

	MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
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## Euripides' *Medea*

Translated by

[C. A. E. Luschnig](#)

### CHARACTERS

Nurse	in Greek, <i>Trophos</i> , Medea's old Nanny from her homeland
Pedagogue	or child-minder, in Greek, <i>Paidagogos</i> , a Slave who tends the children
Children of Medea and Jason	two boys, non-speaking characters
Medea	refugee from Colchis, former princess, former wife of Jason
Creon	King of Corinth
Jason	refugee, former husband of Medea, recently married to Creon's daughter
Aigeus	King of Athens, passing through Corinth
Messenger	a slave of Jason
Chorus	Corinthian Women

The *Medea* was first produced for the Greater Dionysia in the spring of 431 B.C.E. The scene represents Medea's house in Corinth. It is most likely to have used only two actors with speaking parts. There are also several extras representing the entourages of Creon and of Aigeus.

### PROLOGUE[1] (1-130)

*Medea's old Nanny from her childhood in Colchis comes out of the house alone and addresses the elements.*

#### Nurse

How I wish the Argo's sails had never swept through  
 the dark blue Clashing Rocks[2] into the land of the Colchians;  
 I wish the pine trees had never fallen  
 in the groves of Pelion, cut down to put oars in the hands  
 of the heroes[3] who went after the golden fleece  
 for Pelias. Then my mistress Medea would not  
 have sailed to the fortress of Iolcus' land,  
 her heart battered by love for Jason. 5  
 And she would not have convinced the daughters of Pelias[4] to kill  
 their father and would not have come to live here on Corinthian soil  
 with her husband and children, winning over[5] 10

the citizens of the country she had come to as a refugee,  
 and obliging Jason in every way.  
 This is what brings the greatest stability at home:  
 when a woman does not challenge her husband.  
 It has all gone sour now, affection turned to hatred. 15  
 Jason has cast aside his children and my mistress,  
 and now goes to bed in a royal marriage  
 with the daughter of Creon who governs this land.  
 And Medea, in despair, rejected by her husband,  
 howls out "the oaths he swore" and calls upon the right hand, 20  
 a potent symbol of fidelity, and invokes the gods  
 to witness Jason's treatment of her.  
 She won't eat; she just gives in to her grief,  
 washing away all her hours in tears,  
 ever since she realized her husband had abandoned her. 25  
 She never looks up or raises her face  
 from the ground. She is like a rock or wave of the sea  
 when those who love her try to give advice;  
 except that sometimes she lifts up her pallid face[6]  
 and mourns for her dear father, 30  
 her country, and the home she betrayed  
 to come here with this man who now holds her in contempt.  
 The poor woman knows from bitter loss  
 what it means to have once had a homeland.  
 And she hates her children, takes no pleasure in seeing them. 35  
 I'm afraid of her, in case she has some new plan in mind.  
 She is a deep thinker, you know, and she will not put up with  
 this kind of abuse. I know her and I am terrified  
 that in silence entering the house where the bed is laid  
 she might thrust a sharp sword through the heart[7] 40  
 or kill the princess and the one who married her  
 and then suffer some greater tragedy.  
 She is frightening. It won't be easy for an enemy  
 to come out victorious in a battle with her.  
 But here come the children from their play. 45  
 They know nothing of their mother's troubles  
 for the childish heart is not used to grief.

*The old minder of the children of Jason and Medea enters with the children running about him, perhaps playing with hoops or other toys.*

**Pedagogue** (as he approaches)

Well, there's my mistress' long-time slave.  
 Why are you standing here alone in front of the doors  
 grumbling about your troubles to yourself? 50  
 How is it that Medea is willing to be left on her own?

**Nurse**

Look, you've cared for Jason's children all these years  
 and you know that when the masters are in trouble,  
 good slaves share in the disaster and their hearts are touched too.  
 Such deep sadness came over me 55  
 that I needed to come out here and tell  
 Earth and Sky the sorrows my mistress is suffering.

**Pedagogue**

Is the poor woman still feeling sorry for herself?

**Nurse**

I'd like to be in your shoes. She has barely started.

60

**Pedagogue**

Oh the fool! Oops, sorry for the outburst.  
And yet she knows nothing of the latest troubles.

**Nurse**

What is it, old man? Please tell me.

**Pedagogue**

It's nothing. I'm sorry it slipped out.  
Nurse I beg you, please, do not hide this from your fellow slave.  
If need be, I can keep it secret.

65

**Pedagogue**

Yes, well, I heard someone saying, though I was pretending not to listen,  
as I was passing the tables where the old men sit to play  
checkers,[8] you know, next to the sacred fountain of Peirene,  
that these children with their mother — well, the king of this country,

**Creon**, plans to banish them all from Corinthian territory.[9]

70

Whether the story is true I am not sure.  
Of course, I hope it is not.

**Nurse**

And Jason puts up with his children being treated like that,  
even though he is estranged from their mother?

75

**Pedagogue**

Old ties give way to new ones.  
He is not interested in this family.

**Nurse**

It's all over for us, if we take on new troubles  
on top of the old, before they have been drained out.

**Pedagogue**

But listen — it is not a good time for mistress  
to find out about this — so keep it quiet.

80

**Nurse**

Children, do you hear what kind of man your father is to you?  
Damn him! But no, I can't say that. He is my master.  
Still he has turned out to be a traitor to his family.

**Pedagogue**

What else do you expect? Are you just figuring out  
that everyone loves himself more than his neighbor?[10]  
Their father doesn't care about these children now that he has a new wife.

85

**Nurse (to the children)**

Go on — everything will be just fine — in you go, children.  
(to the old man)

But, as best you can, keep them by themselves  
and don't let them go near their mother in the mood she's in.

90

I have seen her giving them that wild animal glare,  
as if she is planning to do something to them. She will not give up

her rage — I'm sure of that — before she strikes out at someone.  
I pray it will be enemies and not loved ones she hurts.

**Medea** (*screaming from inside the house*):[11] 95

*Iô* (Aah!)

I hate my life.

How can I put an end to it?

**Nurse**

Here it comes, my dear children. Your mother  
is stirring up her heart, stirring up her resentment.  
Hurry along inside the house.

And try not to let her see you; 100

do not go near her, but watch out for  
her savage mood and the loathing  
that issues from her stubborn nature.

Go on now, run along inside, quick, quick.

(*Pedagogue and children go inside at line 105.*) 105

It is clear that a dark cloud of sorrow is flaring up  
from its first flicker and soon will ignite  
into a greater passion. What will it do —  
her raging spirit, so hard to quell,  
now that it is battered with abuse?

**Medea** 110

*aiâi* [Aah!]

I am in agony, I am so brutally misused.

You horrible children, of a mother who hates you  
god damn you with your father,  
and the whole house go to Hell.

**Nurse** 115

*io, moi, moi* [Ah me, ah me.] Oh the sorrow of it all!

Why do you entangle the children in their father's  
wrongdoing? Why do you hate them? Ah me,  
dear children, how much I grieve for you.

Tyrants' tempers are insufferable:

they are seldom under control, their power is far-reaching.

It is hard for them to swallow their rages. 120

To get used to living on terms of equality

is better. Look at me. I only hope that it's my luck to grow old  
in security, not among the high and mighty.

The golden mean, first just to say

its name should win a prize, to apply it 125

is by far the greatest achievement. But excess  
never should have a place in our lives.

It brings all the greater ruin

when some god feels spite toward a house.

130

**PARODOS**[12] (131-213)

*The chorus enters singing, perhaps along both parodoi (side entrances) and at intervals, as if from different parts of the city.*

**Chorus**

I heard a sound, I heard a cry

from the unhappy Colchian woman, not yet

gentled. And you, old woman,  
talk to us. While standing in my doorway I heard a cry  
from inside this house. And I felt sorry for the troubles  
of the family, since it is dear to me. 135

**Nurse**

There is no more house. It's all gone.  
Royal sheets enfold him now  
but she weeps away her life,  
my mistress, taking no comfort  
in the words of those who love her. 140

**Medea** (*From inside*)

*ai ai* [Aah!] <Oh Zeus and Earth and Light>  
Hurl your fiery bolt of lightning straight through  
my skull. What use is life to me?  
*feu, feu!* [Aah, aah.] Let me die and leave  
this life I hate. 145

**Chorus** (*Spoken by several speakers or groups*)

— Did you hear? "Oh Zeus and Earth and Light"  
such a shrill cry the unhappy  
bride intones.  
— Why this futile longing  
for the bed you have lost? 150  
It will carry you to an early grave.  
Do not pray for that.

— If your husband  
services a new bed  
that is his affair. Do not fret. 155  
— Zeus will set this right. Do not weep  
so much, mourning for your lost husband.

**Medea** (*From inside*)

O great Themis and Lady Artemis,  
do you see what I suffer, though I bound him  
with mighty oaths, that perjurer,  
my husband? I wish I could see him and his bride  
ground down to nothing, house and all,  
who have dared to wrong me first. 160  
Father, city from which I am torn away  
after I killed my brother in cold blood for him! 165

**Nurse**

Do you hear what she says, crying out  
to Themis we invoke in prayer and to Zeus,  
the caretaker of oaths for the human race?  
There is no way that my mistress will  
vent her anger in some small way. 170

**Chorus**

— Is there any way you could get her to come out to see us  
and hear the sound of our words spoken in comfort? 175

— If only she would somehow put aside  
her deeply felt anger and distemper,  
I am eager to help those dear to me.

— But please go in and bring her here  
out of the house. Repeat our words. They are spoken from the heart. 180

— Hurry before she hurts anyone inside.  
Her grief is stirred up to such a pitch.

### Nurse

I will try but I am afraid I will not persuade  
my mistress.

Still I do not begrudge you the effort.

Yet it's with the look of a lioness who has just given birth  
that she glares at the servants — or like a bull — when anyone  
ventures near her, trying to bring a word of solace. 185

You would not be wrong in saying they were fools, not wise at all,  
those men of earlier times who 190  
invented songs for festivals,  
feasts, and dinner parties  
joyful sounds full of life.

