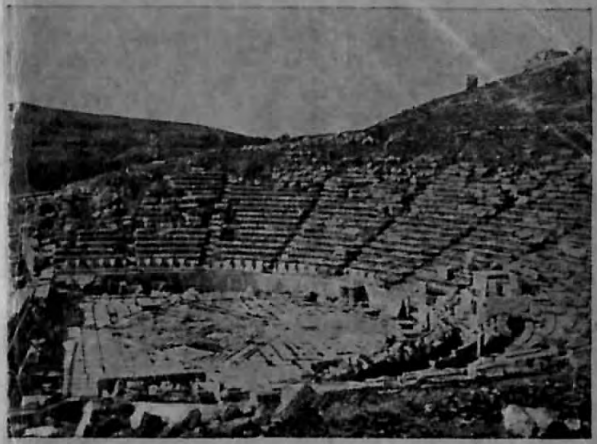
CLARENDON TRANSLATIONS



EURIPIDES
MEDEA

Translated by
F. L. LUCAS

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WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

'Have all the nations of the world since his time produced one dramatist who was worthy to hand him his slippers?'—GOETHE, on Euripides.

THE *Medea*, to be enjoyed, does not need a great deal of introduction. Indeed a twentieth-century audience, sufficiently educated to have heard of the *Argo*, might find it, reasonably performed, quite modern, but for the poetry which keeps breaking in. In the *Eumenides* or *Oedipus the King* antiquity makes itself far more felt; we have to imagine that we attach immense importance to many things which hold little or no place in life to-day. But this tragedy of the struggle of jealousy against love, of woman against man, of East against West,—this tragedy of the sordid middle-age of once splendid youth—is living and familiar still.

And yet you will miss a great deal if you fail to set the play against its true background, to link it with the fascinating personality of the man who wrote it. The city and the poet of the *Medea* repay understanding.

I. EURIPIDES

Heine once wrote, 'I know not if I deserve that a laurel-wreath should one day be laid on my coffin. . . . But lay on my coffin a sword; for I

was a brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity.

They might be the words of Euripides. Both the German poet and the Greek the world does, in fact, remember not for their opinions, but for their poetry; but a poet doubled with a thinker is more than a poet alone; and though it is as pure drama, in the first instance, that the plays of Euripides, as of Ibsen, are great, yet their interest is vastly deepened by the passionate freedom of thought of the rebel who wrote them. To get the most out of the *Medea* it is not enough to feel the vivid life of the characters, the vision and lilt of the songs; besides that, when Medea and the Chorus plead those passionate defences of Womanhood, when Jason, with his Pharisaic contempt as a Greek for Medea, is made to reveal himself as ignoble as the Christian buffoons who bait Shylock in the court-house at Venice, you miss so much, unless there you catch the voice of the poet himself, raised in the name of that Truth for which to the last he cared as much as for any poetic Beauty. The slave nobler than the free, the weak than the strong; the legendary hero tried in hard daylight and found base, the legendary villainess made a woman, human and pitiful; the true hideousness of the heroic vendetta, the true meanness of conventional respectability—these are the themes not only of the *Medea*, but of play after play that followed,

in which Euripides prophesied of pitiless truth and universal pity to the irritation of Athens and the derision of Aristophanes, until, too long dishonoured in his own country, he fled to die like Dante in exile.

The life which ended so, ran from its beginning strangely parallel to the growth, the prime, and the decay of his city's greatness. For he was born[1] in the year (480)—tradition of course said, on the very day—of the fight at Salamis, in which Athens saved Greece; he lived under Pericles; he died, *felix opportunitate mortis*, in 406—the year before the fight at Aegospotami, the death-blow of Athens herself.

He was the son of a middle-class father and of a mother who, though described by the Comic Poets as a greengrocer, was perhaps of noble family. In 462, when he was eighteen, there came to Athens Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, the philosopher and scientist. From him and other intellectuals of the day, Protagoras and Prodicus and perhaps Socrates, who was his junior, Euripides was to learn much. Not without risk; even in the city of Wisdom's Goddess her prophets were stoned; Anaxagoras and Protagoras were both to be driven into exile and Euripides to become odious to the reactionaries of his own day and ours as the poet of the Sophists. ('Truth goeth with a scratcht face')

[1] The Parian Marble, however, dates it 485–4.

But the young man was no mere pale student. He trained, with success, as an athlete; he turned, also with success, to painting, as the young Socrates to sculpture; and he must have seen active service in the field. For he came of age simultaneously with the outbreak of the first struggle of Athens with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League in 459–8, the *annus mirabilis* of Athens, commemorated by the still extant stone which tells how one of the ten tribes of this little land, less than half the size of Lancashire, lost men 'in Cyprus, in Egypt, in Phoenice, at Halieis, in Aegina, at Megara, in the same year'.

But it was a time of victories not merely in war: in 458 was performed the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. In 455—the year after Aeschylus' death in his Sicilian exile—appeared the first play of Euripides, *The Daughters of Pelias*. It was also his first handling of the legend of Medea, for it told how, to avenge her husband Jason's wrongs, she tricked the daughters into themselves murdering their aged father; our play is practically its sequel.

For the next fifty years Euripides was to go on writing plays, defeated again and again by Sophocles and by dramatists who are mere names to us, and victorious only five times in that half-century. From 438 dates probably our first extant play, the *Alcestis*, or, as it might be called, '*The Egoist*', the story of the man who let his wife

die for him, and his lesson. Euripides was already past his fortieth year; Athens had just seen finished the Parthenon and the great gold and ivory Athena of Pheidias; poet and city begin to grow old together.

