 Are recognized; however, Aeëtes 1230  
 Is not such as you claim Minos to be,  
 My husband and Pasiphaë’s progeny,  
 And I’m no Ariadne. Do not, then,  
 Discourse on hospitality but, when  
 You reach Iolcus, think of me, as I  
 Shall think of you: my parents I defy.  
 And may a rumour from afar reach me

Or an avian herald, if your memory  
 Of me has lapsed or else across the foam  
 May swift squalls snatch and take me to your home 1240  
 In Iolcus that before your eyes I might  
 Reproach you and remind you that your flight  
 Was due to my goodwill; may I then be  
 Your unexpected guest." With these words she  
 Shed piteous tears. Then Jason said: "To hell  
 With empty blasts, that courier-bird as well,  
 My dear: your talk is vain. If to the land  
 Of Greece you travel, you will surely stand  
 In everyone's respect and admiration;  
 They'll treat you with a goddess' veneration 1250  
 Because by virtue of your strategy  
 Their sons came home, and from calamity  
 Their brothers, kinsmen, stalwart spouses, too,  
 Were saved. Within the bridal chamber you  
 Shall then prepare our couch, and not a thing  
 Shall come between our love until the ring  
 Of Death's grim knell." He spoke, at which, inside,  
 Her soul at what he'd spoken liquefied.  
 And yet she shuddered at the ruination  
 To come. Poor wretch! For her repudiation 1260  
 Of living in Hellas could not endure  
 For very long, for Hera made quite sure  
 Medea from Aeaea was to go  
 To holy Iolcus as a source of woe  
 To Pelias, leaving her native land.  
 Now, watching from a distance, her whole band  
 Of handmaids mutely grieved. She must now set  
 Off back to her mother's home. She did not yet  
 Think of departure, for she filled with cheer  
 To look upon his beauty and to hear 1270  
 His winsome words. But Jason finally  
 With prudence said to her: "It's time that we  
 Departed lest the setting of the sun  
 Should catch us unawares and then someone  
 From an alien land may know our strategy.  
 But we'll return and meet." To this degree  
 They tested out each other as they voiced  
 Soft words, then parted. Jason now rejoiced  
 As he returned to *Argo* hurriedly  
 To join his friends, while to the company 1280  
 Of her handmaids she went. They came to her  
 As one, but as they pressed her close, they were  
 Unseen by her, for high up in the air

Her soul was hovering. Right then and there  
 She mounted the swift car robotically;  
 With reins and well-made whip in each hand, she  
 Urged on the mules, which to the palace raced.  
 As she approached the city, she was faced  
 With questions from Chalciope, distressed  
 About her sons. Medea, though, oppressed 1290  
 With changing fancies, didn't hear a word,  
 Nor would she have replied if she *had* heard.  
 She sat upon a low stool which was set  
 At the bed's foot and, with eyes that were wet,  
 Laid her left hand upon her cheek and thought  
 Upon the evil deeds that would be wrought  
 Through her advice. When Jason had repaired  
 To where he'd left his comrades, he prepared  
 To go with them, telling them all he'd done,  
 Back to the other heroes. So, as one, 1300  
 They went to the ship. They hastened to enfold  
 Him in their arms and questioned him. He told  
 Them of the maid's devices, having shown  
 The dreadful charm to them. But, all alone  
 Sat Idas, from the others separated,  
 Biting his wrath. The crew, though, were elated  
 And, when night's darkness hindered them, they went  
 About their evening business. Jason sent  
 Two men at dawn to ask of Aeëtes  
 For the seed – Telamon, who loved hostilities, 1310  
 And Aethalides, Hermes's famous son.  
 Nor did their journey prove a useless one,  
 For Lord Aeëtes gave them straightaway  
 The Aonian dragon's fell teeth for the fray  
 (In Ogygian Thebes had Cadmos, following  
 Europe, killed that guardian of the spring  
 Of Ares). There he settled, for Apollo  
 Had given him a cow that he might follow,  
 By his prophetic word, and she had led  
 Him thither. From the jaws within its head 1320  
 The goddess tore them all, delivering  
 Them to Aeëtes as an offering  
 And to the slayer. After dissemination  
 On the Aonian plains, an earthborn nation  
 Aeëtes founded of those who stayed free  
 From death at Ares' sowing. Readily  
 He gave them to take back to the *Argo*,  
 Thinking he'd not complete the task, although  
 He'd yoke the oxen. In the west the day

