

## MEDEA

Nurse:

The *Argo* never should have crossed the sea  
To Colchis, being guided rapidly,  
Avoiding the dark-blue Symplegades.  
Woodsmen should not have cut down the pine trees  
In Pelion's glens which forged the instrument  
Used by the hero-oarsmen when they went  
To find the golden fleece, for Tyro's son  
Had ordered them. Had these things not been done,  
The towers of Iolkos never would have seen  
Medea, whom I nursed, for she'd have been 10  
Untouched by love of Jason, having sailed  
To Iolkos, and she would have surely failed  
To urge the daughters of Pelias to slay  
Their father and be living still today  
In Corinth where she had originally  
Enjoyed a good life with her family,  
Loved by the citizens and succouring  
Her spouse in every way. There is no thing  
That wards off trouble better in this life  
Than when a married couple's free from strife. 20  
Now all is enmity, and everything  
Is ailing in their love. Abandoning  
His children and my mistress for the bed  
Of Creon's daughter, Jason thenceforth wed  
The girl. Disgraced Medea stridently

Called on his oaths and the security  
He'd offered. "Gods, be witnesses," she said,  
"Of his unjust return." She lies in bed,  
Fasting, in pain, her eyes moist endlessly  
Ever since she suffered this indignity, 30  
Eyes cast upon the ground, face turned away,  
Refusing to hear what her friends may say  
To comfort her, deaf as a stone must be,  
Or else an ocean wave. Her silence she  
Breaks only when her neck of snowy white  
She turns aside and in her dreadful plight  
Weeps for her father, home, the native land  
She left when he to whom she gave her hand  
And who disgracefully cast her away  
Conveyed her here. Poor maid, in her dismay 40  
She learned how good it is never to be  
Split from one's native land. Her progeny  
She loathes and hates to look at them at all.  
I fear she'll hatch a new plan. Full of gall  
Is she: ill treatment she will never brook –  
Believe me, I can read her like a book.  
I fear that she will take a sharpened knife  
And slit her innards, ending her sad life,  
In silence where the wedding-sheets are spread,  
Or put to death the woman Jason wed, 50  
And him and all the royal family,  
Then she might cause a greater tragedy,  
For she is dangerous – there is no man  
Who, when he clashes with Medea, can

Boast of a victory. But I see there  
Her children from their games: they're not aware  
Of her hostility, for we may see  
Young children do not dwell on misery.

I rue what I have said –

It's nothing.

Nurse:

By your beard, I'm begging you,  
Do not conceal the news from someone who  
Is a fellow-servant. I won't breathe a word  
If you insist I mustn't.

Tutor:

Well, I heard,  
Though seeming not to listen, someone say,  
As I approached the place where old men play  
At draughts, around Pirene's holy spring,  
That he'd heard that Creon, this country's king, 80  
Will oust Medea and her progeny.  
Whether it was reported truthfully  
I do not know: I hope it is not so.

Nurse:

Will Jason let this happen, even though  
He's quarrelling with their mother?

Tutor:

Older ties  
Give way to newer ones, so in our eyes  
Jason is nothing.

Nurse:

We're done for if we  
Add to the woes we suffered formerly  
Before we've weathered them. We must not let  
Our mistress know of this, for it is yet 90  
Not time to tell her, and therefore keep mum.

Nurse:

You hear, dear children, of the odium  
Your father feels for you? Curse him! Though he  
Is still my master, his disloyalty  
To family is clear.

Tutor:

There is no doubt

All are alike. Have you just now found out  
That men will always love themselves before  
Another (some to supplement their store,  
Some justly)? For their father took a bride  
And thus he yearned to cast his sons aside. 100

Nurse:

Children, go in the house! Be of good cheer!  
Tutor, sequester them – don't let them near  
Their mother in her sorrow, for just now  
I saw her eye them with a tightened brow  
As if she might maltreat them. I know well  
That she'll not terminate her anger's swell  
Till she's attacked someone, and may it be,  
Not any loved one, but an enemy.

Medea [within]:

Ah! Ah!

Nurse:

Children, your mother! Listen to her,  
Her feelings of great anger all astir! 110  
Run quickly in! Don't come into her sight!  
Beware her temper with its fearful bite!  
Her cloud of grief is rising, it is plain.

With her proud spirit, which few can restrain,  
What will she do, plagued with this injury?

Medea:

Ah, ah, I must lament this misery!  
You children of a mother full of hate,  
Die with your father! Likewise may this fate  
Fall on our house!

Nurse:

Why should your children share

Their father's sin? I grieve that they must bear 120

Your hatred and be harmed. A royal mind

Is very dangerous in that we find

They hold sway often but seldom obey:

To fierce changes of temperament are they

Subject. A balanced life is best for me

At any rate – to live with modesty

And safety I prefer, for moderation

Is suitable for every generation.

Excessive means to mortals give no gain –

Indeed they bring a greater store of pain 130

If gods are angry.

Chorus:

The poor Colchian maid

I heard cry out, her grief not yet allayed,

It seems. Old woman, is that true? For I

Heard from a slave within a dreadful cry.

I have no joy in all this misery

Ever since the house drank friendship's cup with me.

Nurse:

The family is done for, finished now.

While Jason holds fast to his royal vow,

My mistress wastes away as there she lies

Within her room: no friend in any wise 140

Can soothe her.

Medea:

Ah, may lightning pierce my head!

Why should I live? I might as well be dead.

Chorus:

O Zeus, o earth, o sunlight, do you hear

The poor maid's misery yelled out so clear?

Why yearn for death, poor fool? For anyway

It will come soon enough, so do not pray

For it! If this new marriage-bed should be

By Jason prized, don't fret. Let Lord Zeus be

Your advocate. Allay this wretchedness

And don't weep over this with such excess. 150

Medea:

Themis and Artemis, do you see how

I suffer, I who gave a mighty vow

To my accursed spouse? May I one day

Behold him and his bride waste quite away,

Their house as well, for they have been so bold

As to commit upon me wrongs untold.

Father, I leave my city, mortified

Because it was through me my brother died.

Nurse:

Hear that? She calls on Themis, child of Zeus,

Who guards men's oaths, they say. It is no use 160

To think that she will in some trifling way  
Break off her great resentment.

Nurse:

## How I pray

That she comes face-to-face to us and hear  
What we will say to her and somehow clear  
Her anger. May I never cast aside  
My friends. Go now and bring the maid outside.  
Tell her that here are friends. Go rapidly  
Lest she harm those within. Her misery  
Is growing.

Nurse:

I will do so. Nonetheless

I still have fears that I will not impress  
Her with my words. However, I shall grace  
Her with my labour. Such a glowering face  
She makes, just like a suckling lioness,  
To any servant trying to express  
Something to her! You would be shrewd to call  
The men of ancient times not wise at all –  
Composing ditties for festivities,  
Banquets and dinners, which would serve to please,  
Yet not one of those ancients could uproot

A mortal's bitter sorrow with the lute. 180  
For deaths and great disasters put an end  
To houses. It would benefit us to mend  
Those ills with song. When a great quantity  
Is catered, why then do they fruitlessly  
Make music? For a feast's plenteousness



Itself provides the guests with happiness.