The spring of 431, the first year of the fatal war, saw both the treacherous Theban attack on Plataea and the *Medea*. Euripides won only the third and bottom place.

To these first ten years of the war, ending with the Peace of Nikias in 421, belong also the *Hecuba*, another tale of a barbarian woman's bitter wrongs and bitterer revenge; the *Hippolytus*, a Greek version of the legend of Potiphar's wife, the tragedy of passion; the *Heracles Mad*, the triumph of friendship; the *Andromache*, bitterly anti-Spartan; and two war plays, full of Athenian patriotism, *The Heracleidae* and *The Suppliants*.

There follow between 420 and 413, the year of the disaster in Sicily, the three bitterest tragedies of all—the *Ion*, with its scathing exposure of orthodox theology; the *Troades* of 415, the year after the black shame of the Athenian butchery at Melos, with its denunciation of blood-stained imperialism; and the *Electra*, a picture of what a blood-feud is like, not in romance, but in the ghastly reality. Sad, disillusioned of all things save courage and compassion, the old man wrote indomitably on in his sea cave looking out from Salamis, the island of his birth and his

country's once untarnished glory. To him alone the dark months of 413 brought some honour; for the epitaph on the Athenian dead who fell in Sicily was his; and his the gift of liberty to some of the survivors, set free by their Syracusan captors because they could recite Euripides.

Four more of our plays date from 412–408. Then suddenly the old poet shook off the dust of Athens and went to the court of the King of Macedon. In that fresh atmosphere he wrote the romantic *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and his masterpiece *The Bacchae*. In 406, torn to pieces like his own Pentheus, said the legend, by the royal hunting-pack, Euripides was dead.

It is an unhappy life. He remained to the last a voice crying in the wilderness; and with the common irony of things the appreciation of his countrymen waited until he was dead, to grow to an even exaggerated intensity. For in later Greek literature, as in Roman, his influence throws Aeschylus and Sophocles into the shade. 'If I knew the dead had consciousness', says a character of Philemon's, 'I would have hanged myself to see Euripides.'

In the last hundred and fifty years there has been, on the other hand, some carping by persons more learned than intelligent, who have complained of Euripides because he is himself and not Sophocles. Indeed, those who play ostrich to life's tragedies are apt to look askance at his.

But our own age, like the fourth century, disillusioned and critical of life, may find him, like Ibsen and Hardy, sympathetic; and from him, too, it might well learn some of his reasonableness, his passionate pity, his hatred of the hates of nations and the last futilities of revenge.

II. The Story of Jason and Medea

There is only space here for a bare outline; the story of the Argonauts in Kingsley's *Heroes* should be read; and of Morris's *Life and Death of Jason* no one who cares for poetry should miss at all events the last book, which covers the ground of the play.

Aeson, King of Iolkos in Thessaly, being driven out by his half-brother Pĕlias, sent his infant-son Jason to Cheiron the Centaur to rear in safety on Mt. Pēlion. Years passed; and Jason, grown to manhood, a leopard-skin on his shoulders, his bright hair rippling down his back, and two spears in his hand—so Pindar tells—came down and stood in the wondering market-place of Iolkos, to claim his birthright.

Pelias had been warned by an oracle to beware of a one-sandalled man; and Jason had lost one of his in fording the wild Anauros that day; so the usurper knew the man of fate, and spoke him fair. He was old; let Jason first fetch the Golden Fleece from Colchis and he would resign the throne.

The tale of the Golden Fleece was this. Athamas, King of the Boeotian Orchomenos, uncle of Aeson and Pelias, had by Nephele the Cloud-goddess two children, Phrixos and Helle; when he married again, their stepmother Ino plotted to have them sacrificed to Zeus. But at the altar a ram with a fleece of gold appeared and flew away with them eastward; Helle fell off into the strait thence called the Hellespont, but Phrixos arrived in Colchis at the east end of the Black Sea. There he sacrificed his ram and gave the Fleece to Aeetes, the king, who put it in the charge of a sleepless dragon. Phrixos lived and died in Colchis; but after death his spirit could not rest in that strange land. Night by night his wraith haunted his cousin Pelias in far Iolkos, calling on him to bring back the Golden Fleece, and his spirit with it, to Greek earth once more. Such now was Jason's quest.

Built of the pines of Pelion and manned with the flower of Greek heroes, the *Argo* sailed to Colchis; but Aeetes would only give up the Fleece on condition that Jason performed impossible trials of strength—yoked the fire-breathing bulls to plough the field of Ares and sowed the dragon's teeth whence sprang armed giants. He would have perished there in Aea had not the king's daughter, Medea, fallen in love with the stranger and by her spells enabled him to accomplish his tasks and carry off the Fleece.

But only after years of tossing through unknown seas did *Argo's* returning oars dip in the Bay of Iolkos. The wanderers found Pelias very old but still living; he had used Jason's absence to put Aeson to death. But Medea gave her husband a fearful revenge; she took the daughters of Pelias, killed an old ram, and by magic turned it into a young lamb before their eyes; promising to do the like for their old father, she persuaded them to murder him with their own hands.

Then Akastos, son of Pelias, drove her and Jason from Iolkos. Ten years they dwelt in Corinth; and then Creon the king offered Jason his daughter Glauke. Middle-aged and soured and hardened, the exile grasped at the chance of redeeming his fortunes; he cast off his old love for the new. At this point the play begins.

III. The Play

But woe be to my bairns' father,
And ever ill fare he:
He has tane a braw bride hame to him,
Cast out my bairns and me.

. . . . . .

She looked fu' lang in their een, sighing,
And sair and sair grat she:
She has slain her young son at her breast,
Her auld son at her knee.