Was sinking through the dark earth far away 1330  
 Beyond the further Aethiopian height,  
 While all her steeds were being yoked by Night  
 And all the heroes now prepared to lie  
 On pallets by the hawsers. In the sky  
 The stars of gleaming Helice, the Bear,  
 Had set and under heaven's girth the air  
 Was still, when Jason went immediately  
 To a bare place with all the secrecy  
 Of a thief and all his needs. He'd taken thought  
 Of everything. Now Argos came and brought 1340  
 A ewe and sheep's milk, both of which he'd got  
 From *Argo*. But when Jason saw the spot,  
 Far from the haunt of men, a meadow still  
 And bright, to start with in the sacred rill  
 He washed his tender body solemnly,  
 Put on a dark robe which Hypsipyle  
 Of Lemnos gave to him, commemorating  
 For him full many an amatory mating.  
 Then, eighteen inches deep, he dug a pit  
 And then he heaped wood-billets over it. 1350  
 He cut the sheep's throat and above the height  
 Of wood he duly stretched it, set alight  
 The billets, pouring on the offering  
 Mixed wine, asked Brimo Hecate to bring  
 Him triumph in the contests, and then drew  
 Away and, from the utmost depths, she knew  
 His voice, that dread goddess, and came to find  
 His sacrifice, while her dread serpents twined  
 Round the oak boughs; a multiplicity  
 Of torches were agleam, and one could see 1360  
 The hellhounds sharply barking all about;  
 The meadows trembled at her step; a shout  
 Rose from the nymphs who to each marsh resort  
 And every river, too, and who cavort  
 Round Amarantian Phasis. Now a dread  
 Seized Jason; even so, with forward tread,  
 He never looked back till he came upon  
 His comrades once again. Now early Dawn  
 Above the snowy Caucasos showed light.  
 Aeëtes then around his chest pulled tight 1370  
 His stiff breastplate which, having liquidated  
 Phlegraian Mimas, Ares had donated  
 To him, and then upon his head he fit  
 His golden helmet with the four plumes – it  
 Flashed like the rolling sun when up it slides

From Ocean. Now his shield of many hides  
 And grim, resistless spear he swung, whose blow  
 No hero could withstand, now there was no  
 Heracles with them – for he alone could stand  
 Its shock in war. Phaëthon was at hand, 1380  
 Holding the rapid steeds that he might go  
 Onto the well-built chariot: he did so  
 And grasped the reins. On the broad thoroughfare  
 He travelled from the city, out to where  
 The contest would be held, and, right along  
 With him, there went the multitudinous throng.  
 Just as Poseidon on his car would cross  
 The land to the Isthmian Games, or Tainarus,  
 Or Lerne's water, or Hyantian  
 Onchestos' grove or with those horses ran 1390  
 To Calauria, or the promontory  
 Of Harmonia, or Garaistus' grove – thus he,  
 Lord of Colchis, appeared. Jason submerged  
 The charm in water, as Medea urged,  
 Then both his shield and heavy spear he sprayed  
 With it, and then his sword. His friends displayed  
 Great strength in trying out his arms, but they  
 Could not contort even a little way  
 That spear: in their robust hands quite intact  
 And firm it stayed. Now it was wildly whacked 1400  
 By Idas with his mighty sword, for he  
 Was angry at them, and its apogee,  
 Like a hammer on an anvil, was repelled  
 And leapt back. Now the heroes happily yelled,  
 Their hopes enlarged, and then each body part  
 Did Jason spray, whereon into his heart  
 A terrible strength, dauntless, unspeakable.  
 Entered. On both sides were his hands filled full  
 Of vigour. As a war horse, hankering  
 For battle, beats the ground while whinnying 1410  
 And leaping, ears pricked up in haughtiness,  
 So Aeson's son was filled with happiness  
 At his own strength; often high-leaping here  
 And there, he brandished in his hands his spear  
 Of ash and shield. You'd say a wintry glare  
 Kept scintillating through the gloomy air  
 Out of the clouds, when they bring on the rain  
 In blackest storm. His men would soon refrain  
 From the contest, but, on benches row on row,  
 They swiftly reached the Arian plains and lo! 1420  
 It stood beyond the town, as far away

As the turning-point is from the starting-bay  
 In chariot-races, when the family  
 Of some dead lord holds games for soldiery  
 And knights. They found Aeëtes and the rest  
 Of the Colchians – they had settled on the crest  
 Of Caucasus, he on the winding lip  
 Of the river. When the crew had moored the ship  
 With hawsers, Jason leapt down, on the way,  
 With both his spear and buckler, to the fray. 1430  
 At once he took his shining helmet, made  
 Of bronze, filled with sharp teeth, his bow displayed  
 Around his shoulders, stripped, now like the bold  
 Ares, now Phoebus with his sword of gold.  
 He looked across the grassland and espied  
 The bulls' bronze yokes and, lying by their side,  
 The plough, unsectioned, rock-hard. He came near,  
 Then through the butt he fixed his mighty spear  
 And, doffing his helmet, this he reclined  
 Against it, then, with just his shield, to find 1440  
 The countless bull-tracks, he advanced. From some  
 Dark recess in the earth he saw them come,  
 Leaving their staunch, smoke-filled abode, and flame  
 Shot out of all four nostrils as they came.  
 The heroes quailed at this, but he withstood  
 Their onrush as a rocky sea-reef would  
 Withstand the waves by countless squalls propelled.  
 His shield before his body Jason held.  
 Both roaring bulls with mighty horns attacked  
 The man but made upon him no impact 1450  
 At all. As when the armourer's bellows glow  
 All through the furnace and thereby bestow  
 Strength to the ravening flame, then blows no more,  
 And from it emanates a dreadful roar  
 As up it leaps, so, fiercely breathing flame,  
 The deadly heat like lightning as they came,  
 Those bulls roared out. The maid's charms, though, protected  
 The man, who now with all his strength connected  
 With the horn of the right-hand bull and then he tugged  
 It nearer to the bronze-cast yoke and lugged 1460  
 The bull down to the ground. Then straightaway  
 He kicked the bronze foot. In the self-same way,  
 With just one blow, the other bull he downed.  
 His ample shield he threw down on the ground,  
 Then grasped their foreknees, striding here and there,  
 From side to side, and swiftly through the glare  
 Of flame he rushed. The king was startled by