Chorus:

She shrilly blames her husband, who betrayed

His wedding-vows, and groans, and now the maid

Calls out to Zeus's daughter Themis, who

Across the dark salt-water brought her to 190

Hellas, straight through the gates of the Black Sea,

A journey that is made infrequently.

Medea:

Women of Corinth, I have come outside

The house in order that you may not chide.

For I know that some men are arrogant,

Indoors and outdoors, some indifferent

By their retiring nature; in men's eyes

There's no justice – before they realize

Clearly another man's true quality

They hate him on first meeting, although he 200

Has done no wrong. A stranger must reveal

His deference to a city; I can feel

No love for him who's full of stubbornness

And harms his fellows by his boorishness.

This sudden blow has ruined me, and I

Resign all joy in life and wish to die.

The man who once meant everything to me

I now know clearly has turned out to be

The basest of all men. We women are,

Of every creature on the earth, by far 210

The most unfortunate: we must procure

A husband at great cost, and he is sure

To be our master. Once she is a wife,  
A woman finds the end of all her strife  
Hangs on one's husband's character – will he  
Be full of goodness or iniquity?  
Divorce must bring to women disrepute  
And they may not refuse a lover's suit.  
And then, when as new wives we must explore  
Fresh customs which we have not learned before 220  
At home, we must divine how we may be  
The best consorts we can be. After we  
Have laboured hard on this and found our spouse  
Does not resent our living in his house,  
Our life is lovely. If this is not so,  
We yearn to kill ourselves. A husband, though,  
When vexed with those within, will leave and end  
His irritation, seeking out some friend.  
But we have just ourselves: we live, they say,  
In safety, while the men must fight and slay 230  
Their enemies. How wrong! Three times a shield  
I'd choose to hold in war rather than yield  
In birth one child. Your tales and mine are not  
Alike – you have a city and you've got  
A father's house and the felicity  
Of life and groups of friends. But look at me -  
Homeless, alone, abused by him I wed  
And from a foreign land as booty led.  
I have no mother, brother, family  
Of any kind to keep this tragedy 240  
At bay from me. This much I'll ask of you –

If I can somehow pay my spouse his due,  
Keep it a secret. Though In other ways  
A woman's full of fear and cannot gaze  
On battle or cold steel, whenever she  
Is wronged in love, there is no savagery  
To match her own.

Chorus:

                    To this I will accede,  
For you'll be right to punish him indeed.  
Your grief does not surprise me. But look there –  
Our leader Creon's coming here to share  
New tidings.

250

Creon:

                    Lady, you who scowl and foam  
Against your spouse, I cast you out to roam  
In exile. Take your children with you, too,  
At once. It is myself who order you,  
And I will not go home till I expel  
You from this land.

Medea:

                    My life's a living hell!  
My enemies are throwing everything  
They can at me. Escaping this fierce sting  
Is hopeless. Though I suffer dreadfully,  
I must ask you why you're exiling me.

260

Creon:

Plainly, I fear you'll harm that child of mine,  
And there are many signals that combine  
To justify my fear: you're shrewd and know

The evil arts and manifest your woe,  
Robbed of your husband, and I hear it said  
You're threatening to harm the girl he wed,  
And me and Jason. Therefore I will take  
Precautions, for it's better that I make  
A foe of you now rather than be soft  
And rue it later.

Medea:

Many a time and oft 270

My fame has harmed me. Ah, one's progeny  
Should not be too wise, for humanity  
Will turn its back on them and tend to call  
Them useless, treating them with vicious gall  
And envy. If to foolish folk you bring  
New wisdom, you'll be thought a useless thing,  
Not wise; and if the city thinks of you  
As being greater than the people who  
Are known for cleverness, you're thought to be  
Provocative. I share this destiny, 280

For, being wise, I'm thought invidious  
By some, and yet I make you timorous.  
What do you fear? Creon, it can't be me,  
For I would not visit iniquity  
Upon my rulers. What misdeed have you  
Performed on me? You wed your daughter to  
The man you chose, that man whom I despise.  
I think that in your dealings you've been wise.  
I don't begrudge you your prosperity.

Advance the marriage! May felicity 290

Attend you all! Give me permission, then,  
To dwell here in this land. Superior men  
Have vanquished me, and therefore I will stay  
Quiet, though sinned against.

Creon:

The words you say  
Are soothing, and yet I am full of dread  
That evil plans are brewing in your head,  
And now my trust in you is even less.  
A woman who possesses recklessness,  
A man too, can be handled better than  
A woman who is clever but who can  
Be silent. Leave at once, and do not say  
A thing! My word is final. There's no way  
You can stay her, for you're my enemy.

300

Medea:

Creon, don't exile me – attend my plea –  
I beg you by your daughter newly-wed.

Creon:

You'll not succeed. You've wasted what you've said.

Medea:

Will you, then, disregard my suppliant plea?

Creon:

I will, because I love my family,  
Not you.

Medea:

Ah fatherland, how I love you!

Creon:

After my children I love Corinth, too.

310

Medea:

To mortals love is wholly ruinous.

Creon:

I think it can, though, be a joy to us.

Medea:

Zeus, don't forget the cause of all our woe.

Creon:

Fool, rid me of my own distress and go.

Medea:

I need no more distress.

Creon:

Well, presently

My men will cast you out.

Medea:

No! Hear my plea!

Creon:

You're bent on causing trouble, woman.

Medea:

No –

My plea was not to stay here. I will go.

Creon:

Why, then, do you still grasp me by the hand?

Medea:

Grant me one day to finish what I've planned

320

For exile. For my children let me find

A haven, since their father pays no mind

To them. Because you are a parent too,

Have pity on them. For it's fair that you

Should be indulgent to them. I don't care

If I am exiled, but that they must bear  
Misfortune I must weep.

Creon:

I've never been  
A tyrant and my grace has often seen  
Distress. Now, woman, although I can see  
I may be wrong, I will bow to your plea. 330  
I warn you, though, that, should tomorrow spy  
You and your children in this country, I  
Will slay you, and I mean just what I say.  
If you must stay, let it be one more day.  
By then you'll do no mischief that I dread.

Chorus:

Where will you turn now that misfortunes tread  
Upon you, lady? What now will there be,  
What land, what house, what stranger's sanctuary  
To save you from distress? Some god has cast  
You, madam, now into a hopeless, vast  
Maelstrom of woe.