Swinburne, *The Witch Mother*.

The play opens with a prologue spoken by the Nurse of Medea's children.

The prologues of Euripides are a convention

apt to stick in modern throats. Aeschylus generally begins with a long speech by one person, but not directly addressed to the audience; Sophocles prefers an opening dialogue between two of the characters. But Euripides baldly (often far more baldly than here) makes some personage come forward and deliver straight to the audience a succint *résumé* of previous and, sometimes even, future events. Why?

First, there were no printed programmes; and though plays were always about some traditional story, the legends were extremely numerous and must often have been unfamiliar to the less educated. No modern dramatist writing, to take a similar case, on the Biblical subject of Judith and Holofernes, could rely on his whole audience knowing the story. Now to familiarize a crowd with a situation is not so simple as it sounds: the younger Dumas laid it down that the 'exposition' in any play should be repeated three times. But Euripides prefers to lay all his cards on the table at once and have all perfectly clear before the action begins. He may too have taken more thought than Aeschylus and Sophocles for the simpler and less well-read part of his audience. It seems to us a curious convention; but so do all conventions at first; what could be more unreal in itself than the modern stage-room, with its missing fourth wall?

Apart from this, the opening of the *Medea*,

plunging straight into the thick of things, with one of the few backward glances in the play to the romance of the Quest of the Golden Fleece, is one of the finest in Euripides. Past romance, grim tragedy to come—these are the two keynotes of the *Medea*, struck already in this first, foreboding speech of the Nurse.

The children enter (49) with their Attendant, who brings fresh ill-news; Medea is to be not only put away, but also banished with her children. Again the Nurse is left alone; suddenly from within comes the wild crying of Medea herself, like the voice of Rachel heard in Ramah, but cursing, not mourning, her children. In the same rushing anapaests the Nurse answers her; now enters the Chorus of Corinthian women, drawn by pity for the stranger.

Then—a climax carefully prepared, first by the slaves' talk of her, next by her voice heard within—the entry of Medea (214):

> Women of Corinth, I am come abroad.

And at once, unfaltering, she bursts, armed with all the poet's eloquence, into that magnificent piece of pleading,—the appeal of her homeless misery; then, with a sudden turn, follows that tremendous vindication of the rights of all women against Man the oppressor; last her one prayer—'Not help, just silence.' The Chorus are hers, despite her guilt, henceforth.

King Creon enters (271), old, dense, self-im-

portant, with sentence of exile. Medea shows herself as good diplomatist as orator; she wheedles from him the one day's respite needed for her revenge. He goes and Medea begins to reveal her plan. She needs some 'tower of refuge' to save her when the deed is done; but even failing that, she will kill, come what may.

The Chorus sing a lyric, which has become famous, taking up the thread of Medea's first speech, on the wrongs, first of Woman, then of Medea (410–45) herself.

Jason appears; for his views have to be heard. They prove as familiar now as ever; for this type of politician is always the same—in the pages of Thucydides,[1] in the Renaissance,[2] to-day. (To them all emotion is sentimentality; what matters is to be politic and common-sense, and to get on in the world;) in fact Jason would have found Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* a far more congenial partner.

This encounter between husband and wife is one of the best of the set debates so common in Euripides; to the modern these are liable to

[1] Cf. the Mytilenaean debate, especially the speech of that enlightened cynic Diodotus, in Thuc. iii. 37 sqq.

[2] In fact the play as a whole has not a little of that Italianate combination of subtlety and savagery which colours so much of our Elizabethan Drama of Revenge (especially Webster and Marston); which was of course distantly descended, through the Latin tragedies of Seneca, from Euripides.

seem as unreal as the prologue and the *deus ex machina*. But an Athenian audience, sharp-witted in general, and spending a large part of life on juries, being pleaded to, or pleading themselves (for litigants had to be their own counsel), took the delight of connoisseurs in these disputations.

Jason departs (623), his excuses and his offer of money rejected with contempt.

The Chorus, thinking of Medea, bewail the bitterness of too passionate love, of dissension, and of exile (627–62).

Aegeus, king of Athens, unexpectedly arrives from Delphi; Medea wins from him an oath to protect her; her 'tower of refuge' is found (663–763). Triumphant, she now discloses her plot in its fullness—a feigned reconciliation with Jason, a poisoned robe for the princess, the murder of her own children to complete her husband's desolation.

The Chorus, filled with horror, ask, as they chant the glories of Athens, how that Holy City can receive her after such a deed, nay, how she can have the heart to do it (826–65).

Jason returns, is gulled, and departs with the children bearing the poisoned gifts (866–975).

The Chorus sings a lament for the children and the bride, for Jason and the guilty mother herself (976–1001).

The Attendant returns with the news that the gifts have been accepted and the children re-

prieved from exile. Medea, left alone with them, in a scene famous and often painted in antiquity, is torn between love for them and lust for vengeance, until 'knowing the better, she chooses the worse' (1002–80).

In an interlude the Chorus complain that children bring more sadness than gladness (1081–1115).

A servant of Jason bursts in with the news that the bride and her father have perished by the poisoned robe and that Jason is coming, hot for vengeance. Medea, nerving herself for the crowning horror, goes in to slay her little ones [1] (1116–1250), while outside the Chorus cry to Earth and Sun to stay her hand, and beat on the bolted door; and then drift sadly away into a dirge for just such another tragedy of long ago.

For the third time Jason enters, defeated, ruined. As he batters at the door Medea appears on high, standing like an avenging deity in her dragon-car, sent by the Sun-god to her rescue. After a last long wrangling, which the modern reader wishes away, she vanishes, leaving desolate and childless this schemer out-schemed, to await the death she has prophesied (1293–end).