But no one has found a way with music on the lyre with all its strings  
to stop the hateful torments people suffer 195  
— deaths and terrible fates that bring down our homes.

And yet it would help us all to be able to cure sadness with songs.

Where there is a plentiful feast, why lift the voice aimlessly?  
The fullness of the table 200  
has delight enough in itself for most of us.

*The Nurse exits into the house.*

### Chorus

I heard the sound of laments, full of despair;  
she cries out shrill sad sounds of mourning  
at the betrayer of her marriage-bed, her evil husband. 205

For the injustice she suffers, she invokes  
Themis keeper of oaths, daughter of Zeus,  
who brought her  
into Greece from a faraway land  
over the sea by night 210  
through Pontus' gate, hard to pass.

### EPISODE I (214-409)

*Enter Medea from the house; during the speech she goes down among the  
members of the Chorus.*

### Medea

Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house,  
so that you will not hold anything against me. I know that many people  
are standoffish, some in the privacy of home 215  
and others in the public sphere. Some people, because they are shy,  
have acquired the ill repute of indifference.

There is no justice in people's perception:  
there are some who, before they know a person inside out,  
hate him on sight, even if they have never been wronged by him. 220

An outsider in particular must conform to the city.

A native too: I do not condone self-absorbed people  
who through insensitivity irritate their neighbors.  
But for me this unexpected disaster  
has wrecked my life. I am cast adrift. I have lost 225

all pleasure in living and I want to die, my friends.

The man who was everything to me, try to understand this,

has turned out to be the vilest man alive, my own husband.  
 Of all creatures that have life and reason  
 we women are the sorriest lot: 230  
 first we must at a great expenditure of money  
 buy a husband and even take on a master  
 over our body: this evil is more galling than the first.  
 Here is the most challenging contest, whether we will get a bad man  
 or a good one. Besides, divorce is unsavory 235  
 for a woman and it is not possible to say no to one's husband.  
 And when she comes into new customs and rules  
 a woman must be a prophet of what she could never learn at home:  
 how best to deal with her marriage partner;  
 and if we get it worked out well and a husband shares 240  
 our life with us, and he bears the yoke without violence,  
 life is to be envied. Otherwise we are better off dead.  
 But the man, when he is bored with things at home  
 he can go out to ease the weariness of his heart.[13]  
 But we have just one person to look to. 245  
 They say that we live a life free of danger  
 at home while they face battle with the spear.  
 How wrong they are. I would rather stand three times  
 in the line of battle than once bear a child. 250  
 But the same story does not apply to you and me.  
 You have this city and your father's home,  
 enjoyment of life, and the companionship of friends,  
 but, alone and without a city, I am abused  
 by my husband, carried off as plunder from a foreign land, 255  
 I have no mother, no brother, no relative  
 to offer me a safe haven from this disaster.  
 I ask you this one small favor:  
 if some way or means can be found  
 to make my husband pay for this abuse [and the father of the bride and the 260  
 bride herself][14]  
 — keep it silent. For a woman in all other things is full of fear  
 and a coward when it comes to looking on deeds of valor and the sword  
 but when she is wronged in her marriage  
 there is no heart more bloodthirsty. 265

### Chorus

I will do this. It is right that your husband should pay,  
 Medea. I am not surprised that you grieve over your loss.  
 But I see Creon, king of this country,  
 coming, a messenger of some new proclamation.  
*Creon enters along one of the parodoi (the one leading from the palace) 270*  
*with an entourage of his henchmen. The chorus might withdraw to the edges of*  
*the orchestra to witness but not participate in the public proclamation.*

### Creon

You there, with the scowl on your face, raging against your husband,  
 Medea, I command you to leave this land,  
 taking your two children with you.  
 Do not delay. Of this sentence of banishment I am both judge and jury[15]  
 and I will not go back home again  
 until I have cast you outside the borders of my country. 275

### Medea

*aiai* [Oh no!] I am ruined ... desperate!  
 My enemies are unfurling all the sails  
 and there is no clear landing place from ruin.  
 But still, though I am in dire straits, I want to know the reason.  
 Why? Why are you banishing me from this country, Creon? 280

**Creon:**

I am afraid of you — no need to cover up my reasons —  
 in case you do some irreparable harm to my daughter.  
 Many factors contribute to my dread:  
 You are innately clever and skilled in many evils,  
 and you are grieved because your husband has been taken from you. 285  
 I hear that you are making threats: — against the father of the bride,  
 the bridegroom, and the bride, to do us some injury  
 — this is the news they bring me. I shall take precautions against all this.  
 It is better to suffer your hatred, madam,  
 than to be soft now and regret it later. 290

**Medea**

This is not the first time, Creon, but over and over again,  
 people's opinion has injured me and done me great harm.  
 A man who has full use of his faculties should not  
 educate his children in any special skills;  
 apart from the reputation they get for being unproductive, 295  
 they will reap the enmity of the citizens.

If you try to show some clever innovation to the inept  
 you will seem useless and hardly skilled at all;  
 [if people in the city suspect you of being superior to those  
 they believe ingenious you will irritate them.][16] 300

And I share in this fate myself:  
 because I have skills, I suffer the envy of some,[17]  
 and to others I am a rival; but I am not so very clever.  
 And then you are afraid of me. What harm can you suffer from me? 305

It is not in my power — don't be afraid of me, Creon —  
 to do wrong to the royal family.  
 What wrong have you done me? You married your  
 daughter to the man you chose for her. But my husband,  
 I do hate him. You, I think, have acted with good sense in this. 310  
 Now I do not begrudge you your good fortune.  
 Give your daughter in marriage, prosper; but let me live  
 in this land. I have been wronged,  
 but I will keep quiet, defeated by my betters. 315

**Creon**

Your words are cajoling to my ears, but inside my heart  
 I am afraid you are forming some evil new plan,[18]  
 So much the less I trust you than before.  
 For a quick-tempered woman — the same goes for a man —  
 is easier to guard against than a silent clever one.  
 But you must leave at once. No more arguments. 320  
 The matter is settled and you are not so clever  
 that you can stay here in our midst, being an enemy to me.

**Medea**

No, please, at your knees[19] I beg you in the name of the new bride.

**Creon**



You are wasting words. You will never get your way. 325  
**Medea**  
 But will you drive me away and not respect my prayers?  
**Creon**  
 Yes, because I care less for you than for my own family.  
**Medea**  
 O homeland, how deeply now I remember you.  
**Creon**  
 Yes, after my children, it is by far the dearest thing to me.  
**Medea**  
*Feu, feu* [Aah, aah] mortal affections, how great an affliction they are! 330  
**Creon**  
 That, I think, depends on the circumstances.  
**Medea**  
 Oh Zeus, never forget who is responsible for this.  
**Creon**  
 Go, you foolish woman, and relieve me of my troubles.  
**Medea**  
 I am in trouble and need no more struggles.  
**Creon**  
 Soon you will be forced out at the hands of my guards. 335  
**Medea**  
 Not that, I beg you, Creon ....  
**Creon**  
 Apparently you are going to make a scene, madam.  
**Medea**  
 I will go into exile. It was not for that that I supplicated you.  
**Creon**  
 Why then are you trying to coerce me? Let go of my hand!  
**Medea**  
 Just one day. Let me stay for one day 340  
 to make plans how we will manage in exile,  
 and find resources for my children, since their father  
 does not put his children's welfare first.  
 Pity them. You are a father, too. You have a child  
 and it's natural for you to feel kindly toward them.  
 I'm not concerned for myself, if I have to go into exile, 345  
 but it breaks my heart if they are to suffer deprivation.  
**Creon**  
 My nature is not at all tyrannical,  
 and on many occasions in showing respect I have suffered for it  
 and even now I see that I am making a mistake, madam,  
 but still I will grant you this. But I warn you 350  
 if the coming light of the sun finds you  
 and your children inside the borders of this country  
 you will die. That is my final word; it will not be taken back. —

[Now, if stay you must, stay for one day.  
 you can not do any dreadful deed of which I am in terror.][20] 355  
*Exit Creon with his men.*

### Chorus

Unhappy woman,  
*Feu, feu* [Ah, ah] unhappy for your miseries.  
 Where will you turn? To what host for shelter?  
 Or what home or land will you find  
 to rescue you from shipwreck? 360  
 A god has brought you into an  
 impassable surge of woes, Medea.

### Medea

Things have gone wrong at every turn. Who can deny it?  
 But this is not how it will be. Don't even think it. 365  
 There are still trials for the newly-weds  
 and for their kin no small troubles.

Do you think that I would ever have fawned on him  
 if not to get something or with some plan in mind?  
 I would not even have spoken to him or touched his hands. 370  
 He has reached such a state of recklessness,

that though he could have destroyed all my plans  
 by forcing me out of the country, he has allowed me to remain  
 this one day, in which I will turn three of my enemies into  
 corpses, the father, the daughter, and my husband. 375  
 I have many ways to kill them;[21]

I do not know which to try first, my friends.  
 Whether I should set the bridal chamber on fire  
 or thrust a sharp sword through her liver,  
 in silence going into the house where the bed is laid. 380

But there is one thing in the way: if I am caught  
 entering the house in secret and carrying out my scheme,  
 I will die and become a laughing stock to my enemies.

Best the straight route in which I am  
 most skilled — to take them off with poisons. 385  
 So far so good.

And then they are dead. What city will take me in?  
 What friend abroad will offer me asylum  
 and a secure home and save my life?

There is none. Let me wait a short time  
 in case some tower of strength will occur to me  
 and then with deceit and in silence proceed to the murder. 390

But if I am driven by resourceless misfortune  
 I will myself take the sword — even if I must die —  
 and kill them — I will go to such an extreme of daring.

No! By the mistress I worship  
 most of all and have chosen as my helpmate, 395  
 Hecate, dwelling in the inmost recesses of my hearth,  
 no one will bruise and batter my heart and get away with it.