Medea:

I undeniably  
Am cursed. But things will not turn out to be  
This way if in my craft I'm potent still:  
The new-wed pair yet strive and there's more ill  
For those who forged the marriage. Do you think  
That I would calculatedly hoodwink  
The man if I'd no hope of gain or planned  
Nothing: I never would have grasped his hand

Or spoken to him. Now his idiocy  
Has grown to such a lofty point that he, 350  
Though he can banish me, lets me abide  
For this one day – when I will kill the bride,  
Creon and Jason. I can slay all three  
In many different ways, but which shall be  
The first to try? I really can't decide.  
Should I into the bridal-chamber slide  
In silence and set it alight? And yet  
One thing stands in my way – if I am met  
When entering the house, they'll slaughter me  
With great delight. No, unequivocally 360  
I should employ the most direct process,  
In which I show significant prowess –  
Poison. Alright, but when they've met their end,  
What city will accept me, then? What friend  
Will offer shelter? None! I'll wait a while  
To see if any battlement will smile  
On me. Although I'll kill them stealthily,  
If some chance circumstance exposes me,  
I'll take a sword and, though I'll surely die,  
I'll slaughter those who captured me – yes, I 370  
Will go to such extremes. By Hecate,  
The goddess whom I worship specially,  
Who dwells within my house and whom I chose  
To be my helper, I vow none of those  
I shall encounter will be gratified  
By harming me. I'll kill the groom, the bride,  
The father, and the marriage I shall show



As bitter, and their family full of woe,  
And they will feel my exile bitterly.  
Don't spare, Medea, your sagacity, 380  
Your craft, your plotting. Now into the fray!  
For this will test your pluck. See your dismay!  
Don't be the object of their mockery  
From this Sisyphean match! Your pedigree  
Is noble, for your father was a king,  
His father Helios – from them you spring.  
You're clever, and a woman: although you  
Cannot perform great deeds, yet you can do  
Much evil.

Chorus:

Holy rivers to their source  
Flow backwards: backwards also is the course 390  
Of everything. Men are deceitful now  
In all their thoughts and don't hold fast their vow  
To Heaven. Talk of women's reputation  
Will alter, turning into admiration,  
The female sex no longer denigrated  
And by malicious rumour deprecated.  
Old bards will cease to hymn our faithlessness,  
Though Phoebus, lord of song, refused to bless  
Our minds with music: otherwise I'd sing  
Of men in answer, for there's many a thing 400  
Throughout the chronicles of history  
That could be said about men's destiny  
As well as women's. But you sailed away  
From your own home, passing, your heart astray

With love, between the twin rocks in the swell  
Of the Black Sea. Now on strange soil you dwell,  
Your husband's love, your bed eradicated,  
Deprived of any rites. The potency  
Of oaths has disappeared: humility 410  
Has gone from Greece and taken to the skies.

You have no father's home to realize  
An anchorage for you. Unhappily  
Another now exerts authority  
Within the house, and she's a woman who,  
As princess, has more mastery than you.

Jason:

How many times before this have I seen  
That no-one can control a vicious spleen!  
Although you could have kept this house and land  
By bearing patiently what has been planned 420  
By your superiors, yet you will be  
Exiled because you gabbled foolishly.

Well, I don't care one whit, so go ahead,  
Say I'm a loathsome man, but what you said  
About the royal house? Believe you're sent  
To exile as a lucky punishment.  
And I've always attempted to allay  
The king's wrath, prompting him to let you stay.

But you'd not cease your folly but would go  
On blackening the royal house, and so 430  
I send you into exile. All the same,  
I'd not disown my loved ones, so I came  
To see to your best interests so you may

Not be a pauper when you're sent away  
With our two children nor in dire need  
Of anything at all. Exile indeed  
Brings many hardships. You hate me, but still  
I cannot, madam, bear you any ill.

Medea:

You evil man, so full of cowardice,  
You've come here as my greatest foe. For this 440

Reveals to me your lack of bravery –  
To wrong your loved ones and then brazenly  
Look them straight in the face. I must profess  
The greatest malady is shamelessness.

You're welcome, though, for I'll relieve my ache  
By telling you your wicked actions make  
Me sick – I'll grieve your heart. Now, first of all,

I saved your life, as all the Greeks recall  
Who set off on the *Argo* as your crew,  
When you had been commanded to subdue 450

And yoke the bulls that breathed out sheets of flame  
And sow the fields of death. For then I came  
And slew the dragon which eschewed all sleep  
In order that it might be free to keep  
Its eyes forever on the fleece of gold,  
And thus I had the bravery to hold  
Aloft the beacon of your sanctuary.

Of my accord I left my family  
To go to Iolkos, there to live with you  
Beneath Mt. Pelion; and then I slew 460  
King Pelias in the most bloodthirsty way

Through his own children so as to allay  
Your every fear. I did all this for you  
And you betrayed me, marrying anew,  
Though we had children. Without progeny  
You'd be condoned for your desire to be  
Married again. I have no esteem for  
Your oaths now. Don't the gods rule anymore?  
Or have their laws been altered? You can see,  
I'm sure, that you've not kept your oath to me. 470

By my right hand, which you with earnestness  
Have grasped with both my knees, how profitless  
Was that suppliant grip! How totally  
Our hopes are lost! But listen now to me –  
I'll treat you as a friend (although from you  
What gain can I expect? Yet this I'll do,  
Because with what I ask you I will show  
How devilish you are) Where shall I go?  
My father's house, which for you I betrayed,  
Just as I did my country, when I made 480

My way here? Or Pelias' poor progeny?  
A fine reception would they offer me,  
Whose father I have slain! My family,  
As fate now has it, is my enemy.  
And by whatever I have done for you  
I've made an enemy of people who  
Did not deserve it. Indisputably  
So many women through your villainy  
Think I'm content. My spouse is so steadfast  
And wonderful that I have now been cast 490

Away from here, devoid of company  
But for my children. Such indignity  
For a new bridegroom now his children roam  
As beggars with your saviour far from home.  
Zeus, when you indicated gold to man  
With marks that it was counterfeit, why then  
Did you not indicate the very same  
With similar marks upon the human frame?

Chorus:

For wrath it's hard to find a remedy  
When families meet with hostility.