[1] Tradition said that the Corinthians murdered the children in revenge for Creon and his daughter; it was either an earlier dramatist, or Euripides, who first made Medea herself their murderess.

A tabulated summary may give a clearer idea of the structure:

1–130.	*prolŏgos.*	Nurse: Nurse-Attendant: Nurse-Medea (within).
131–212.	*parŏdos.*	
213–409.	*epeis.*I.	Medea-Chorus.
		,, -Creon.
410–45.	*stăsĭmon* I.	The wrongs of Woman and of Medea.
446–626.	*epeis.*II.	Medea-Jason. (I.)
627–62.	*stăs.*II.	The curse of Passion, of Dissension, of Exile.
663–823.	*epeis.*III.	Medea-Aegeus.
		,, -Chorus.
824–65.	*stăs.*III.	Holy Athens.
866–975.	*epeis.*IV.	Medea-Jason. (II.)
976–1001.	*stăs.*IV.	Lament for slain and slayer.
1002–1250.	*epeis.*V.	Medea-Attendant.
		,, -Children.
		Choric Interlude. 'Children are no blessing.'
		Medea-Messenger.
1251–92.	*stăs.*V.	Murder of the Children; the legend of Ino.
1293–end.	*exŏdos.*	Medea-Jason. (III.)

[*Note on technical terms.*

prolŏgos = all the part before entrance of Chorus.
exŏdos = ,, ,, after last song ,, ,,
parŏdos = entrance song of Chorus.
stăsĭmon = a Choric song (not in trochees or anapaests).
epeisŏdion = the 'interlude' of dialogue between songs; so called because the drama began by being wholly lyric, and the *epeisŏdia*, the origin of our 'Acts', were a later addition.]

It is a fine example of Greek architecture, strong and simple unity and symmetry. Notice how Medea dominates the whole, scene after scene; how the clash of her and Jason is brought thrice before us, in three scenes separated by equal intervals. The first meeting is indecisive; the second, a seeming triumph for Jason, seals his doom; the third is the proud apotheosis, one may almost call it, of his despised victim.

On the side of Jason stands Creon; set off on Medea's by Aegeus; while round her gather the minor characters, Nurse and Attendant and Chorus, like pawns before their Queen, foils in their puppet weakness to her terrible intensity of purpose.

The only blemishes are the scene with Aegeus, who is rather tiresome, and the last scene of all, in which the sudden arrival of the dragon-chariot from nowhere is rather disturbing. Why this apparition? One feels that if Medea was a person with flying-chariots at call and resources of that sort up her sleeve, she should never have been reduced to such desperate straits or to such complicated shifts to get out of them. It is as if one's sympathies had been played upon.

But here again, as in the prologue, we are dealing with a Greek convention. From the dim origin of Greek Tragedy in rites paid to dead men or dead gods with a special belief in their resurrection there survived a fondness, as well

marked in Aeschylus as in Euripides, for closing plays with divine epiphanies and prophecies. Medea was originally a goddess and her legend closely connected with the worship of her children near Corinth, hence the fitness of a parting allusion to it by a prophecy put into the mouth of a transfigured Medea. An audience of god-fearing Athenians ('too superstitious' in the words of St. Paul) probably loved such 'curtains' as dearly as a medieval crowd the bodily apparition of Satan in a Miracle Play; and sometimes, as in the *Electra* and the *Hippolytus*, Euripides' handling of this convention hushes the jarring discords of tragedy to a silence as noble as the close of *Hamlet* itself. The *deus ex machina* does not come, as Horace implies, to cut the knot, when it is too tangled for the poet himself; the device is used, whatever its value, for its own sake.

There remains one more convention unfamiliar now and, in its use, what might seem another fault—the Chorus and its helplessness in the Murder Scene (1251–92).

The Greek Chorus is another relic of religious origin—the dancers of the ancient ritual dance. With the introduction of Actors, first one, then two, then three, they lost their old pride of place and found a new function as a sort of living foreground and background. In the dialogue their commonplaceness and want of character heighten

still more the heroic stature of a Medea or a Clytemnestra; they serve as a foreground nearer to the men and thoughts of everyday. But in their lyrics, on the other hand, they are remoter, dream-figures behind the actors, no longer individual voices, but the mouthpiece of Poetry itself, a living background of song.

That is the business of the Choric Odes; they give tragic relief. Relief, relaxation of the tension of horror or pity, all dramatists have to provide somehow. Shakespeare and the Elizabethans do it by a return to the common and comic; in *Macbeth* the spell of the midnight murder of Duncan is snapped by the knocking on the door and the cheery grossness of the Porter.

But where the Elizabethans look for relief by coming down to earth, the Greeks seek it by dreaming away into the clouds, by fleeing on the healing wings of pure poetry far into the philosophy of life. Reminded of the insignificance of Man before the Universe, we find the sorrows before us less utterly crushing than they were; just as the stars used to whisper to Emerson—'So hot, my little sir!'

So in the Murder Scene in the *Medea*. In the strophe the dream-figures of the Chorus beat with nightmare impotence on the barred and bolted doors (Prof. Murray well compares Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagiles*); in the antistrophe they dream and drift away to the thought of 'old, unhappy,

far-off things', the fate of Ino wife of Athamas. There is in the *Hippolytus*, close on the climax of the tragedy, just this cry for 'the wings of a dove':

> Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding,
> In the hill-tops where the Sun scarce hath trod;
> Or a cloud make the home of mine abiding,
> As a bird among the bird-droves of God!
>
> (transl. Murray.)