I will make their marriage bitter and painful,  
 bitter the royal connection and my exile from this land.  
 But come. Spare nothing of what you know, Medea, planning and  
 scheming. 400

Go now to the edge. This is a contest for heroes.  
 You see what you suffer. You must not be a laughing stock

to these sons of Sisyphus and this marriage of Jason,  
 you who are born of a noble father, son of the Sun god. 405  
 But you know all that. And besides we are  
 women, most helpless for the good,  
 but skilled craftsmen of all that is evil.

### FIRST STASIMON (410-445)

#### Chorus

Backward flow streams of holy rivers and justice  
 and all things are being turned back. 410  
 For men's counsels are deceitful, and the pledge taken  
 in the gods' name is no longer firmly fixed.  
 New tales will give glory to my life;  
 honor is coming to the female of the species;  
 discordant rumors will let women go.

The Muses will cease from their songs of ages past  
 from their paeans to our faithlessness. 420  
 Not to our mind has Phoebus, the leader of tunes,  
 granted the inspired song of the lyre;  
 for I could sing a song in response 425  
 to the race of men. But long life has  
 much to tell of our side and of men's.

You sailed from your father's home  
 with maddened heart between the double rocks of the sea  
 and you live on foreign soil,  
 abandoned, with no man in your marriage bed,  
 poor woman, now an exile from this land 435  
 you are driven away without rights.

But the grace of oaths has gone; respect no more  
 abides in the vast lands of Hellas, but it has flown to the skies 440  
 and you no more have the house of your father  
 to shelter you, poor woman,  
 from troubles. And over the bed  
 another queen more powerful stands now in the chamber. 445

### EPISODE II (446-626)

*Enter Jason along the parodos leading from the palace.*

#### Jason

This is not the first time, but over and over again, I have seen[22]  
 how utterly stupid an intransigent temper can be.  
 You had the chance to stay in this country and keep your home  
 by patiently putting up with what your betters decide,  
 but now you have had your say and for it you are to be deported. 450  
 It makes no difference to me: never let up  
 saying that Jason is the vilest man alive.  
 But for what you have said against the royal family  
 think yourself lucky to be punished with exile.

I was constantly trying to assuage the passions  
of the rulers in their anger and I wanted you to stay. 455  
But you could not control your craziness, never letting up on your abuse  
of the royal family. That is why you are to be exiled from this land.  
Still, in spite of this I have not come to renounce  
my loved ones, but because I care for your well-being, woman,  
so that you will not go into exile with the children in need 460  
or wanting for anything. Exile brings many problems  
in its wake. Even if you hate me  
I could never think badly of you.

### Medea

You ... you, utterly vile ... this is the worst charge I have  
to say against your total lack of manliness. 465  
You have come to me, you who are most hateful  
[to the gods and to me and to the whole human race]?[23]  
This is not daring; this is not courage,  
to abuse your loved ones and look them in the face,  
this is the most virulent of all human sicknesses, 470  
shamelessness. Still you have done me a favor in coming.  
I will lighten my grief by reviling you  
and you will feel the sting in hearing it.  
I will begin at the beginning. 475  
I saved your skin, as all the Greeks know  
who boarded the Argo with you,  
when you were sent to master the fire-breathing bulls  
with yokes and to sow the deadly field;  
and the dragon which guarded the golden fleece  
and, never sleeping, protected it with its many coils, 480  
I killed it and held up the light of safety for you.  
As for me, after betraying my father and my home  
I came to Iolcus near Pelion  
with you, eager but not prudent.  
Then I killed Pelias, in the way that he would die most tragically 485  
at the hands of his own children and I confounded their entire house.  
And you, after receiving this from me, you, the vilest man alive,  
you have betrayed me, and you have made a new marriage,  
though you already have children. If you were still childless  
you could be excused for craving another marriage bed. 490  
Gone is the faith of oaths. I cannot understand  
whether you believe the old gods are no longer in power  
or that new covenants are established for men today,  
since you must know that you have not kept your oath to me.  
*Feu* [Ah] right hand, how fervently you were taken 495  
and these knees, how futilely I was clung to in supplication  
by an evil man. But I have lost my hopes.  
Listen. I will share with you as if you were a friend.  
And what will I get out of it?  
Still ... under questioning you will appear more shameless. 500  
Now where will I turn? To my father's house  
which I betrayed for you along with my native land, when I came here?  
Or to the unhappy daughters of Pelias? They would be delighted  
to take me in. I murdered their father.  
This is how it is. I have made myself an enemy 505  
to my loved ones at home, the very ones I should not have

hurt; in helping you I have enemies.  
 And for this you have made me an icon  
 of Greek womanhood: I have in you a wonderful  
 husband and faithful to me — oh, the pity of it 510  
 if I must go into exile, cast out of this country  
 without friends, a lonely mother with two lonely children,  
 a fine reproach to the new bridegroom  
 that your children are homeless beggars, and the woman who saved your life.  
 Oh Zeus! Why have you given us a clear test 515  
 of gold to tell which is counterfeit  
 but of men — where to identify an evil one would be useful —  
 there is no such mark on his body?

### Chorus

Anger is frightening and hard to remedy  
 when loved ones join in strife with loved ones. 520

### Jason

I must, it seems, practice my rhetorical skills,  
 and, like the skillful captain of a ship,  
 shortening my sails, outrun  
 the blasts of your tongue-lashing, woman. 525  
 And, since you make such a mountain of it  
 I think that Kypris, god of love, was the savior  
 of my expedition, and she was the only one of gods or men.  
 You have a subtle mind, and it would be tedious  
 to go through every detail of the story, how with his inescapable arrows  
 Love compelled you to save me. 530  
 Still, I will not put too fine a point on it.  
 However much you have benefitted me, all well and good.[24]  
 But you certainly got more out of saving me  
 than you put in, as I will demonstrate. 535  
 First you make your home in Greece instead of  
 an alien land and you experience justice  
 and the rule of law, not merely brute force.  
 All the Greeks are aware that you are a wise woman  
 and you have fame. If you still lived  
 at the ends of the earth, no one would know your story. 540  
 For me, let me have no gold in my home;  
 give me no song to sing sweeter than Orpheus'  
 if my fate is to be unknown.  
 This much I had to say about my labors. 545  
 You are the one who turned our discussion into a contest.  
 Now the reproaches you heap on my royal marriage,  
 here I will prove first that I did the smart thing  
 and showed good sense and finally that I am a great benefactor  
 to you and my children. Let me finish.[25] 550  
 When I arrived here from the land of Iolcus  
 dragging with me many useless encumbrances,  
 what luckier opportunity could I have found  
 than, as a refugee, to marry the king's daughter?  
 It is not what is eating you, that I hated my marriage to you  
 and was infatuated by desire of my new bride, 555  
 and not that I had a craving for more and more children  
 — the ones I have are enough and I am satisfied with them —  
 but so that — and this is the point — we might live well

and not be in need. I am well aware that  
 even a friend shuns a poor man and stays out of his way, 560  
 and I wanted to bring up children worthily of my house,  
 and father brothers to your children  
 and put them on an equal footing and join the families  
 so that we could live well. What do you need with children?[26]  
 It's in my interest to help my living children 565  
 with future offspring. Have I made bad plans?  
 You would not say so if the marriage bed did not gnaw at you.  
 But you have reached such a point, you women,  
 that if your marriage is in good order you think you  
 have it all, but if anything goes wrong in your marriage 570  
 the best and finest things you count  
 as their opposite. There should be some other way  
 for men to produce children. Women would not have to exist at all.  
 And then humanity would be saved a lot of trouble. 575

**Chorus**

Jason, you have given a very effective speech.  
 But still to me — even if I speak out of character —  
 you seem, in abandoning your wife, not to be doing the right thing.

**Medea**

In many ways I am different from most people.  
 For in my estimation anyone who is dishonest 580  
 but speaks well deserves the greatest censure.  
 In his confidence that he can conceal his injustice with rhetoric,  
 he has the heart for any wrong. But he is not so very clever.  
 And you, then, do not try your specious argument  
 on me. For one word will lay you flat:  
 you should, if you were not despicable, have made this marriage 585  
 only after convincing me, and not in secret from your loved ones.

**Jason**

Yes, of course, you would have been a fine confederate in this plan,  
 if I had told you of the marriage, when even now you do not  
 have the mettle to put aside the great anger in your heart. 590

**Medea**

That is not what stopped you, but your foreign marriage  
 was not turning out glorious enough for you as you approach old age.

**Jason**

You may be certain of this: it was not because of the woman  
 that I made the marriage into the royal family which I now enjoy,  
 but just as I said before, wanting to give you  
 security and to father royal brothers 595  
 for my children, a support for my house.

**Medea**

I pray never to have a happy life that is painful to me  
 nor wealth that eats away at my heart.

**Jason**

Do you know how to change your prayer and appear wiser?  
 Pray that good things should never seem painful to you 600  
 and, being well off, not to think that you are suffering misfortune.

**Medea**

Carry on with your abuse, since you have a way out,  
but I am abandoned and exiled from this country.

**Jason**

It is your own choice. Don't blame anyone but yourself.

**Medea**

605

And what did I do? Get married and abandon you?

**Jason**

You uttered curses against the royal house.

**Medea**

Yes, and to your house I really am a curse.

**Jason**

I will not carry on this quarrel any longer.

But if you want to take me up on my offer  
of money for the children or your own exile

610

say so. I am ready to be generous to you

and to send letters to friends abroad who will take care of you.

And you are a fool, if you refuse my offer, woman.

Put aside your venom and you might get somewhere.

**Medea**

615

We will not be making use of your friends;

I will not take anything from you; don't give me anything.

The gift of a bad man brings no pleasure.

**Jason**

I call the gods to witness

that I want to help you and the children in every way I can.

My generosity is not enough for you, but in your stubbornness

620

you push your friends away. You hurt yourself all the more.

Exit Jason.