500

Jason:

It seems I must speak fairly, challenging  
The storm of all your tedious prattling,  
Like a good helmsman who must navigate  
With trimmed sail. But since you exaggerate  
The kindness that you showed me, I must say  
That Aphrodite is the sole mainstay  
Of my excursion. Although you are smart,  
To say that Eros with his matchless dart  
Forced you to save me would bring enmity  
To me. I'll not stress this extensively.  
You helped me greatly but received more gain  
Than you provided, as I will make plain.  
You live in Greece, not a barbarian land,  
While justice and the law you understand.  
Where force is not allowed. You're famous, too,  
In all of Greece for wisdom. But if you  
Lived at the edges of the world, there'd be

510

No-one who'd talk about you. As for me,  
Let me be poor and not sings songs as pure  
As those of Orpheus while I am sure

520

To have renown. Well, that's enough about  
My toil (for it was you who set this bout  
Of words in action). No, what you have said  
About the fact that I'm about to wed  
A princess – I will show that I am wise  
And self-controlled to make you realize  
That I will be a great ally to you

And to my children... Hush! When I came to  
Iolkos, surrounded by much misery,  
What luckier thing to happen but to be

530

The husband of the daughter of a king,  
Though exiled. While at this you feel a sting,  
I was not tired of you, nor did I yearn  
To have another bride, nor did I burn  
For further children. No, I'm satisfied  
With those we have. I wished to be supplied  
With riches and content especially,  
Aware that everybody tends to flee  
A penniless friend. For I wished to maintain  
My children fittingly for my domain:

540

The children whom with you I have begot  
Shall be on an equal footing with them. What  
Need have you for yet more? And yet for me –  
I need new children so that they might be  
A benefit to ours. A bad plan? No,  
For even you would not think this were so

Unless you missed the sex. If all is fine  
Within the bedroom, you women opine  
That you are happy, but if there should be  
A problem there, all your serenity 550  
You start to loathe. We should enlarge our race  
By breeding children in another place,  
No females anywhere. Accordingly  
Mankind would be devoid of misery.

Chorus:

Jason, you've spoken well. However, you  
Should not have left Medea, in my view.

Medea:

I differ from most folk, I realize,  
For I think all who in their words are wise  
Must all the same receive a penalty  
That's very harsh, for they can cleverly 560  
Conceal injustice with those words, and thus  
Their boldness makes them most iniquitous.  
But they don't have *that* much sagacity,  
Nor you. Don't spout your specious oratory.  
One word will bring you down: if you'd not been  
Wicked, before you wed you should have seen  
To it that you had sounded out my mind  
To get my blessing and not gone behind  
Your family's back.

Jason:

                    Your blessing? What a thing  
To say! If I had broached my marrying, 570  
You'd have said no. Indeed you cannot part

With all the towering rage that's in your heart.

Medea:

That wasn't it. You thought an alien wife

Would bring you disrepute in later life.

Jason:

It was not for a woman that I wed

A royal princess, but, as I have said,

To shelter you, begetting progeny

As brothers to our children and to be

A bulwark for our house.

Medea:

Prosperousness

That brings torment I'd not wish to possess.

580

Jason:

Are you aware of how to change that plea

And show yourself with more sagacity?

Don't think yourself unfortunate when you

Are quite the opposite.

Medea:

Insult me, do!

You have a refuge – I shall flee this land

Friendless.

Jason:

You *chose* that! Try to understand

No-one's to blame but you.

Medea:

What did I do?

Did I get wed and break my faith with you?

Jason:



You curse the royal family.

Medea:

I do,

And I send curses on your own house, too.

590

Jason:

I'll spar with you no more. But if I may

Give you some funds to send you on your way,

Speak up, for I'll provide them liberally.

I'll send my friends some tokens, too – they'll be

*Your* friends as well. If you should turn me down,

You'd be an idiot. Put off that frown

And prosper.

Medea:

I reject your friends and I

Won't take a thing from you, so do not try

To help me. There's no benefit at all

In base men's gifts.

Jason:

Nevertheless, I call

600

The gods to witness that I wish to do

My best for all the three of you, but you

Refuse the aid I offer, stubbornly

Rejecting all your friends: accordingly

Your pain will grow.

Medea:

Go, then – you're seized, it's clear,

With love for your new bride. Why linger here

Outside the palace? Play the groom! Maybe

You'll have a drastic marriage. We shall see.

Chorus:

When Aphrodite comes with no ado

And little madness, there are very few 610

Who don't enjoy her. But unfortunately

Too much lust brings to no-one decency

Or glory. Lady, I sincerely pray

Your golden darts which always find their way,

While dipped in lust, you do not shoot at me.

May self-restraint be my accessory,

The gods' best gift. May that goddess not shy

Anger and endless brawls on me that I,

Maddened with love, will seek a stranger's bed,

But may she judge the time when we should wed 620

And honour peaceful marriages. O may

I never be exiled from here, a prey

To helplessness, and suffer cruelty.

Before that can occur, may death take me.

There is no sorrow greater than that you

Have lost your native land. We've seen it, too:

And not from others have we this report –

No city and no friend of any sort

Has pitied you in your great suffering.

May that man die unloved who cannot bring 630

Himself to honour friends in honesty:

That man shall never be a friend to me

Aegeus:

I wish you joy, Medea: to address

A friend this way is best.

Medea:

May the gods bless

You, too, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion.

Whence have you come to visit us upon

This land?

Aegeus:

From Phoebus' oracle.

Medea:

Wherefore

Did you go to the earth's prophetic core?

Aegeus:

I long for offspring.

Medea:

Have you actually

Lived childless for so long?

Aegeus:

Yes: it must be

640

Some curse.

Medea:

You're married?

Aegeus:

Yes.

Medea:

What, then, was said

Of children?

Aegeus:

What can't be interpreted

By mortals.

Medea:

May I hear it?

Aegeus:

Yes, you may:

It needs a wise mind.

Medea:

What, then, did he say?

Aegeus:

“Do not the wineskin’s salient foot undo...”

Medea:

Before...? Something that must be done by you?

Must you arrive somewhere?

Aegeus:

I first must reach

My home again.

Mede:

Must you repair some breach

In Corinth?

Aegeus:

There’s a man called Pittheus – he

Is king of Troezen.

Medea:

Yes, the progeny

650

Of Pelops, known for his great godliness.

Aegeus:

Well, it’s to him that I wish to address

My thoughts about these words.

Medea:

He’s famous for

His skill in subjects such as this.

Aegeus:

What's more,

He is my closest friend.

Medea

Prosperity

Attend you in all your desires!

Aegeus:

I see

Your face is wet with tears. Why is that so?

Medea:

My husband is the lowest of the low.

Aegeus:

What's this? Tell me about your misery.

Medea:

Jason has done me wrong, although by me

660

He's not been harmed.

Aegeus:

Then clearly tell me how

He's wronged you.

Medea:

Well, another mistress now

Rules in his house.

Aegeus:

A shameful act!

Medea:

That's clear:

Although at one time I was very dear

To him, he's left me.

Aegeus:

Was this love affair

So great or did the man no longer care

For you?

Medea:

It was, and to his family

He's been untrue.

Aegeus:

Ignore him, then, if he

Is base, as you have told me.

Medea:

He has wed

A princess.

Aegeus;

Whose child is she? Go ahead,

670

Tell me the rest.

Medea:

Creon's, who rules this land.

Aegeus:

Lady, your sorrow I can understand.

Medea:

I'm finished! I've been exiled, too.

Aegeus:

But who

Has done this? You are telling something new –

A fresh grief.

Medea:

Creon.

Aegeus:

Does Jason accede

To this? I don't approve of such a deed.

Medea:

Not in those words, but yes. So hear my plea

And pity me in my adversity.