Of the character-drawing little need be said. Medea dwarfs the rest. She is no afflicted angel—angels make poor *dramatis personae*—she is Woman and Passion and the East. Her loves and her hates are her only law; and it is a justice as convincingly probable as poetic, that she whose passion never hesitated at slaying her brother or at making parricides of the innocent daughters of Pelias, should now be swept into murdering her own children to gratify the hate into which that love had turned. (Medea is a tragedy in herself, the tragedy of a lost soul. With her courage, her intellect, her passionate devotion, she might have been so great; it is ill fortune and ill usage that have made a devil of her.) And it is with her of course that we sympathize, though she becomes repellent at the end; we are meant to; but it must be remembered that an Athenian audience would find Jason's conduct in itself much less disgusting. To replace an irregular union with a foreigner, such as was common at

Athens, by a *mariage de convenance* with a country-woman, was just what many of the audience must themselves have done in all respectability. On the other hand, Verrall goes too far in saying that Jason's defence in ll. 547–75 is meant to be sincere. His pretence of anxiety for Medea's welfare is very threadbare; what he wants is to avoid scandal; he proves mighty philosophic about her banishment. No, Euripides meant the transaction to seem odious; and was doubtless thought by many of his hearers a pestilent crank in consequence.

A good play needs no moral; but the *Medea*, like most of the works of Euripides, has several: that the selling of human love and happiness for wealth and position and the sordid ambitions of the place-hunter, may prove as dangerous as base; that if you wrong people persistently, you may make fiends of them; and that revenge, the fantastic passion of human pride never to give its enemies the laugh, can become a mania feeding on its own flesh, suffering as much as it inflicts.

IV. The Theatre

On the south-east face of the Acropolis, looking towards the seaward end of the bare mountain-ridge of Hymettus, there still rise the semicircular tiers of stone seats of the theatre of Dionysus. At their foot lies the round dancing-place of the

Chorus (*orchēstra*), where stood the altar of the god (*thўmĕlē*); behind it was once, probably, a low, straight, narrow platform-stage (*lŏgeion*), backed by the *skēnē* or stage-building. *Skēnē* means 'tent', and the name is a relic of the early days, when the actors' dressing-room was a temporary booth. It was an obvious step to make this booth itself act a part and pretend it was some building mentioned in the play, royal palace or the like; then in the time of Aeschylus the advance was made of painting the side facing the audience as a back-scene; and it became the convention that this background should represent the front of a building, with three doors and, near its top, a ledge or narrow balcony where characters could stand, although by the use of other painted screens to cover this back-wall the scene could occasionally be set in the wilderness or a camp or on the sea-shore. In addition to the three doors, there were entrances at each side of the stage; at Athens, the western of these, that on the audience's right, would lead to the city or the harbour, the eastern to the country, and in the entrances and exits of characters this distinction was carefully observed. Aegeus and Creon and the Chorus, for instance, in our play would enter from the right.

Stage machinery was scanty. Since the audience could not see into the interior (contrast the modern stage with its three-walled room), the interior

had to be brought out to them; this was done by rolling out through one of the doors a small platform, running on wheels and having a sort of tableau arranged on it, for instance, Clytemnestra standing over her husband Agamemnon's body. This must have made even more demand on the imagination than most Greek theatrical devices. For descents from Heaven and ascents thither was used the *mēchănē* or machine, a crane with pulley which raised and lowered the persons in a car or the like (cf. Medea's dragon-chariot).

Such were the resources of the Greek theatre, more primitive even in some ways than the Elizabethan; for there was no means even of darkening the stage for night-scenes. The dresses, on the other hand, were a magnificent blaze of colour; and to give the actors heroic stature and indeed to prevent them being dwarfed by the vastness of the theatre, they were padded and dressed in tall masks and boots with thick soles (*kŏthornoi*). The movements of men so encumbered were, of course, bound to be rather slow and statuesque than violent and histrionic; and the masks made facial play impossible. Further, women's parts were taken by men; and the only musical instruments were the flute or harp, the accompaniment being kept strictly subordinate to the words. The chorus of fifteen in tragedy, twenty-four in comedy, danced in the orchestra, giving expression in gesture not only to their own lyrics but

also, undoubtedly, to the emotions of the situation of the moment on the stage.

At the Great Dionysia each year were performed three tragedies and a satyric drama by each of three poets selected by the Archon, who assigned to each a choregus, that is, a wealthy man who was bound to pay the expenses of chorus and production. The poet until later times trained the chorus himself. The prizes, in money, were awarded by five judges; and the victorious dramatist and his choregus were perhaps crowned with ivy on the stage.

The audience itself was like no modern one—30,000 Athenians of all sorts and conditions (tickets for the poor were paid for by the state), sitting cramped on 13 inches each of stone seat for the best part of 4–5 days in the open air. The end of a Greek March may be still bitterly cold; or, if the sun is out, that southern slope may prove, to a northerner at least, uncomfortably hot. But there they sat hour after hour, clapping or hissing or kicking their heels and even throwing things at the actors, with great spontaneity; yet if any one is tempted to sneer at the Athenian demos, let him remember that the poet they delighted to honour was none other than Sophocles, the very last dramatist that vulgarity would choose. With all its enforced simplicity the Greek theatre had this great advantage over the modern, that the audience had to rely on their own imagina-

tion instead of having it debauched by Drury Lane effects; and they could give their minds to listening to the poetry without being deafened, dazzled, and distracted by the vulgarities of our popular stage, our imitation sandstorms, or processions of supers and white elephants.