**Medea**

Go. Desire for your new bride overcomes you  
when you spend too much time away from the house.

Get on with your marriage. Perhaps with gods' help it will be said

you have made a marriage that you will soon regret.

625

## SECOND STASIMON (627-662)

**Chorus**

Love coming on too strong  
does not give glory or virtue  
to men.<sup>[27]</sup> But if Kypris comes in moderation,  
no other goddess is so gracious.

630

Never, oh goddess, let fly at me an inescapable arrow  
from your golden bow, after you drench it in desire.

But I pray that composure be my friend,  
the finest gift of the gods.

635

Dreaded Kypris, never hit me with quarrelsome angers  
and insatiable strife,  
after stinging my heart for another bed,

but honoring a match free of conflict, wisely discern  
women's love. 640

Fatherland, home,  
let me not be stateless,  
leading a life without means,  
hard to get through, 645  
full of the most pitiable sorrows.

Let me die, yes, die,  
before reaching that day;  
of troubles there is no other worse than  
separation from one's native land. 650

We have seen it and do not have this story  
from others to reflect upon;  
no city, no friend  
pities you, as you suffer 655  
the most terrible of sufferings.

Without grace may he perish who  
does not treat his loved ones honorably  
unbolting his heart in pure love. 660  
He will never be a friend of mine.

### EPISODE III (663-823)

*Aigeus, king of Athens, enters with a royal entourage.*

**Aigeus**

Medea, hello.[28] For no one knows a better way  
than this to address friends and wish them well.

**Medea**

Hello to you too, Aigeus, son of Pandion  
the wise. What brings you to this country? 665

**Aigeus**

I have just come from the time-honored oracle of Phoebus Apollo.

**Medea**

And why did you visit the oracular navel of the world?[29]

**Aigeus**

To ask how I might get a child.

**Medea**

Dear gods, are you still childless at your time of life? 670

**Aigeus**

Yes, we are childless, through an affliction from some deity.

**Medea**

Do you have a wife or do you keep a celibate bed?

**Aigeus**

I share my bed with my wife.

**Medea**

What then did Phoebus tell you about children?



**Aigeus**

Words wiser than a man can understand.

675

**Medea**

Are you permitted to share with me the god's message?

**Aigeus**

Oh yes, since it needs a discerning mind.

**Medea**

What then did the oracle respond? Tell me if I am allowed to hear.

**Aigeus**

Not to loose the projecting foot of my wine sack ...

**Medea**

Until after you do what? Or reach what country?

680

**Aigeus**

Until I come again to my own home.

**Medea**

Why then are you passing through this country?

**Aigeus**

There is a man named Pittheus, king of Trozen ...

**Medea**

The son, it is said, of Pelops, a most god-fearing man.

**Aigeus**

I want to communicate the god's oracle to him.

685

**Medea**

Yes, for he is a prudent man and skilled in such things.

**Aigeus**

And he is, besides, the most friendly of my allies.

**Medea**

May you fare well, and gain your heart's desire.

**Aigeus**

But why do I see your face and complexion so wasted?

**Medea**

Aigeus, my husband is the world's most wicked man.

690

**Aigeus**

What are you saying? Tell me clearly why you are downcast.

**Medea**

Jason wrongs me though I have done nothing to him.

**Aigeus**

What has he done? Tell me everything.

**Medea**

He has taken a new wife, to be mistress of his house over me.

**Aigeus**

He would not have dared such a despicable act.

695

**Medea**

You may be sure he did. And we who were loved before are now rejected.

**Aigeus**

Did he fall in love, or grow weary of his marriage to you?

**Medea**

Yes, very much in love. He is disloyal to his family.

**Aigeus**

Let it go then, if, as you say, he is wicked.

**Medea**

He has fallen in love with marrying into a royal family.

700

**Aigeus**

And who is father of the bride? Finish the story.

**Medea**

Creon, who rules this country of Corinth.

**Aigeus**

No wonder you are upset, my lady.

**Medea**

I am ruined. And besides that I am driven into exile.

**Aigeus**

By whom? This is yet another new tragedy.

705

**Medea**

Creon has banished me from Corinth.

**Aigeus**

And Jason permits it? I don't approve of that.

**Medea**

He says he does not, but he is willing to put up with it.

But I beg you by your beard  
and I fall suppliant at your knees,

pity me, pity me in my despair

710

and do not let me be driven out destitute,

but take me in to share your home and country.

And then with the gods' help I pray your desire for children

will bear fruit and you yourself die happy.

715

You do not know what a lucky find you have found in me.

I will put an end to your childlessness and help you  
become a father. I know how to concoct a potent elixir.

**Aigeus**

There are many reasons that I am eager to grant you  
this favor, my lady, first out of reverence for the gods  
and then in the hope of children whose birth you predict.

720

For I am in utter despair over it.

This is how it is with me. If you come to my land

I will do my best as a man of honor to receive you as my guest.

This much I will promise you, Medea:

I am not prepared to give you escort from this place,

725

but if on your own you come to my home,

you will remain there under protection and I will not deliver you up to anyone.

But you must make your way from this country  
for I want to be free from blame in the eyes of my hosts here.

730

**Medea**

Yes, I will do that. But if there could be a pledge to me  
of these things, I will have everything I need from you.

**Aigeus**

Don't you trust me? Or what is troubling you?

**Medea**

I trust you. But the house of Pelias is my enemy  
and so is Creon. If you are bound by an oath you will not hand me over  
to them if they try to take me away from your country. 735

But if you come to terms in words only, without an oath to the gods,  
you could become their friend and you might  
yield to their heralds.[30] For I am in desperate straits,  
and they have all the wealth and royal power.[31] 740

**Aigeus**

I see you are taking every precaution.  
If you think it's best, I will not refuse to do as you ask.  
This way things will be safer for me too:  
I will have a pretext to offer to your enemies  
and you will be more secure. Bring on the gods. 745

**Medea**

Swear by the plain of Earth, and Helios the Sun, father  
of my father, and add the whole race of gods.

**Aigeus**

To do and avoid doing what? Put it into words.

**Medea**

Never yourself to cast me out of your country  
nor if anyone else of my enemies desires  
to take me away, ever to give me up of your own free will. 750

**Aigeus**

I swear by Earth and the bright light of Helios  
and all the gods to abide by your words.

**Medea**

It is sufficient. And if you do not keep your word, what will you suffer?

**Aigeus**

What happens to all men who break their oaths.[32] 755

**Medea**

Farewell on your journey. All is well;  
I will come to your city as soon as possible,  
when I have done what I intend to do and achieved what I desire.  
*Exit Aigeus.*

**Chorus**

May Lord Hermes, son of Maia, the kindly escort,  
guide you to your home, and may you accomplish  
what you desire, Aigeus, 760  
because you have proven to me  
that you are a good and generous man.

**Medea**

Oh Zeus and Justice, daughter of Zeus, and light of the Sun!  
I shall be victorious over my enemies now, my friends.  
I have set out upon my journey. 765

Now I have hope that my enemies will pay the price.  
 For where I was most in trouble, this man  
 appeared as a safe haven of my plans:  
 to him I shall attach a cable to guide me there,  
 going to the city and fortress of Pallas Athena. 770  
 And now I shall tell you all my plans.  
 Hear my words though there is no pleasure in them.  
 I will send one of my servants to Jason,  
 asking him to come into my sight.  
 And when he comes I will speak to him ingratiating words,  
 how I agree with him in all these things and everything is fine — 775  
 this royal marriage he has made, after betraying me.  
 And I will say that it is advantageous and sensible.  
 But I will beg for my children to stay here,  
 not that I would leave my children in hostile territory 780  
 for my enemies to abuse,  
 but so that with deceit I may kill the king's daughter.  
 For I shall send my children with gifts in their hands,  
 bringing them to the bride, asking for reprieve from exile,  
 a finely woven dress and a tiara of beaten gold. 785  
 And if she takes them in her hands and puts them on her flesh,  
 she and anyone who touches her will die a horrible death,  
 so potent are the poisons I will smear on the gifts.  
 After this it is a brand new story.[33]  
 I grieve over the deed I must do 790  
 after this. For I shall kill my children.  
 There is no one who will rescue them.  
 And after confounding Jason's whole house  
 I shall leave the country, in flight from the murder  
 of the children I love, after daring a most unholy deed. 795  
 For it is not tolerable to be laughed at by my enemies, friends.  
 Let it pass. What good is life to me? I have no homeland,  
 I have no home as a refuge from evils.  
 I made my mistake when I abandoned  
 my father's house, won over by the words 800  
 of a Greek man, who will, with god's help pay for this.  
 The children born from me, he will never again see  
 them alive, for the rest of his life, and he will not father a child  
 from the newly-wedded bride, since she, the wretch, must die  
 wretchedly through my poisons. 805  
 Let no one think that I am mean or weak  
 nor peaceful, but of the other sort,  
 a weight upon my enemies but to my friends most kind.  
 It is to such people the heroic way of life belongs.[34] 810  
**Chorus**  
 Since you have shared this story with us,  
 in our desire to help you and in keeping  
 with human values, we beg you not to do this.  
**Medea**  
 I will not change my mind. I understand why  
 you would say this, you are not suffering abuse as I am. 815  
**Chorus**  
 Will you dare to kill your own flesh and blood, Medea?

**Medea**

Yes, this will cause my husband to feel the most pain.

**Chorus**

But you would be the sorriest of women.

**Medea**

Never mind. All other words are in vain.

*She calls out and addresses her servant from the opening scene. Enter Nurse.*

Go and bring Jason here.

For we rely on you in all confidential matters. 820

Tell him nothing of my decisions,

if you care for the well-being of your mistress and are a real woman.