The hero's strength. Now the Tyndaridae –  
 For it had been predicted long ago –  
 Took up the yoke and gave it him to throw 1470  
 About them. Then a bronze-made pole he placed  
 Between them both and to the yoke he laced  
 It by its point. Leaving the fire, those two  
 Returned then to the ship. But Jason drew  
 His shield onto his back; he now put on  
 His sharp-toothed helm and took his spear, which none  
 Could shun, and, like a worker of the earth  
 With an Argive goad, he struck the bulls' wide girth  
 And pricked them, well directing the plough's blade  
 Of adamant. The animals now made 1480  
 A raging din and breathed fierce fire, their breath  
 Like howling winds which men, in fear of death  
 While sailing on the sea, shrink from, thereat  
 Their great sail furling. Not long after that  
 They yielded to the spear, the rugged land  
 Now broken up, cleft by the ploughshare and  
 The vigorous bulls. The clods groaned dreadfully,  
 Rent by the furrows, each a misery  
 To man, while he, far from him, cast the teeth  
 Incessantly among the clods beneath, 1490  
 And often turning round lest that the yield  
 Of earth-born men should rise up in the field  
 Against him, while the beasts, bronze-hoofed, went on  
 In toil. The third part of the day still shone  
 When weary workers call out for that sweet  
 Ox-loosing hour – now ploughing was complete,  
 The tireless ploughman finishing the field,  
 Though four plough-gates were measured in the yield.  
 He then unyoked the bulls which, at his shout,  
 Fled to the plain in fright. He turned about, 1500  
 Returning to the ship, while he could see  
 The earth-born men. His comrades heartily  
 Encouraged him. He then drew from the rill  
 His helmet and with water drank his fill,  
 Then bent his nimble knees, replenishing  
 His mighty heart with courage, quivering  
 With ardour, like a boar who hones his teeth  
 On hunters, while upon the ground beneath  
 Much foam flows from his angry mouth. Around  
 The entire field the earth-born men were found 1510  
 Already rising. Many a stout shield,  
 Two-pronged spear, shining helmet caused the field  
 Of dread Ares to bristle. Through the air

From earth up to Olympus flashed the glare.  
 As when the wintry clouds are put to flight  
 By hurricanes beneath the murky night  
 After a mighty snowfall, and a mass  
 Of shining stars throughout the gloom can pass,  
 So did they shine as they began to spring  
 Above the earth. But the wise counselling 1520  
 Of sly Medea, Jason once again  
 Recalled: he seized a boulder from the plain,  
 Huge, round, the quoit of Ares, God of War:  
 This quoit could not be lifted up by four  
 Stalwart young men one inch. Then instantly  
 He cast it in their midst and secretly  
 Crouched, confident, beneath his shield. As when  
 The sea roars over jagged rocks, just then  
 The Colchians cried aloud; meanwhile the king  
 Was speechless at that hard rock's hurtling. 1530  
 The Earthborn, like swift hounds with gnashing teeth,  
 Fell on and killed each other and, beneath  
 Their spears, like pines or oaks which by a squall  
 Are devastated, now began to fall.  
 Just as a fiery star leaps from the sky,  
 Blazing, a sign to mortals who descry  
 Throughout the gloomy air its vividness,  
 So did the son of Jason start to press  
 In on the earthborn men, his weapon free  
 Of its sheath, and, smiting indiscriminately, 1540  
 Mowed them all down, many face to the ground  
 Or on their side – there were some that were found  
 Upright up to their shoulders, others quite  
 Erect, while others en route to the fight  
 Were caught. As in a war for property,  
 A husbandman fears that his fields might be  
 Mowed down, he grasps his sickle in his hands  
 New-honed and curved, then darts across his lands  
 And cuts the unripe crops, with no delay  
 Until the sun should parch them, in this way 1550  
 He slashed the earthborn crop. Their blood was spilled  
 Upon those rows, as fountains' grooves are filled  
 With water. So, some biting on the land  
 Headlong, some backward, some on side or hand,  
 They fell, seeming like monsters of the sea.  
 Many were hit before their feet were free  
 From the earth; as far as they rose in the air,  
 They bent towards the ground, reclining there  
 With sopping brows. When heavy rain is sent

By Zeus, thus new-grown orchard-shoots are bent,  
I think, down to the ground, pulled clean apart  
From their roots, the toil of gardening men. Then heart-  
Onerousness and deadly misery  
Comes to the landlord/planter, similarly  
A heavy misery assailed the king.  
To the Colchians he went back, pondering  
How swiftly he might strike them. Now the sun  
Had set and Jason's trials were all done.

1560