Don't let me be cast out without a friend,

But let me come to your domain and lend 680

Me succour as your suppliant. And thus

I pray that you will soon be prosperous,

Begetting children, and die happily.

You do not know the boon you have in me,

For I will terminate your childlessness

Since I know medicines that will bring success

To you.

Aegeus:

For many reasons, madam, I ache

To grant this favour to you, first for the sake

Of the gods, and second, for the progeny

You vow I'll have, for I am utterly 690

Undone on that score. Therefore, thus things stand –

If you decide to go into my land,

I promise to protect you. This I'll say:

That from my land I'll not send you away:

At my house you'll stay in security –

If you should leave, then it's your own decree.

Even my friends must see my truthfulness.

Medea:

So be it. I would have all the success

I want from you if you vow this to me.

Aegeus:

Where is your trust? What is your difficulty?

Medea:

I trust you. Pelias's house, though, is a foe,  
As Creon's is, to me, and, even though,  
Bound by an oath, you won't send me away  
When men are sent to take me, yet you may,  
Agreeing in mere words, not oaths, then be  
A comrade to them all and then agree  
To a messenger's request. I'm powerless  
But they have wealth and royal effectiveness.

Aegeus:

A prudent speech indeed! Then I will vow  
To the gods, if that's your preference, since now                      710  
For me this plan is safer, for I'll show  
Some pretext to your foes, and you'll be so  
Much safer, too. So name the gods.

Medea:

Swear by  
Earth, Helios, my grandfather up on high –  
In fact, all of the gods.

Aegeus:

Make me aware  
Of what I should and should not do.

Medea:

Take care  
You'll never banish me. I beg you, please,  
If asked by any of my enemies  
To do so, turn them down as long as you  
May live.

Aegeus:



By all the gods, that will I do.

720

Medea:

So be it. What would be the penalty  
For you if you infringed your guarantee?

Aegeus:

That which descends on all the impious.

Medea:

Go, then, in happiness. All's well with us.  
For I'll go to your city speedily  
Once I've accomplished what's meant to be.

Chorus:

Patron of travellers, Hermes, Maia's son,  
Conduct him safely; and may all be done,  
Aegeus, that you have yearned for. For I see  
You are a man of true integrity.

730

Medea:

My friends, by Zeus, by Justice and the light  
Of the sun, I'll be victorious in the fight  
Against my foes; and now I have begun  
My journey I am sure that every one  
Of them will pay the price, and just as I  
Was in the deepest pain, this man came by  
And proved a harbour for my plans; and so,  
When I shall to Athena's city go,  
To him I'll tie my cable. Everything  
I've planned I'll tell you, though it will not ring  
With pleasure in your ears. I'll send a man  
To Jason, who will ask him if he can  
Come to me, and when he arrives I'll quell

740

His wrath and tell him that he married well,  
Though he abandoned me: his choice, I'll say  
Was good. I'll pray he 'll let my children stay  
Behind, but not that in a hostile land  
My foes may slight them, but, as I have planned,  
That I may slay the princess he's to wed;  
A gown I'll send, too, woven with fine thread, 750  
Set with a golden crown: this finery,  
Once she has donned it, will ensure that she  
Is doomed to die in torturous distress,  
As will all those who touch her, for that dress  
I'll smear with poisons.. But enough of that.  
What I must do now I am groaning at:  
I'll kill my children. For there is no-one  
That can protect them. Look what I have done –  
Destroyed my husband's house. Now I shall fly  
This land to circumvent the deed that I 760  
Must do – to kill my darling progeny  
In cold blood. It's unbearable for me  
To hear my enemies' laughter, friends. But let  
That be. Where is the gain of living yet  
For me? I'm banished, and no means of flight  
From all of my misfortunes is in sight.  
I listened to a Greek: I was amiss  
To leave my father's house – he'll pay for this,  
I swear.. He'll see our sons no more, and he  
Will father none with her. So wretchedly 770  
The wretched maid must by my poisons die.  
But let there be no-one who thinks that I

Am weak, base or not irksome: that's not true –

I am the opposite, a menace to

My foes, kind to my friends. Such folk possess

Throughout their lives a great illustriousness.

Chorus:

The plan that you've outlined now gives me pause:

To aid you and uphold society's laws,

I urge you not to.

Medea:

Yet it cannot be

But this. But I have suffered dreadfully, 780

Much more than you yourself in this affair,

And so I pardon you.

Chorus:

But will you dare

To slay your sons?

Medea:

To hurt my husband thus

Is best.

Chorus:

And show yourself so treacherous?

Medea:

Yes, even so: away with words! Nurse, go

Bring Jason here! But do not let him know

The plans that I have made, and show to me

That you're a woman by your loyalty.

Chorus:

Erechtheus' sons from aeons long gone by

Have been content, born of the gods on high, 790

A land untouched by any enemy,  
Feeding upon renowned sagacity,  
Gracefully stepping through the fulgent air  
Where once Harmonia, she of the golden hair,  
Was born, they say. And legend has it, too,  
That Aphrodite through the country blew  
Down temperate breezes as she bent to fill  
Her pail from the Cephisus, as she still  
Would dress her tresses with the fragrancy  
Of roses, while, beside Sagacity, 800  
At her request, the Loves would sit where they  
Would labour side by side in an array  
Of worth. How can this city or this land  
That's occupied by holy rivers stand  
Making you partner of its citizenry  
Once you yourself have slain your progeny,  
Stained with their blood? I beg you to survey  
The act you're planning, and do not, I pray,  
Slaughter your children! Where are you to find  
The boldness, courage and the strength of mind 810  
To do this deed? How will you contemplate  
Their faces as you plan their dreadful fate?  
You will not have the purpose, once you hear  
Their infant imprecations, then to smear  
Your hands with their life's blood hard-heartedly.  
Jason:  
I've come at your request. Though you hate me,  
I'll hear you out. What is your wish?

Medea:

I pray

That you'll forgive the words I thought to say.

It's very reasonable for you to bear

My wrath, since in the past we've had our share 820

Of making love. But I've been querulous

About those words, reproaching myself thus:

"You idiot, why do you rave and fight

Against those people who plan things aright?

Why make myself an enemy to those

Who rule this country – you, too, who propose

Things in my interest by marrying

The daughter of a king and fathering

Brothers for our own sons? Why don't I cease

My anger when the gods offer us peace? 830

Have I no children, then? Do I not flee

The land? Am I not lacking company?

I thought all these things over and I found

That I'd been very foolish with no ground

For anger. I approve and realize

That in your wedding plans you have been wise

And helped us. O I must have been insane,

For I ought to have helped you to obtain

Your goal while standing by the marriage-bed,

Rejoicing at the bride you are to wed. 840

We're what we are, we women, although I

Won't say we're base; but you should never try

To ape our nature, playing tit for tat

With women's childishness; admitting that

I was a fool, I yield the ground to you,

For I have taken a much better view  
Of this. My children, leave the house! Come here,  
Embrace your father! Speak to one who's dear  
To us and end our former enmity.  
Our bitterness has disappeared, for we 850  
Have made a truce. Come, take your father's hand.  
And yet I fear that soon I must withstand  
Something the future hides. Children, will you  
Hold out your arms to me, as now you do,  
Forever? How I weep, so full of tears!  
Our wrangling gone, my eyes are full of tears.