*Exit Nurse.*

**THIRD STASIMON (824-865)****Chorus**

Descendants of Erechtheus,[35] wealthy[36] of old  
and children of the blessed gods, 825  
from a land holy and unconquered, feeding

on most glorious wisdom[37] always 830  
stepping delicately through the brightest air,  
there once they say the nine Muses of Pieria  
gave birth to Golden Harmony.[38]

They sing the tale that Kypris 835  
drawing water at the streams of fair-flowing Kephisos  
breathes gentle sweet-smelling

auras of winds over the land; and always putting 840  
on her hair a fragrant garland of rose blossoms,  
she sends the Loves, co-workers with wisdom,  
helpers of every sort of excellence. 845

How then will the city of holy rivers,  
the land that gives safe-passage[39] 850  
to friends,

welcome you, child-killer,  
not holy with the others? 855  
Picture the blow to the children;  
picture the murder you are committing.

Do not, at your knees  
in every way we beseech you,  
do not kill your children. 860

Where will you get the boldness  
of mind to confer upon your hand or heart,  
that terrible daring? 865

And, how, when you cast your eyes  
on the children will you take part 870  
in their murder without weeping? No, you cannot  
— when your children fall begging —  
wet your hand in their blood  
keeping an iron-willed heart. 875

**EPISODE IV (866-975)***Enter Jason.***Jason**

I have come at your bidding. For even though you hate me  
I shall not fail you, but I will hear  
what it is you want from me now, woman.

**Medea**

Jason, I ask you to forgive me for the things  
I said before. You're used to putting up with my temper,  
since so many acts of love have passed between us. 870

I have gone over the arguments with myself  
and I reproached myself, "stubborn woman, why do I rave  
and show hatred to those who wish me well,  
and make myself an enemy to the rulers of this country  
and to my husband who is doing the most advantageous things for us 875  
in marrying royalty and fathering brothers  
for my children? Shall I not give up  
my anger — what is wrong with me? The gods provide well.

Don't I have children, don't I know that  
I am a refugee in need of friends?" 880

In contemplating these things I realized I was suffering  
delusion and that my rage was in vain.

I accept it now. You seem to me to be acting logically  
in bringing us this marriage alliance, and I was foolish. 885

I should have taken part in the arrangements  
and joined you in the ceremony and stood by the bed  
and taken delight in your bride as a member of the family.

But we are what we are, we women:  
I will not say evil. But you should not copy our faults;  
don't repay our craziness in kind. 890

I give up and admit that I was wrong  
then, but now I have come to a better way of thinking.  
Children, children, come out of the house.

*Enter children with the Pedagogue.*  
Greet your father and speak to him  
with me and give up our earlier hostility 895  
to become friends again, along with your mother.  
We have made a truce and our anger is over.

Take his right hand. Ah me, for our troubles:  
secret sorrows flood into my mind. 900

My children, will you live for a long time  
to stretch out your dear arms in this way?

Ah! I am near tears and full of fear.  
At long last I have put aside the strife with your father,  
and tears fill my tender sight. 905

**Chorus**

And for me too, tears well up in my eyes.  
I pray there will be no greater sorrows than the present ones.

**Jason**

These things I approve of, woman, and I do not blame you for the past.  
It is natural for the female of the species to give way to passions

when a husband takes on another marriage,  
but your heart has changed for the better 910  
and you have recognized the winning argument,  
in your own good time. This is the action of an intelligent woman.

And, children, it was not without sound planning that your father  
arranged greater security for you, with gods' help. 915  
For I think that one day along with your brothers  
you will be in the top rank of Corinthian society.

When you grow up. The rest your father is taking care of  
and any of the gods who are propitious to me.  
May I see you well-grown reaching your early 920  
manhood, superior to my enemies.

But you there, why do your eyes glisten  
with tears, why do you turn away your pale face,  
and not gladly accept my words?

**Medea**

It's nothing. I was thinking about my children. 925

**Jason**

Cheer up now. I will do right by them.

**Medea**

Yes. . . as you say. I do not disbelieve your words.  
But a woman is a mere female naturally given to tears.

**Jason**

Why then are you grieving over your children?

**Medea**

I gave birth to them. And when you prayed that they would live,  
pity came over me wondering if this would happen. 930

Some of the reasons I had for inviting you into this exchange  
have already been said. Now let me tell you the rest.

Since the royal family has determined to send me into exile —  
and I agree that this is best, I understand it very well,

for me not to stay here as an encumbrance to you 935  
and the rulers of the country, since I appear to be their enemy —

I will then lift anchor in exile from this land,  
but the children — they should be raised by your hand.

Ask Creon not to exile them from his territory. 940

**Jason**

I'm not sure I can convince him, but still it is worth a try.

**Medea**

Then tell your new wife to ask her father  
not to exile the children from this country.

**Jason**

Yes, of course, and I think I will convince her.

**Medea**

You will if she is a woman like the rest.  
I will lend a hand in this effort too. 945

I will send her gifts which are the most lovely  
in all the world, I am sure of it, by far the most lovely:  
a fine dress and a tiara of beaten gold

and my children carrying them. Quick,  
 one of my servants, bring here the ornaments. 950  
*Enter servant with gifts.*  
 She will be happy not in just one but in countless ways:  
 in you she has a most excellent husband  
 and she will also possess these ornaments which Helios, the Sun,  
 father of my father gave to his descendants.  
 Take these wedding gifts into your hands, children, 955  
 and give them to the happy royal bride.  
 She will receive most perfect gifts.

### Jason

But why, you foolish woman, do you deprive yourself of these?  
 Do you think the king's house is in need of dresses  
 or gold? Keep them. Don't give them away. 960  
 If my wife has any respect for me at all  
 she prefers me to gold, I am certain.

### Medea

Oh no you don't. The saying goes "gifts persuade the gods."  
 And "gold is stronger than ten thousand words among men."  
 She has divine favor, now the god will increase it. 965  
 In her youth she has power. But to save my children from exile  
 I would give my life, not gold alone.  
 But, children, go into the wealthy house  
 to your father's new wife, my mistress,  
 supplicate her, beg her not to send you into exile, 970  
 hand her the ornaments — this is very important —  
 make sure that she take these gifts into her own hands.  
 Go, quickly. And may you succeed and be bearers of good news  
 to your mother of what she wants to hear.  
*Jason, the children, and the old Pedagogue exit.* 975

## FOURTH STASIMON[40] (976-1001)

### Chorus

Now I have no more hopes for the children's life —  
 no more. They go now to murder.  
 The bride will receive the gifts, the poor woman will take  
 the doom of the golden diadem;  
 onto her golden hair she will put Death's  
 adornment, taking it in her own hands. 980

The beauty and unfading glow of the golden robe  
 will persuade her to put on the well-crafted crown.  
 She will dress as a bride now for the dead below.  
 Into such a snare will she fall 985  
 and into the destiny of death, unhappy girl.  
 She can not escape her doom.

But you, unhappy, ill-wedded son-in-law of kings  
 unknowing to your children 990  
 you are bringing doom, and to your wife  
 hateful death.



Unhappy man, how far you have strayed from your destiny. 995  
 And most of all I lament your grief, unhappy mother  
 of children whom you will murder —  
 your own children, for the sake of the marriage bed, which  
 your husband  
 lawlessly deserted and now he dwells with another spouse. 1000

**EPISODE V (1001-1250)***Enter Pedagogue with the children.***Pedagogue**

Mistress, your children are pardoned from exile  
 and the royal bride happily took the gifts  
 in her hands. There is peace from that quarter for your children.  
*ea* [hah!]

Why do you stand in confusion when the news is good?  
 [Why have you turned away your face  
 and do not gladly accept this word from me?] 1005

**Medea**

*aiai* [Aah! Aah!]

**Pedagogue**

That is not in tune with my message.

**Medea**

*aiai* [Aah! Aah!] again.

**Pedagogue**

Have I announced a misfortune I was not aware of,  
 and been cheated of my hope of being a bearer of good news? 1010

**Medea**

You told what you had to tell. I do not blame you.

**Pedagogue**

Why then is your face downcast and why are you crying?

**Medea**

It has to be, old man. For the gods and I ...  
 yes, I with faulty reasoning have devised these things.

**Pedagogue**

Cheer up. You too will come home with your children's help. 1015

**Medea**

I will send others home before that, unhappy woman that I am.

**Pedagogue**

You are not the only woman to be separated from her children.  
 As humans we must lightly bear misfortunes.

**Medea**

I will do that. But go into the house  
 and prepare for the children what they need for today.  
 Children, children, you have a city  
 and a home in which, when you have left me in my misery,  
 you will dwell forever deprived of a mother. 1020

And I will go to another country, a refugee,  
 where I cannot delight in you or see you happy. 1025  
 I will never adorn your nuptial bath and bride  
 and marriage bed, never hold up the wedding torch.  
 My own daring has wrecked my life.  
 Dear, dear children all my care for you has gone to waste!  
 What a waste the toils which wore me out,  
 when I endured the hard useless pangs of childbirth. 1030  
 Truly once, grief-stricken though I am now, I had high hopes  
 in you, that you would care for me in my old age  
 and when I died, with your own hands you would tend me,  
 something we all hope for. But now it's all gone,  
 my sweet expectation. For without you 1035  
 I will live a life of sorrow, agonizing for me.  
 And you, with those dear eyes of yours, will never again  
 look at your mother, when you have gone away to another life.  
*feu, feu* [Ah! Ah!] Why are your eyes staring at mine, children?  
 Why do you smile that very last smile? 1040  
*aiai* [Ah, Ah!] What will I do? My heart is not in it,  
 women, when I look at the gleaming eyes of my children.  
 I could not do it. Goodbye my plans  
 of before. I shall take my children with me.  
 Why should I abuse them to wound their father,  
 and have twice as many woes myself? 1045  
 I will not do it. Goodbye my plans.  
 But what is the matter with me? Do I want to be  
 a laughing stock, letting my enemies go unpunished?  
 These things must be endured. Damn my cowardice! 1050  
 How could I let soft words into my heart?  
 Go into the house, children. (*Children start to leave.*) Whoever  
 is not permitted to partake of my sacrifice  
 stay away. I shall not let my hand grow slack.  
 Ah. Ah. [a, a] 1055  
 Do not, oh my heart, do not do these things.  
 Let them alone, you miserable woman, spare your children.  
 Living there with me they will delight you.  
 No! By the avengers down in Hades!  
 There is no way that I will leave my children  
 to be abused by my enemies. 1060  
 [They must die. And since they must,  
 I who gave them birth will kill them.][41]  
 The plan is underway and there is no escape.  
 The crown is on her head; dressed in the robes,  
 the royal bride is in her death throes; I am certain of it. 1065  
 Now I shall set out upon a most sorrowful road  
 and I shall send them on one more sorrowful still.  
 I want to speak to my children. Dear children,  
 give your mother your right hand to kiss.  
 Oh dearest hand, dearest mouth, 1070  
 and form and noble face of my children,  
 may you be happy, but there. Your father has ruined  
 everything here. Oh sweet embrace.  
 Oh soft skin and lovely breath of my children.  
 Go, go on. I am no longer able to look 1075  
 at you. I am overcome by wrongs.