THE MEDEA OF EURIPIDES

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

NURSE
CHORUS OF WOMEN
CREON
AEGEUS
CHILDREN OF MEDEA
MEDEA
ATTENDANT
MESSENGER
JASON

(*The* NURSE *comes from the house alone.*)

Would God that Argo had never winged her way
To Colchis through the blue Symplegades!
That never axe in the glens of Pelion
Had hewn the pines to shape her, and the oars
For heroes' hands that sought the Golden Fleece
For Pelias! For *then* Medea, my lady,
Would never have crossed the seas to tower'd Iolkos,
With all her heart struck wild for Jason's love
Never have tricked the daughters of Pelias
To murder their own father, never fled
To Corinth here with Jason and her sons.
Welcome at first, indeed, the men of Corinth
Gave her in exile; and her heart was still
At one with Jason's then,—(and there's no help
In trouble like the bond of wife and husband)
But now all's changed to hate, and love lies sick—
Since Jason, false to my lady and his sons,
Turns from her to a kingly bridal-bed,
Wedding the child of Creon, lord of Corinth.
And now Medea, forsaken, put to scorn,
Clamours the oaths he swore her, calls upon

That hand that pledged her once his truest faith,
Bids the high gods be witness, what return
Her love hath gained of his ingratitude.
There she lies, fasting, given up to grief,
Wasted with tears that have not ceased to flow
Since first she learned her lord was false to her.
Look up she will not, will not lift her face
Out of the dust, but lies as deaf as stone
Or wave of the sea to aught that they can say,
Who love her. Only, sometimes she bows aside
Her fair white neck and sobs to herself alone
For her dear father and Colchis and her home,
Left and forsaken for him who scorns her now.
Poor heart, she has learnt in grief, how happy they
That never sickened for the shores of home.
But her sons she hates—no joy to see them now—
And I dread some sudden stroke of her devising;
For that wild heart will never suffer wrong
Patiently—well I know her—and I fear
Lest she steal in, where stands her marriage-bed,
And to her heart plunge home the whetted steel:
Or lest she slay King Creon and her lord,
Bringing some worse fate yet upon herself.
For she is terrible; and no man lightly
From strife with her shall turn in triumph home.
But see—the children, rested from their play,
Are coming home, with never a thought for all
Their mother's grief. Young hearts are strange to sorrow.

(*Enter the* CHILDREN *with their* ATTENDANT.)

Attendant. Well, thou old treasure of our mistress' household,
Why art thou here beside the door alone,

Brooding and muttering o'er some tale of woes?
How can Medea bear thee from her side?

Nurse. Old sir, that watchest over Jason's children,
Good servants, when their master's fortunes fall
On evil days, take it themselves to heart.
And I was sunk so deep in misery,
The longing took me to rush out of doors
And cry my mistress' woes to earth and heaven.

Att. Why, is our hapless lady weeping still?

Nurse. Blest Ignorance! Her grief is but begun.

Att. Poor fool—saving my mistress' reverence—
Little she knows her new calamity.

Nurse. What do you mean, old man? Oh tell me, tell me!

Att. Nothing—I was a fool to say so much.

Nurse. Nay, I implore thee, cheat not thy fellow-slave.
Trust me. At need I'll keep thy secrets safe.

Att. I heard it said, though seeming not to hear,
Where they play draughts—the elders of the city—
Seated about Peirene's noble spring,
That Creon, Lord of the land, now means to banish,
These children with their mother from the bounds
Of Corinth. Whether the tale be true or no,
I cannot tell; God grant it may not be.

Nurse. But can then Jason—even if he hates
Their mother—see his children suffer this?

Att. Vain for old loves to struggle with the new;
And Creon looks not kindly on our house.

Nurse. Then are we ruined—if now new misery
Must fill our cup, ere we have drained the old.

Att. But mark you this: now is no time to tell
Our lady; so be still and hold thy peace.

Nurse. Do you hear, poor babes, how your own father treats you?

I will not curse him, since he is my lord ;
But he has proved to his own kin unkind.

Att. And who is not? Hast never learnt ere this
That none's as kind to his neighbour as himself?
Though some at least keep justice while others seem
To think of nought but gain—seeing their own father
Casts off his love of these for a new bride's sake.

Nurse. Go in—all shall be well—go in, my children :
But as for thee, keep them as much apart
As may be—out of their mother's angry sight.
Just now I saw her turn on them wild eyes,
Beast-like, as though she meant somewhat—and never
Will her rage cease, I know, until some head
Has felt the brunt of it. I only pray
It be some foe, not friend, she wreaks it on!

Medea (*within*). O! O!
O miserable and bowed and broken!
O me! O me! That I might die!

Nurse. My children, betimes was my warning spoken,
Your mother's heart kindles, her wrath grows high.
Run now, begone! And keep you in hiding,
Cross not her path, but shun her and flee
From her wild, wild heart and her hate's abiding
Implacability.
Go in, get you in; from the cloud of her weeping
That waxes and towers to heavenward there,
She surely shall kindle, like lightnings outleaping,
Some deadlier passion. Ah what will it dare,
That spirit so great, in its wrath so unsleeping,
Stung wild by despair?

Medea (*within*). Woe, woe, woe!

I have borne things that cry for wild lamentation,
I have borne them; and now, curst sons of mine,
Of the evil mother, may God's damnation
Smite you and your sire and all his line.

Nurse. Alas and alas, for the doom that is fated!
The father's sin on the children too
Wilt thou visit? Ah, how can they be hated?
Children, my children, I fear for you.
For the hearts of princes are hard to fetter,
Slow to obey, long used to rule,
And ever their anger burneth bitter,
Bitter and slow to cool.