Chorus:

My cheeks show pale tears, too. May the distress  
That we have suffered cease its sad progress!

Jason:

This I approve: I don't recriminate  
You for the words you said to me of late – 860  
A woman's wrath is natural when she  
Discovers that she's faced with rivalry  
In love. But now you've found the better way  
And realized that my decree holds sway,  
Although it took some time for you to see –  
You are a woman of sagacity.

Children, my anxious thoughts have now secured  
Safety for you, by all the gods assured.

You, with your future brothers, through this land,  
I estimate, will have supreme command. 870

First, grow to manhood: all things else shall be  
Seen to by me and that divinity

That smiles on me. So may I see you thrive  
In strapping adulthood that you may drive  
My enemies away! Medea, say  
Why you have wet your cheeks and turned away  
From me? Does what I said displease you?

Medea:

No,

It is the children that disturb me so.

Jason:

Why grieve for them?

Medea:

I bore them: when you prayed

They'd live, I felt great sympathy invade 880

My heart lest they should not survive.

Jason:

Cast out

Your fear – I'll see to this without a doubt.

Medea:

I will. I won't distrust your words. But we

Women are prone to weeping copiously.

Some things I've told you but I'll mention now

Some more – this country's leaders took a vow

To exile me, for it is best for me

Not to stay here, a liability

To you or to the rulers living here,

For I'm the house's enemy, I fear. 890

Then I shall leave this land. Accordingly,

That you may raise my children, make your plea

To Creon that they won't be sent away.

Jason:

I have my doubts but I must make essay

To win him over.

Medea:

Therefore you must ask

Your bride to take upon herself the task

Of begging him.

Jason:

I will most certainly:

I think I can persuade her.

Medea:

Yes, if she

Is a woman like the rest. I'll lend a hand

Myself and send her gifts that are more grand 900

Than any other gift – a gown whose thread

Is finely woven and, to crown her head,

A golden diadem my sons shall take

To her. One of you servants, go and make

Haste – bring them hither. She'll have happiness

Aplenty with her husband there to bless

And share your bed, possessing, too, a gown

That Helios, my grandfather, handed down

To his descendants. Children, from these men

Receive this bridal dowry, for you then 910

Must take it to the royal bride – it's no

Unworthy gift that she's receiving.

Jason:

Oh,

You silly woman, why do you rebuff



These things? The house has finery enough.  
Keep them, for if my bride should honour me  
In any way, she'll rate prosperity  
Much less than she'll rate me.

Medea:

I'll have my way:

Gifts can prevail upon the gods, they say.  
A gift of gold, as well, is reckoned more  
Among the race of men than fifty score 920  
Of words. Now your intended's destiny  
Is waxing while she is still young. To free  
My children, though, from being sent away  
I'd give my life, not merely gold. I pray,  
Children, enter the palace grounds and plead  
Your case to your father's bride, who's now indeed  
My mistress, and petition her that you  
Won't be exiled. Present the garment, too,  
For it's the most important thing that she  
Accepts the gifts I give. Go speedily 930  
And may you be successful, children dear,  
And bring me back the news I long to hear.

Chorus:

My hopes are lost that they might live, for they  
Already walk upon their fated way  
To murder, and that golden crown will she  
Put on, mark of her life's extremity.  
The charm and heavenly glitter of her gown  
And the fashioned gold encircling her crown  
Will make her don them. But the bridal bed

She lies in will then be among the dead. 940

She'll fall into that snare of death and not

Escape the fatal blow – such is her lot.

Unlucky bridegroom, your own children's life

You'll have destroyed, bringing upon your wife

A dreadful death. O how fallaciously,

Poor wretch, you looked upon your destiny!

Poor wretch, I grieve for you, who plan to slay

The children that you bore through your dismay

That Jason has renounced your marriage-bed

Vilely so that another he may wed. [enter Tutor] 950

Tutor:

Your children, lady, won't be sent to be

Exiles, because the princess happily

Received your gifts, and so at least they're safe. [Medea weeps]

Lady, the news is good – why do you chafe?

Medea:

Ah!

Tutor:

    This is not in tune with my report.

Medea:

Ah!

Tutor:

    Did I tell a mishap of some sort

In ignorance?

Medea:

    You've said what you have said:

I don't blame you.

Tutor:

Why, then, are your eyes red,  
Your face downcast?

Medea:

Alas, how numberless  
The reasons are: I my senselessness 960  
And Heaven have contrived it.

Tutor:

Be of cheer:  
Your sons will bring you home soon, never fear.

Medea:

But others to their *final* home I'll bring  
Before I may observe that happening.

Tutor:

You're not the only woman separated  
From those you love: we must accept what's fated,  
We mortals.

Medea:

I will do so. Go inside  
The house and with their daily needs provide  
My children. [exit Tutor] Children, it has now been planned  
That you'll stay here. But to another land 970  
I'm bound to flee before I see you wed,  
Each of you with a wife and marriage-bed,  
And hold the wedding-torch. My stubbornness  
Has brought me hither. With what bootlessness  
Did I rear you! I gave you birth in vain,  
Laboured in toils and suffered much in pain.  
I had great hopes that you'd take care of me  
In my old age and, when I died, would be

The ones to dress me for my grave – a fate  
All mortals crave. But this sweet thought of late 980

Has perished. I have lost you and must bear  
A painful and accursed life elsewhere.  
You shall not see your mother anymore  
But live a different life. Alas, wherefore  
Do you observe me thus? Why smile that way,  
That final smile? O gods, I'm in dismay –  
What shall I do? My courage now is gone,  
Women of Corinth, now I look upon  
My children's radiant countenances - I

Can't do it, though. And so I say goodbye 990  
To former plans. I'll let my children go  
From Corinth. Why create a double woe,  
Making their father suffer all their pain  
While I yet suffer, too? I say again  
Farewell, my plans! But what is wrong with me?  
Am I obliged to suffer mockery,  
My foes unpunished? It's my feebleness  
That makes me say such words of tenderness.