*Children exit.*

I understand what evil I am about to do  
but my wrath is stronger even than my thoughts,  
which is the cause of the greatest wrongs of humankind.

1080

### ASTROPHIC CHORAL SONG (1081-1115)

#### Chorus

Often before now

I have gone through the more subtle stories  
and I have pored over greater questions  
than women usually investigate.

But we have a Muse too  
who associates with us for sharing wisdom.

1085

Not with all of us,

out of many women the number of us  
inspired with the gift of song is small.

I have come to believe that human beings who  
have never had the experience of rearing  
children, are much better off than  
those of us who are parents.

1090

Because they never have to worry  
whether children turn out to be

a pleasure for humans or a misery,  
the childless are free of many troubles.

1095

But those who have in their houses the  
sweet bloom of children — I see them  
worn down by care all the time,

first how they will bring up their children right  
and how they will leave them a livelihood.

1100

And worse than this it remains unclear  
whether their toil is spent on children  
who will turn out good or bad.

But one misfortune — last of all  
and worst for all humankind — I have to say it:

1105

yes, suppose they have found sufficient living  
and the children have grown up to young adulthood  
and they have turned out to be good. If fate  
should have it so, along comes Death  
carrying off their children to Hades.

1110

How then does it profit, in addition to the other woes  
that the gods cast upon mortals,  
to bear this bitterest grief  
for the sake of children?

1115

#### Medea

My friends, I have been waiting a long time,  
expecting news of how events are progressing there.  
The messenger comes into view.

Now I see one of Jason's servants coming  
this way. His agitated breathing  
shows that he brings news of a fresh disaster.

1120

#### Messenger

Medea, you have perpetrated a terrible,  
criminal act! You must flee, flee at once.  
Take ship or chariot, but go.

**Medea**

What has happened that I need to take off in this way?

**Messenger**

The royal princess is dead just now  
a victim of your poisons and her father, Creon, is dead too. 1125

**Medea**

That's wonderful news. You will have my eternal  
gratitude and I will call you my friend.

**Messenger**

What are you saying? Have you gone mad, woman?  
You have destroyed the royal household,  
and are glad to hear it and have no fear of the consequences? 1130

**Medea**

I too have something to say in answer  
to your words. But do not rush off, my friend,  
tell your tale. How did they die? You will give me  
twice as much pleasure if they died horrible deaths. 1135

**Messenger**

When your two children came in  
with their father, and went to the bridal chambers  
we slaves were glad, those of us who had been distressed before  
by your troubles. From ear to ear talk spread quickly  
that you and your husband had called a truce to your earlier quarrel. 1140

One kisses a hand, another the blond heads  
of the children. I was beside myself with joy  
and followed along to the women's quarters with the children.  
And our mistress, to whom we pay respect now instead of you,  
before she caught sight of your two children  
held her eyes fixed eagerly on Jason. 1145

But then she covered up her face  
and turned away her pale cheek,  
sickened by the approach of the children. But your husband  
was trying to assuage the rancor and venom of the young woman  
by telling her this: "Do not be angry at my family. 1150

Won't you stifle your rage and turn back your face.  
Hold your husband's loved ones as your own,  
take the gifts, and ask your father to revoke  
the sentence of exile from my children, for my sake?" 1155

And she, when she saw the fine garments did not resist  
but agreed with her husband in everything,  
and before father and children were far from the house,  
she scooped up the fine robe and put it on;  
then she fitted the golden crown around her curls  
and with a shimmering mirror arranged her hair, 1160  
smiling at the lifeless image of her face.

And then she gets up from her throne and walks  
through the room, stepping lightly on her delicate feet  
overjoyed with the gifts, again and again  
casting an eye upon her arched foot. 1165

Suddenly there was a terrible sight to see:  
 the color drains from her face; her step unsteady, she tries  
 to go back, trembling from head to foot, and barely manages  
 to stumble into her seat and avoid falling on the ground.  
 Then an old woman, one of her slaves, thinking a fit 1170  
 from Pan or one of the gods had seized her,  
 let out a wail, before she saw white foam  
 streaming from her mouth and from her eyes  
 the pupils turned back; and the blood was drained from her skin.  
 Then there came a terrible cry in answer 1175  
 to the wail. At once one slave ran to her father's  
 rooms, another to her new husband,  
 to tell them what was happening to the bride.  
 The whole house reverberated with the sound of running feet.  
 By now a fast walker turning the last lap 1180  
 of the course would be reaching his goal.  
 And the poor woman, her eyes glazed over, stirred from her silence  
 and with a deep groan was trying to get up.  
 But a twofold trouble was warring against her:  
 the crown of gold around her head 1185  
 was spewing out an eerie stream of ravenous fire,  
 and the fine robes, gifts from your children,  
 were eating away the poor girl's beautiful flesh.  
 She stands up and tries to escape, but she is on fire.  
 She shakes her head this way and that, 1190  
 trying to throw off the crown, but all the more tightly  
 the gold holds its bonds; and the fire — when she shook  
 her head — burned twice as bright.  
 Overcome by the disaster she falls to the floor,  
 unrecognizable to the sight of anyone but a parent. 1195  
 The condition of her eyes and her once lovely face  
 were murky, and blood dripped  
 from the top of her head with fire mixed in,  
 and the flesh was dripping from her bones like sap  
 from a pine, through the hidden gnawing of the poisons, 1200  
 a terrible sight. We were all afraid to touch  
 the body. We had her fate to teach us.  
 But her poor father in ignorance of the tragedy  
 suddenly bursts into the room and throws himself on the body.  
 He cries out and enfolding her in his arms 1205  
 he kisses her and speaks to her, "My poor child,  
 which of the gods has mangled you so horribly?  
 Who has made me an aged tomb, to grieve for you.  
 Ah me let me die with you, my child."  
 And when he stopped his weeping and wailing 1210  
 he wanted to raise up his old limbs  
 but was held back by the fine robes like ivy  
 by the shoots of laurel. The struggle was hair-raising.  
 He wanted to get up on his feet  
 but she held him fast. If he tried to use force 1215  
 she tore the aged flesh from his bones.  
 After a time he was exhausted and the poor man  
 let go of life. He was not strong enough to fight the disaster.  
 They lie dead together, child and aged father  
 beside her. A tragedy that makes you want to cry. 1220

In my view your part is beyond my telling.  
 You will know how to escape punishment.  
 Not for the first time I find our lives are a shadow,  
 and I am not afraid to say that people who think  
 they have everything figured out and are masters of logic 1225  
 — they are responsible for the greatest folly.  
 No human being is happy.  
 Strike it rich and you are luckier  
 than your neighbor — but happy, never. 1230  
*Exit messenger.*

### Chorus

The god has inflicted many troubles  
 on Jason today and he deserves them.  
 Unhappy daughter of Creon, done to death,  
 how we pity you for your tragedy,  
 all because of your marriage to Jason. 1235

### Medea

My friends. I have determined to do the deed at once,  
 to kill my children and leave this land,  
 and not to falter or give my children  
 over to let a hand more hostile murder them.  
 They must die and since they must 1240  
 I, who brought them into the world, will kill them.  
 But arm yourself, my heart. Why hesitate  
 to do these tragic, yet necessary, evils?  
 Come, unhappy hand of mine, take the sword  
 take it, move to the dismal turning point of life. 1245  
 Do not be a coward. Do not think of your children —  
 how much you love them, how you gave them birth.  
 For this one short day forget your children,  
 and mourn tomorrow. For even if you kill them  
 still you loved them very much. I am an unhappy woman. 1250  
*Exit Medea.*

## FIFTH STASIMON (1251-1292)

### Chorus

Earth and all-shining  
 rays of the sun, look down, look down on this  
 godforsaken woman before  
 she lays her murderous, kin-killing hand on her children.  
 For they are sprung from your golden seed,  
 and when the blood of a god is shed by the hands of men 1255  
 there is terror.  
 But, Zeus-born light, prevent her,  
 stop her, drive from the house  
 this wretched Fury made murderous by the spirits of vengeance. 1260

Toil over the young has come to nothing:  
 for nothing you gave birth to your dear children,  
 you who left the most inhospitable entrance  
 of the dark blue Clashing Rocks.

Wretched one, why does heavy anger  
of the heart and hateful murder fall upon you? 1265  
It is hard for mortals to expiate the taint of kindred bloodshed  
upon the earth, grief comes in tune  
from the gods, falling upon the murderers' houses.  
(*A cry of terror is heard from inside.*) 1270  
Do you hear the cry? Do you hear the children?  
Oh miserable, ill-fated woman!

**Child 1**

Ah me, what will I do? Where will I run from mother's hand?

**Child 2**

I do not know, dear brother; we are lost.

**Chorus**

Should I go into the house? I think I should stop  
the murder of the children. 1275

**Child 1**

Yes, by the gods, help us. We need you.

**Child 2**

How close we are to being trapped beneath the sword.