Ah the life of Fellowship is sweetest.
Let me safely grow old in humbleness.
Of all names Enough for mortals is meetest
In speech, and in deed most strong to bless.
But the might of the mighty never brings them
Joy, and whenever God's wrath shall go
Forth to their overthrowing, He flings them
Guerdon of bitterer woe.

(*Enter the Chorus of Corinthian women.*)

Chorus. In my ears the woe and the wailing are loud
Of the daughter of Colchis; not yet hath she bowed
Her spirit. But, old dame, tell—
Say what it is. As I stood in the gateway, I heard her there
Crying aloud in the house; and I too, O my mother, share
Sorrows of the house that I love well.

Nurse. Our house is fallen, our weal is departed,
For our lord is gone to the bride-bed of kings,
And our lady broods in her bower broken-hearted,
And no friend's voice comfort brings.

Medea (*within*). O my God, O Earth, O Light God-given,
Might the flame of the lightning but blast this head!
What joy is in living? Ah, would to Heaven
I might sleep from sorrow, dead.
Chorus (*Strophe*).
Some Voices. Didst thou hear—'O God, O Earth, O Light!'—
How you poor wife in evil plight
Lamenteth shrill?
Others. That bed wherein none dare lay him,
Death's own, wilt thou crave, and pray him
To hasten? Ah none shall stay Him;
O blind one, be still.
Others. False is Jason now,
Owning a new love's reign!
His shame it is: fret not thou.
Others. God's self shall espouse thy cause. (Waste not in vain,
Sad heart, weeping to have thy lord again.)
Medea. O mighty Themis, O Queen of Heaven,
Do ye mark what I suffer? His heart I had bound
By the holiest vows—ah vainly given!
God grant that I yet may see the hound
And his bride and their palace in sunder shaken.
I had wronged them not: they have ruined me.
O my country, my father, so foully forsaken,
Brother I slew so shamefully!
Nurse. Do ye hear her words, the cry of the weeper
To Themis he sware by, and Zeus that is keeper
Of all men's oaths, men say?
Surely her wrath shall strike yet deeper
Before it dies away.
Chorus (*Antistrophe*).

Some Voices.
Ah I wish she would but show her face
To us and hearken for a space
Our words of cheer.
Others. O might but the wrath be amended
That sickens her soul, and ended . . .
(At least let us ne'er, unfriended,
Forsake one so dear.)
Others. Seek her, thou, and lead
Forth from her bower. Say
We too are her friends at need.
Others. O quick—ere she work some harm at home this day,
Seeing how fiercely her anguish takes its way.
Nurse. I will do thy bidding—God knoweth, I fear
She will not hear. . . .
Yet labour to please thee I will most gladly—
Although if ever a slave draw nigh
To speak, she turns upon him madly
The glare of a whelped lioness' eye.
Ah, dull hearts I deem them, our fathers before us,
And witless, that only for festival
Devised the sweet solace of music and chorus—
Only for revel and banquet-hall.
But none hath devised with song and with playing
Of many-stringed lyres to quiet man's woe,
The griefs black as Hell, that breed murder and slaying
And bring the homes of the mighty low.
Yet, minstrelsy should succour our sadness.
When the feast is merry, why need we then
Vain clamour? Enough in itself of gladness
The banquet brings to men.
Chorus. I have heard her wild agony's sobbing refrain,

And the voice shrill with grief and weary with pain
That cries for her love's betraying
And her wrongs, and calleth, praying,
Faith plighted, consecrate,
God's child, that brought her
Over the midnight strait,
Over the deep to Greece by the Gate
That bars the Bitter Water.

(*Enter* MEDEA.)

Medea. Women of Corinth, I am come abroad,
But, pray you, blame me not. I know that men
Scorn others oft just for the looks they have,
Or because strangers. And strangers, though they do
Nothing at all, are evil spoken of,
Called idle. For there dwells not any fairness
In the eyes of men, who ere they know the heart,
Hate at first sight one that hath never wronged them.
But still the stranger must meet the city's ways
In all things—nay, I praise no citizen
That wrongs his fellows with churlish stubbornness.
But as for me, this sudden blow has struck
Right to my heart. Dear friends, I am undone;
Life 's sweet no more and Death alone seems dear.
On judging one man truly hung my fate
Meanest of men I know him now—my lord!
Ah, of all things possest of life and reason
We women are born to be unhappiest—
We who must first, with a rich dowry's bribe
Buy us a husband; then—ill's crown of ill—
Yield up our bodies to their mastery
And here our whole life hangs upon the chance
Of a good mate or an evil; since for woman
Wedlock dissolved is shame, nor have we power

To put our husbands from us. 'Mid strange ways
And customs thrown, the young bride must divine,
What home ne'er taught her, how to treat her lord.
Then, if her labour prospers and her mate
Shares his life with her, not chafing at the yoke,
Happy her days; but if not,—better death!
The man indeed, when he feels weariness
Of those at home, can go abroad and ease
His heart's satiety; but woman's eyes
Unto one single soul must look forever.
They say we lead a sheltered life at home,
While they must battle in the press of spears,—
Fools! I had rather stand in the battle-line
Thrice, than once bear a child.
And yet—since the same words fit not your estate
And mine, (you have your native land, your home,
And joy in life, and fellowship of friends,
While desolate I and homeless, put to scorn,
With no mother and no brother and no kin
To be my refuge in my evil hour)
Therefore I pray you grant me this one thing,—
If there be found some means or some device
Of vengeance on my husband for my wrongs,—
Your silence. Verily, woman in other ways
Is timorous, weak to look on strife and steel;
But when her bridal-bed is put to shame
There lives not any heart more murderous.