Children, go in. The man who thinks this deed  
Of sacrifice is wicked has the need 1000  
To stay away. And yet I will not stay  
My hand. But no! – don't do it, do not slay  
Your children! If they go to live with me  
In Athens, I will live there happily.  
By Hell's avenging Furies, to my foes  
I swear to you that I will not expose  
My children to be slighted. They must die

In any case, and so it must be I,  
The one who gave them birth, who'll slaughter them –  
They can't escape their fate. The diadem 1010  
Is on her head and she is perishing,  
I'm sure. But now, since I am travelling  
A wretched road and sending those I bore  
Within my womb upon a road yet more  
Wretched, I'll say farewell. My sons, I pray,  
Give me your hands and lips to kiss, for they  
Are precious to me. Ah, such nobleness  
You show to me! I wish you happiness,  
But in that other place, for what is here  
Your father took away. How sweet, how dear, 1020  
How tender is your flesh, how redolent  
Your breath! Enter the house. I am so rent  
With pain I cannot look at you. I know  
The woe that I am doomed to undergo.  
My wrath is larger than my calculation –  
It brings to men the greatest tribulation.

Chorus:

I often spoke more subtly, often, too,  
Bore greater contests than a woman's due.  
We, too, possess a muse, that gives a share  
Of wisdom to us, but not everywhere - 1030  
We're very few, one woman among many,  
And of our sex you'd pick out hardly any  
That have a muse. The childless, I propose,  
Possess more satisfaction than do those  
Who aren't because they clearly cannot know

If they to mortals give more joy or woe.

So from much pain they hold themselves aloof.

However, those who house beneath their roof

The lovely gift of children, then I see

That they are fraught with troubles constantly: 1040

First how to raise them well, then how they may

Find them a living, doubting then if they

Should toil for bad or good, then, finally,

A good career assured, maturity

Achieved, if Fate decides, they will be hurled

Forevermore into the Underworld.

What does it profit us that, for the sake

Of those we reared, the gods resolve to make

Us more ill-starred on top of other woes,

While thus our misery more painful grows? 1050

Medea:

My friends, for long I've waited here to see

How everything will come about for me.

Here's one of Jason's servants: by the way

He's breathing it would seem there's fresh dismay.

Messenger:

Medea, you've committed lawlessly

A dreadful deed. Flee, flee, by land or sea.

Medea:

Why must I?

Messenger:

Creon's daughter and the king

Himself have just now died – your poisoning

Has killed them.

Medea:

Ah, great news! You now will be

A benefactor and a friend to me.

1060

Messenger:

What's that you say? Woman, are you quite mad?

You've stained the royal house and yet you're glad

And not afraid.

Medea:

Well, there is something I

Am more than keen to tell you in reply.

But don't be hasty – tell me now, my friend:

How did they die? For if they met their end

In agony, you will have given me

Twice times the joy.

Messenger:

When your twin progeny

Entered the house with Jason, all of us

Servants, who had been so solicitous,

1070

Were cheered because the news our ears had caught

Was great – the information that was brought

Said your and Jason's former altercation

Had been resolved and reached a termination.

One kissed the children's hands, one each blond head,

While I, delighted, with the children sped

Into the women's rooms. The princess, who

Is now the one we hail instead of you,

Had only eyes for Jason, but when she

Saw that your little boys had come with me,

1080

She veiled her eyes, her white cheek turned aside,

Disgusted at the sight. Then Jason tried  
 To cool her anger, saying, "Don't, I pray,  
 Be unkind to your kin, but cast away  
 Your wrath and look at us again. Regard  
 Them as your husband does and don't be hard.  
 Accept the gifts Beg Creon to release  
 The children from their exile for my peace  
 Of mind. She saw the dress and could not bring  
 Herself to wait, accepting everything 1090  
 That Jason wanted her to do; before  
 Her father and the boys passed through the door,  
 She took the robe and wrapped the splendid thing  
 Around her frame before then settling  
 The golden crown upon her head, then she  
 Took up a mirror and coquettishly  
 Fluffed up her hair, at the reflected view  
 Smiling. She rose and then paraded through  
 The room with dainty footsteps, fascinated  
 With her two gifts. Often she contemplated 1100  
 Her tendons, glancing backward. Suddenly  
 The maid became a dreadful sight to see.  
 Her colour changed, her legs a-trembling;  
 She staggered sideways, almost tumbling  
 Out of her chair. A servant crone yelled out,  
 Thinking that she'd been visited, no doubt,  
 By some god, maybe Pan himself, for she  
 Was in a frenzy – until she could see  
 The foam, the rolling eyes, the bloodless skin, 1110  
 And then again she yelled – ah, such a din!



One went to Creon's house immediately,  
Another went to Jason so that she  
Could tell the fearful news. Then with the sound  
Of drumming feet we heard the house resound.  
After the time a sprinter runs his race,  
His legs rotating at a speedy pace,  
The maid awoke and gave a dreadful wail,  
Hit with a double pain: a mighty trail  
Of all-consuming flam shot from the crown  
About her tresses, and the fine-spun gown, 1120  
The gift your sons had given her, ate at  
The wretched girl's white flesh. From where she sat  
She leapt up, all aflame, and, as she fled,  
She tried to shake the circlet from her head.  
But it stuck tight, and as she shook her hair  
It blazed up twice as high into the air.  
She fell down to the floor – no-one could see  
Her former self but Creon, because she  
Showed eyes no longer hers, her face as well  
No longer shapely. From her head there fell 1130  
Great gouts of blood with flames of fire blent,  
Her flesh, like pine-torch resin, drizzled, rent  
From off her bones. Your poison's jaws, concealed  
Within those gifts you sent her, have revealed  
A dreadful sight. We dared not touch her – we  
Had learnt from what we had been forced to see.  
But her poor father, who had not yet heard  
About the tragedy that had occurred,  
Entered the chamber, and at once he fell

Upon the body, letting out a yell. 1140

Throwing his arms about her with a kiss,

Then said, "Poor child, which of the gods did this?

Who has bereft me of you? O may I,

An old man, lie beside you now and die!"

When he had ceased his groaning, from the ground

He tried to raise his aged frame but found

That he was stuck, as ivy tends to cling

To laurel, to her dress. What struggling

Ensued! He tried to rise, but couldn't, for

She stopped him; if he used constraint, he tore 1150

His ancient flesh straight from his bones. Then he

Gave up the ghost, for the calamity

He could not overcome. They both lie dead,

Daughter and father. But what can be said

Of you? I do not know., but presently

You'll be enlightened of the penalty

That you'll receive. The life of every man,

As I have stated, is no better than

Chorus:

O earth, o rays of sun that give us light,  
See this poor woman – such a wretched sight! –  
Before her bloody hands attack her young  
Children. For from your golden race they're sprung.  
It's fearful that the blood of gods should spill  
Upon the ground, the outcome of man's ill. 1190

O light of Zeus, impede this treacherous  
And cruel Fury! Take her hence from us,  
For we are plagued with Furies! Ah, the pain  
Of giving children birth is all in vain –  
For you, too, who left the unfriendly strait  
Of the dark Symplegades. Why does this great  
Anger envelop you as you commit  
Successive murders? How grievous is it  
To slay one's kindred for those who do so  
Inflict upon their house god-given woe! 1200

First Child:

Hel!

Chorus:

Ah, do you not hear the children's cry?

O wretch! Accursed woman!