**Chorus**

Unhappy one, how you are made of rock or iron  
who will kill the children,  
whom you birthed, with death by your own hand. 1280  
I have heard of one woman before this  
who laid her hands on her own dear children:  
Ino, maddened by the gods, when the wife of Zeus  
sent her wandering from her home.  
She plunged, poor woman, into the sea, for the  
impious death of the children; 1285  
she stretched her foot over the seashore  
and with her two children she lost her life.  
What could be still more awful?  
Marriage bed of women  
full of pain, how many things you have done to us humans, 1290  
all of them bad!

**EXODOS[42] (1293-1419)**

*Enter Jason*

**Jason**

You there, women standing here at the door,  
is she still in the house, Medea, who has  
perpetrated these heinous crimes, or has she taken flight?  
She would need to hide herself in the earth 1295  
or grow wings to lift her body high into the air  
if she is to avoid revenge from the royal house.  
Or does she trust that after killing the rulers of the country

she will escape their kinsmen unpunished?  
 But I am not so concerned about her as about my children. 1300  
 The family she assaulted will take care of her.  
 I have come to save my children's lives  
 in case Creon's relatives try to do something to them  
 exacting vengeance for their mother's godless murders.[43] 1305

**Chorus**

Poor man, you do not know into what a depth of evils  
 you have come, Jason, or you would not have uttered these words.

**Jason**

What is it? Does she intend to kill me too?

**Chorus**

Your children are dead, killed by their mother's hand.

**Jason**

Oh no! what are you saying? Women, you have doomed me. 1310

**Chorus**

You need to know that your children are gone.

**Jason**

Where did she kill them? Inside the house or outside?

**Chorus**

Open the gates and you will see your murdered children.

**Jason**

Hurry, unlock the doors, now, servants,  
 unfasten the bolts, so I may see the two disasters,  
 my children dead and her — I'll make her pay. 1315

**Medea**

*(Appearing in a dragon-drawn chariot on the rooftop with the bodies in her arms)*

Why are you shaking the doors and trying to force them open,  
 to find the bodies and me the perpetrator?  
 You are wasting your effort. If you need anything from me,  
 say so, but you will never touch me with your hand.  
 Such transport the Sun god, father of my father 1320  
 has given me, a defense against the hand of my enemies.

**Jason**

You abomination, you vilest, most hateful woman,  
 to the gods and to me and to the whole human race.  
 You had the heart to take the sword to your own children  
 to whom you gave birth, and you have left me childless and devastated. 1325  
 You did these things. How can you still look on the sunlight  
 and earth, after daring the most appalling deed?

Damn you. Now I see it, I didn't understand it then,  
 when I brought you, so hideous a monster, into Greece,  
 from your home and that barbarous land, 1330  
 betrayer of your father and the country that reared you.  
 The gods have hurled you as an avenging spirit against me.

For you killed your brother at the hearth  
 and then boarded the beautiful ship Argo.  
 That is where you started. But after marrying 1335  
 me and bearing my children,



because of the marriage bed you killed them.  
 There is no Greek woman who would have dared  
 such deeds, any of whom I could have married, but instead  
 chose you, a marriage tie that has ruined me, 1340  
 a lioness, not a woman, with a temper  
 more savage than Tyrrhenian Scylla.[44]

But not even ten thousand curses could  
 sting you. Such boldness is in you. 1345  
 Go, you depraved murderer of your children.  
 What is left to me but to cry out for my fate?

I will not enjoy my new marriage,  
 and the children whom I fathered and brought up  
 I will never be able to speak to them alive, for I have lost them. 1350

**Medea**

I could prolong an answer to your words  
 if father Zeus were not aware  
 what you have gotten from me and what you did in return.  
 You were not going to disrespect your marriage to me  
 and lead a happy life, ridiculing me. 1355

And the royal bride and Creon who arranged the marriage for you  
 were not going to exile me from the country and get away with it.  
 Remember this, and go ahead and call me lioness if you like  
 and Scylla dwelling in the Tyrrhenian land,  
 I have wrenched your heart as I had to do. 1360

**Jason**

You will suffer too and share in this tragedy.

**Medea**

You can be certain of that. But the pain is pleasure if you do not laugh.

**Jason**

Oh children, what a terrible mother you had.

**Medea**

Oh children, how you were destroyed by your father's disease.

**Jason**

My right hand did not strike them.

**Medea** 1365

But your abuse and your new marriage.

**Jason**

You thought the marriage bed was worth your children's lives?

**Medea**

Do you think this a trivial wrong for a woman?

**Jason**

If she is a good woman. But to you nothing is good.

**Medea**

The children are dead. This will sting you. 1370

**Jason**

They are a pollution to you.

**Medea**

The gods know who began this tragedy.

**Jason**

Then they know the vileness of your heart.

**Medea**

Hate me. I, too, hate your irritating voice.

**Jason**

And I yours. The separation is easy.

**Medea**

What then? I too am eager to make my departure.

**Jason**

Allow me to bury my children and mourn over them.

**Medea**

No, never. I shall bury them with my own hand,  
taking them to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia  
so that none of my enemies will defile them  
by tearing up their graves. And in this land of Sisyphus  
I shall authorize a sacred festival and ritual  
to last forever for this unholy murder.

And I shall go myself to the land of Erechtheus  
to live with Aigeus the son of Pandion.

But you, a coward, you will die a coward's death as you deserve,  
struck on your head by a remnant of the wreck of the Argo  
seeing a bitter end to your marriage to me.

**Jason**

But may the Avenger of children destroy you  
and Justice that haunts murderers.

**Medea**

What god or divine spirit would listen to you  
an oath-breaker and deceiver of guests?

**Jason**

*Feu, feu* [Aah, aah] loathsome child murderer.

**Medea**

Go home and bury your wife.[\[45\]](#)

**Jason**

I am going, denied rights to my two children.

**Medea**

Do not mourn yet. Wait for old age.

**Jason**

Oh dearest children.

**Medea** To their mother, not to you.

**Jason**

And yet you killed them.

**Medea** Yes, to wound you.

**Jason**

*omoi* [Ah me.] I long to kiss  
the sweet lips of my children.

**Medea**

1375  
1380  
1385  
1390  
1395  
1400

Now you speak to them, now you love them.  
Before you pushed them aside.

### Jason

In the name of the gods  
let me touch the soft skin of my children.

### Medea

That will not happen. Your words are thrown into the empty air.  
(*She flies off into the air toward Athens.*)

### Jason

Zeus, do you hear how I am driven away  
and what I suffer from this loathsome  
child-killer, this lioness? 1405

This is all that is left to me, all that I can do,  
to mourn and cry out to the gods  
and call the divine spirits to witness how she  
killed my children and keeps me 1410  
from touching them with my hands and burying their bodies.  
I wish I had never fathered them  
to see them destroyed by you.

*Exit Jason.*

### Chorus

Of many things Zeus in Olympus is keeper,  
many are the things the gods bring about against all reason, 1415  
and what is looked for does not happen after all,  
yet a god finds a way for the unexpected.  
That is how this story has ended.

*The chorus files out with these lines.*

## Acknowledgments

In translating *Medea* I have aimed at making a version that, while keeping close to the Greek, would be natural enough to be used on stage or in a reading and accurate enough for classroom use. I would like to thank [John T. Quinn](#) for going over the whole translation and making many useful suggestions that improved the work immeasurably; Lance Luschnig, Lynne Haagenen, Chaucey Wittinger, and Ivan Peterson for taking parts and reading it with me on a memorable afternoon, 14 March 2006; Ivan Peterson for inviting me to give a talk to his class, "The Monsters We Make," and his students, especially Catherine Brinkerhoff for taking an interest in the translation and inspiring me to work on it again in the Winter of 2005-06.

This translation is dedicated to Ivan and Chaucey and their daughter Alexandra.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Prologue is everything that happens before the parodos (or entrance-song of the chorus). Most Greek tragedies have a prologue (Aeschylus' *Persians* being an exception). The prologue is spoken by an actor in the mask of a character who often, but not always reappears in the play. The Euripidean prologue usually takes the form of an opening monologue that not only gives background, but establishes the tone and the ethos of the play. Here the mood of regret, the might-have-been opposed to the reality, is fixed from the first. Often the monologue is followed by a dialogue (or scene between two characters). It is unusual for the opening monologue to be spoken by a slave. In several plays (*Alcestis*, *Hippolytus*, *Trojan Women*,

*Bacchae*) it is a god who opens the play. Another play that opens with a slave is Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Sophocles favors a prologue in dialogue form (as in *Antigone* and *Electra*).

<sup>2</sup> The Clashing Rocks are the Symplegades. They clashed together, smashing any ships that went through. Once the Argo passed through, they remained open. In Greek legend the Argo was the first ship. Nurse is thus wishing away a major accomplishment of the Greeks as well as a favorite saga from the past. As is common in Greek thought, with its interest in first causes, she (though not Greek herself) goes back further than the actual sailing, here to the trees on Pelion, cut down to build oars (and the ship itself).

<sup>3</sup> The word she uses is *aristoi* (in the genitive *aristōn*, "of heroes"), literally, "the best men." The Greek word heroes refers to men and women who after death become the object of cult, worshiped as chthonic (or earth) deities usually to ward off disasters. I imagine the Nurse, herself a slave, uses this term sarcastically.