First Child:

What am I

To do? I can't escape.

Second Child:

I do not know,

For we are doomed beneath the weapon's blow,

Dear brother.

Chorus:

I'll go in. I must impede

Her hand.

First Child:

Yes, do so, for there's great need.

Second Child:

The sword's almost upon us.

Chorus:

Ah, to me

You're stone, you're iron – oh what villainy! –

With your own hand to kill the sons you bore.

One woman only have I known before 1210

To kill her children – Ino, cast from home,

Driven by madness, fell into the sea

When she had slain her children impiously,

Perishing with them. What disaster still

Remains? A woman's marriage brings much ill.

How many are troubles you have brought

Already to mankind? What pain you've wrought!

Jason:

You woman standing by the house, has she

Who has committed this dire villainy 1220

Inside or has she fled? She'll have to hide

Herself beneath the earth or swiftly glide

Up to the heavens if the penalty

She owes the royal house she plans to flee.

Now that she's slaughtered those who here held sway.

Does she believe that she will get away

Unscathed? However, my concern is more

For my two sons. She will be punished for

Her deeds by those she wronged. For I came here

To save their lives so that they may not fear

1230

Their next of kin: I surely will enact

Repayment for their mother's impious act.

Chorus:

O wretched Jason, you don't know the size

And depth of your misfortune: otherwise

You'd not have spoken thus.

Jason:

What? Has she planned

To kill me, too?

Chorus:

By their own mother's hand

Your boys lie slaughtered.

Jason:

What was that you said?

Then I'm no more.

Chorus:

Sir, both your sons are dead.

Jason:

Inside or out here?

Chorus

Open the gates and see

Your slaughtered sons.

Jason:

You servants, speedily

1240

Unbar the gates. Wish to see this sight

Of double murder. Then I shall requite

The deed. [Medea appears aloft]

Medea:

Why all this rattling? Why try  
To break the locks that you may cast you eye  
On me and our dead sons, whom I have slain?  
Should you want something from me, don't refrain  
From speaking, but don't touch me. You can see  
Old Helios' chariot: he gave it me  
To ward off hostile hands.

Jason:

Vile creature, you  
Are hateful to the gods and me, and to 1250  
All mortals. You had the temerity  
To take a sword to your own progeny  
And left me childless, and then, having done  
This dreadful deed, you'll still look on the sun  
And on the earth. I wish you dead! Again  
I'm sensible, though then I was insane  
When from your country of barbarity  
I brought you home to Greece to live with me,  
Though you betrayed your father and the land  
That nourished you despite that it was planned 1260  
That the avenging spirit meant for you  
Was visited on me because you slew  
Your brother at the hearth, and then the fair  
*Argo* you stepped aboard and that was where  
These evil acts began. So we were wed  
And you bore children, but our wedding-bed  
Caused you to kill them. There's no woman who  
In Greece would do this, but I married you!

But you were a destructive match for me,  
Aggressive and alike in savagery 1270  
To Tuscan Scylla. You're a lioness  
And not a woman. Since I can't suppress  
You with the bite of countless injuries,  
For you abound with such indignities,  
Be gone, child-murderer. My fate shall be  
Bewailed – no benefit accrues to me  
From a new bride: the children I begot  
And nurtured it has now become my lot  
Never to speak to, for I've lost them.

Medea: I  
Would counter your words with a long reply 1280  
Had Zeus not known how I have given aid  
To you and with what pain I've been repaid.  
You planned to wed another, happily  
To spend your life and make a mockery  
Of me, as did your bride. Creon, the king,  
Who offered you his daughter, planned to fling  
Me from this land. So call me, if you will,  
Scylla, the dweller on that rocky hill,  
And lioness, for in a vital spot  
I've touched your heart.

Jason:  
You, too, grieve at your lot. 1290

Medea:  
Of course, but it's worthwhile if you'll agree  
To cease your mocking.

Jason:



Ah, how wickedly

Your mother acted, children!

Medea:

Children, you

Have perished through your father's sin.

Jason:

Untrue!

I did not kill them.

Medea:

No, the infamy

Of your new match caused that fatality.

Jason:

For *that* you killed them?

Medea:

Is it your belief

That such a lot is but a trivial grief

To women?

Jason:

Yes, for women we are wise.

But all things are disastrous in your eyes.

1300

Medea:

Our boys are dead, and this will critically

Distress you.

Jason:

Oh no, on the contrary –

They live and will revenge.

Medea:

Ah, the gods know

Who was the person striking the first blow.

Jason:

Indeed they know how foul you are.

Medea:

Then hate

Away! How I detest the way you grate

Your voice.

Jason:

I hate the way you grate yours, too.

We'll part with ease.

Medea:

Oh how? What shall I do?

I cannot wait.

Jason:

Allow me, then, to lay

Our boys to rest and mourn them.

Medea:

There's no way 1310

I'll do that. I'll inter them privately

And take them up to Hera's sanctuary.

I will take care none of my enemies

Tear up the graves with their indignities,

And I'll enjoin in Sisyphus's land

A solemn feast and holy rites to stand

As retribution to the end of time –

Thus will we pay for this unholy crime.

Myself, I'll go to the land of Erechtheus

To live with the son of Pandion, Aegeus. 1320

But you will die a miserable death

That fits a coward – you'll draw your last breath

Hit by a piece of planking that will fall  
From *Argo*, now you've tasted of the gall  
Our marriage brought.

Jason:

O may you utterly  
Be finished by the Fury's penalty  
Paid for our children's death: may Justice, too,  
Aid them in this.

Medea:

Who'll listen now to you?  
What god? What heavenly power? Your promise you  
Have broken, you've deceived a stranger, too. 1330

Jason:

Child-killer! Unclean wretch!

Medea:

Go home and lay  
Your wife to rest!

Jason:

I'll go in my dismay,  
Reft of my children.

Medea:

But your grief will swell –  
Wait for old age.

Jason:

O sons, whom I loved well!

Medea:

Not so, for it was I loved them so.

Jason:

And yet you killed them.

Medea:

Yes, to bring you woe.

Jason:

Sons, let me kiss your lips.

Medea:

Ah, finally

You kiss and speak to them, yet recently

You drove them off.

Jason:

Ye gods, just let me lay

My hands on your soft flesh.

Medea:

I tell you nay -

1340

Your words are all in vain.

Jason:

Zeus, do you see

She's ousting me? Oh, this monstrosity,

This children-murderer, this lioness

Has brought me – do you hear? – so much distress.

With all the strength I have, though, I lament

And call the gods to witness that you sent

Our children to their deaths and won't allow

My touching or interring them. O how

I wish I'd not begot them and descried

Them slain by this insane infanticide!

1350

Chorus:

Lord Zeus has many treasures up on high,

And there are many things the gods supply

Against our hopes. What man expects to see

Does not occur, but some divinity

Achieves the unexpected in some way.

Such is the tale that you have heard today.