<sup>4</sup> The death of Pelias was famous and is pictured on vase paintings. Medea was able to rejuvenate people. In order to help Jason regain the kingdom of Iolcus from his uncle who had usurped the throne, Medea offered to rejuvenate Pelias by cutting him up and putting him into a large cauldron. She persuaded his daughters to cooperate in this by rejuvenating an old ram. They tried the same with their father but he did not emerge from the pot.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Scholia* (ancient commentaries, written in the margins of some of the manuscripts), Medea pleased the citizens of Corinth by using her spells to save them from a famine.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek says "pale neck." The neck is a particularly alluring and vulnerable place on a woman's body. See Nicole Loraux (tr. A. Foster), *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Many editors bracket all or parts of lines 38-43 in the belief that they are a later interpolation. As they stand they are in part repetitious of sentiments already expressed or about to be expressed and could be an explanation by a commentator. Lines 40-41 with slight change come up at 379-80 where they clearly refer to Medea's intention to dispatch the princess. Here, if genuine, they appear to refer to a possible suicide attempt by Medea.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, "passing the *pestoi* [that is, according to the scholiast, or ancient writer of marginalia, the place where the game was played] where the very old men sit..." . *Pestoi* may be a game of dice or a board game, such as the one Achilles and Ajax are pictured playing on numerous vases. See Leslie Kurke, "Ancient Greek Board Games and How to Play Them," *CPh* 94 (1999):247-67: Pollux 9.98 "The game, which uses a large number of pebbles (as playing pieces), is a board having areas marked off in lines. The board is called *polis*. Each one of the pebbles is a dog (*kuon*). The pebbles are divided into two sets according to their colors. The art of the game is the capture of a pebble of the opposite color by hemming it in with two of the same color." Aristotle *Politics* 1273a7 writes about the person who is *apolis* (cityless) being like an isolated piece in *pestoi* (*pettoi*).

<sup>9</sup> The old man makes this pronouncement a complicated mini-drama through his word order and strategy of postponement.

<sup>10</sup> The manuscripts have a line here (87), bracketed by most editors because it seems superfluous and inane: ["some justly, others out of self-interest"].

<sup>11</sup> This is a highly theatrical introduction to the character: the disembodied voice issues from the house. Cries from the house are always ominous. Often they are the cries of victims of murder as in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroe* (or *Libation Bearers*) and later in this play where the cries of the children are integrated into the last choral ode. The house itself is

ominous, being the hidden space, the domain of the female, where secrets are hidden. Another ploy Euripides uses in this play and other early dramas is a double introduction of his female character. Here the anguished cries of an unseen Medea, like the howls of a caged animal, all the more frightening because she is unseen and because Nurse has said "I'm afraid of her" (37), are followed at her first entrance by a composed, rational, persuasive woman who knows she is playing to an audience. In the *Alcestis*, Alcestis' first words are the delirious outbursts of a woman in death's embrace from which she rouses herself to give a perfectly articulate speech, rationally stating her position and her last wishes. Likewise, in the *Hippolytus*, Phaedra's ravings about a fantasy life for herself as a sort of wood nymph or huntress maiden are the first we hear from her, but later she gives a powerful philosophical oration about the reasons people fail to do what is right. In all these plays we see the emotional side first and then the rational. It is the fact that an audience is present that brings out Medea's persuasive skills.

<sup>12</sup> This is a very unusual Parodos. Usually the chorus enters as a group and sings an ode. Here there is an operatic duet between Nurse and Medea along with the chorus, an early example of the actors encroaching on the role of the chorus. The chorus is of citizen women, the only Corinthians of citizen families in the play. This fact gives them a certain political importance, for example, in their reactions to their king and his punishment of Medea. They announce the arrival of Creon, but do not utter a word in his presence. Their sympathy for Medea's sufferings from her husband's abuse is apparent from the start. As is the usual practice, this chorus announces the reasons for its arrival: they have heard Medea's cries and been saddened. They agree that she has been wronged and not only here and now, but in the cosmic court of justice, "Zeus will set this right" (158, literally, "Zeus will act as your co-defendant").

<sup>13</sup> Line 246 inately adds "visiting some friend or companion" which may be a pedant's interpolation to clean up the text. A man might have a mistress or visit the brothels, besides resorting to his friends' parties, where respectable women did not go. Jason did more than see friends; he negotiated another marriage.

<sup>14</sup> Many editors bracket this line (262, "father of the bride" is literally "the one who gave his daughter to him") on the grounds that Medea's threat to the king and his daughter is too readily accepted by the chorus. This is not, I believe, a convincing argument against the line. The chorus offers all its fellow-feeling to Medea and seems to have little or no sympathy for Creon.

<sup>15</sup> Creon calls himself *brabeus*, an umpire or judge who makes the final decision.

<sup>16</sup> I have bracketed these lines only for the flow of the translation.

<sup>17</sup> The manuscripts have another line here (304), bracketed by most editors: [to others I seem unassuming and to others of the other sort].

<sup>18</sup> Or perhaps "I am afraid you are planning some evil inside your heart."

<sup>19</sup> Medea gets down on her knees into the position of a suppliant, taking the knees and hand of Creon. Exactly when she does this is disputed by the critics, but I believe she assumes the full suppliant position when she says "at your knees." Creon thus refuses her plea until she agrees to the sentence of exile, flatters him as a concerned father in contrast to Jason, and reduces her request to something so insignificant, just one day to pack and get the children ready, that he could hardly refuse. His initial disregard for the suppliant shows him not as respectful as he boasts (at 349).

<sup>20</sup> These lines are bracketed by many editors, but I am of mixed minds about them. They certainly soften our impression of Creon, but I prefer the more tyrannical Creon whose last words, without these two lines, on stage are a pronouncement of death against Medea and

(probably) her children.

<sup>21</sup> She does have many ways of killing, but one thing her murders have in common is that she gets to men through their children, from killing and dismantling her brother to slow her father's pursuit (a detail not in the play); using the daughters of Pelias to dismember and boil their father; killing Creon through his daughter (this is not part of her actual plan, but she knew he loved her and would rush to her aid); and using her own children to destroy Jason. On the other hand, all her murders until the last can be seen as promoting the oikos (family) she establishes with Jason.

<sup>22</sup> Inadvertently Jason quotes Medea's words (292) as if she controls even his speech.

<sup>23</sup> This line (468) is often bracketed because it is repeated at line 1324 by Jason. Again I am of mixed minds because Jason quotes Medea on at least one other occasion (446) and the line seems appropriate here as well as in the later passage.

<sup>24</sup> This is a way of saying "and I thank you for it."

<sup>25</sup> Medea interrupts, perhaps because of the outrageous suggestion that the betrayer is the benefactor or she may balk at his appropriation of their children as his especially now that he has deserted them.

<sup>26</sup> Children belonged to the man. In case of a divorce it was usual (but not universal) for the children to go with the father. The exile of Jason's children, then, is strange and suggests that it is not only Medea whom Creon wants out of the way, but the children as well, because they are a reminder to him and his daughter that Jason is a married man. Jason does not need any more children by Medea. After he failed to regain his kingdom at the demise of Pelias, his only hope for royal status is through sons by the princess. Since the purpose of Greek marriage was the birth of legitimate sons, Jason by saying to Medea "What need have you for children?" is denying her any value at all. The speculation of some scholars, that Medea's children are illegitimate, is, in my opinion, a red herring. First, neither Jason nor Medea is a citizen of Corinth. Next, the laws of fifth-century Athens (according to which only children with citizen parents on both sides could be enrolled as citizens) cannot be imposed upon heroic age Corinth. Furthermore, many heroes are of mixed and illegitimate parentage, including Theseus (Athens' national hero), who will be the product of Aigeus' liaison with Pittheus' daughter, on his way home to Athens after he leaves Medea. And finally, Jason admits, "The [children] I have are enough and I am satisfied with them" (558).

<sup>27</sup> The word is not the generic one for human beings, but ἀνδράσιν ("males").

<sup>28</sup> This is a very clear example of the use of everyday speech in Euripidean tragedy.

<sup>29</sup> The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, considered the Navel (omphalos) of the earth. Votive omphaloi (of monumental size) are found at Delphi. One of the most important of the oracles, the god Apollo spoke here to humans often in riddles through his priestess, the Pythia. In classical times the sounds of the Pythia were interpreted by priests.

<sup>30</sup> Or ambassadors: a herald was sent with an ultimatum as a precursor to a declaration of war.

<sup>31</sup> The Medea is often presented as a political drama about the oppressed. She finds herself in a hostile environment and has no weapon with which to fight back but herself and her children.

<sup>32</sup> What happens to oath-breakers is that their family is wiped out. Medea will speed the gods' will by making Jason childless.

<sup>33</sup> These words are a signal that Medea is doing something new, not in the traditional legends.

It is very likely that Euripides invented the story that she killed her children. In earlier versions the children were killed by the relatives of Creon, by the Corinthian women, or accidentally by Medea when she tried to make them immortal.

<sup>34</sup> The heroic code requires helping friends and hurting enemies. It is challenged in Greek literature from Homer on.

<sup>35</sup> Erechtheus was the mythical founder of Athens, born of the earth.

<sup>36</sup> Wealthy, ὄλβιοι. Cf. Solon, 13:

Happy (ὄλβιος) is he to whom there are dear children and solid-hoofed horses  
and swift hunting hounds and a friend in a foreign land.

Before the reforms of Solon, Athens was so poor that freemen were indenturing themselves for debt. Cf. Thucydides: 1.2.5.

<sup>37</sup> Or culture.

<sup>38</sup> Or "Golden Harmony gave birth to the nine holy Pierian Muses."

<sup>39</sup> πομπιμός σε χώρα, 848: the word order makes it seem as if the land itself is carrying her. Athens took pride in her claim to be a safe haven for displaced persons.

<sup>40</sup> Though less overtly political than the three previous odes, the fourth stasimon does have some political undertones. Even this late in the story (1000-1) Jason is still Medea's husband (πόσις) though he has lawlessly (ἀνόμως) gone to live with another partner in her house (ξυνοικεῖ πόσις). After the play is over, Medea will do the same (1385 συνοικήσουσα): she will go to Athens to live with Aigeus as his wife and to produce the next generation.

<sup>41</sup> Most editors delete these lines because they are repeated at 1240-1 where they are more effective, especially if spoken for the first time.

<sup>42</sup> The Exodos is everything that comes after the last choral ode.

<sup>43</sup> This is one of the earlier versions of what happened to Medea's children, that they were killed by Creon's kin.

<sup>44</sup> Scylla from on top of a rock reached down and caught sailors; notice how Jason is trying to put himself back into the center of the story.

<sup>45</sup> Preparing bodies for burial is woman's work.



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