Chorus. I grant thy prayer, for just will be thy vengeance,
Medea; 'tis little wonder if thy wrongs
Rankle; but lo! now, Creon, Lord of Corinth,
Draws near with tidings of some fresh resolve.

(*Enter* KING CREON *with a guard of spearmen.*)

Creon. Thou with the sullen face and raging heart
Against thy lord, Medea, I tell thee, go!—

Banished—thy two sons with thee—from this land.
And linger not! For of this sentence I
Am judge and executor both; nor will I turn
Homeward until I have cast thee from our bounds.
Medea. O misery—I am destroyed, undone.
For now my foes crowd on full sail against me,
And harbour is none of refuge from my ruin.
Yet though thus wronged, this I will ask of you,
King Creon—why do you banish me from Corinth?
Creon. I fear thee—no need to cheat thee with untruths—
Lest thou shouldst bring destruction on my daughter.
And many things combine to make me fear:
For thou art wise and versed in evil lore,
And angry for the loss of thy lord's love.
I hear that thou dost threaten, so men tell,
Both groom and bride and father of the bride
With vengeance. Well, I'll be forearmed in time.
Better for me to earn thy hatred, woman,
Now, than to soften and afterward repent.
Medea. Alas!
So now once more, O Creon, as so oft,
Rumour hath wronged me to my bitter hurt.
Ah, never should man of sense let sons of his
Be taught to know o'ermuch of any art.
For they will be but barren in themselves
And earn, to boot, their fellows' bitter envy;
Since fools will scorn the teacher of new wisdom,
Calling him useless and his wisdom folly,
And all that have a name for subtler wit,
Outshone, will loathe the rival in their streets.
Such is the fate that I have come to share.
For being wise some men do envy me,
Some deem me useless, and some overbusy,

Some an offence. Yet I am not *so* wise.
But you do fear me—lest I work you harm.
I am not such, O Creon, fear me not—
Not one to sin against a race of kings.
For what have you done to wrong me? Given your child
To the man your heart desired. 'But I loathe my lord.'
Yet you, methinks, have played an upright part.
I do not grudge that you should prosper now;
Marry—God speed you. Only suffer me
To dwell in Corinth. I will hold my peace,
For all my wrongs. The stronger have prevailed.
Creon. Soft to the ear thy pleadings: but I dread
What evil thou mayest be plotting deep at heart,
And all the less I trust thee than before.
Hot passion in a woman—ay, or man—
Is not so dangerous as silent cunning.
But get thee gone at once, and spin no tales,
For my resolve stands fast; not all thy arts
Shall keep in Corinth thee, mine enemy.
Medea. O mercy, by thy knees—thy new-wed child!
Creon. Thou wastest words. Thou never wilt prevail.
Medea. Will you hound me hence,—not reverence any prayer?
Creon. My own house is more dear to me than thou.
Medea. O my country, now the thought of thee comes home!
Creon. So mine to me is dearest,—next my children.
Medea. Woe for the curse that love is to mankind!
Creon. That, in my judgement, turns on circumstance.
Medea. My God, let him that caused this 'scape not Thee!
Creon. Begone, thou wanton, and take my troubles with thee.

Medea. Troubles enough are mine, I need no more.
Creon. Quick, or my spearmen's hands shall hale thee hence.
Medea. No, no, not that, I do implore thee, Creon.
Creon. Woman, it seems thou art bent on plaguing us.
Medea. I *will* go—it was a different boon I craved.
Creon. Why then so violent, clinging to my hand?
Medea. Let me stay here for this one day alone
And take some counsel for our banishment
And for my children's sustenance, since he,
Their sire, prefers to take no thought for them.
O pity them! You are a father too
With children, and you needs must wish them well.
Not for myself I care, in banishment,
But my heart is wrung for their unhappiness.
Creon. I am the least tyrannical of men;
Conscience hath made me work myself much ill.
So, woman, now I err with open eyes,
Yet thou shalt have thine asking. But I warn thee,
If God's next coming lamp of dawn behold
Thee and thy sons within the bounds of Corinth,
Thou diest. My word is spoken and is true.
But now, if stay thou must, stay this one day.
Thou canst not work so soon the crimes I dread.
[*Exit* CREON.

Chorus. Poor Lady, alas for thy misery!
Where now wilt thou turn? To whose hearth go?
What house or what land shall thy refuge be?
For thy path God hath set thee a pathless sea,
Medea, of woe.
Medea. Things have gone ill, most ill; who shall say nay?
But think not I am fallen yet so far;
There are yet ordeals for this bridal pair

And for him that made the match, pains not so light.
Think you I would have fawned upon this fool,
Save for some profit or some trickery?
Else had I never spoken, nay, nor touched him.
But he is gone so far in foolishness,
That when he might have baffled all my plots
By banishment, he has let me remain
One day, whereon I will make corpses three
Of my enemies—father and child and husband.
Oh, I have many a deathward road for them—
Which to take first I know not, O my friends.
Kindle in flames the palace of the bride?
Or to her heart plunge home the whetted steel,
Stealing within, to where her bride-bed stands?
But here's one stumbling-block—if I am taken
Creeping treacherously within their gates,
I shall be slain and give my foes the laugh.
Best take the straightest way, the way my wisdom
Hath learnt the best, and by my poisons end them.
Well,
Suppose them dead; what city will receive me,
Who will hospitably keep safe for me
A land of refuge, an inviolate home?
There is not any. Then, a little while
I will wait still, and if some tower of safety
Reveal itself, with plot and secrecy
I will pursue this murder. But if doom
Drives me resourceless hence, with my own hand
I will unsheathe the sword and, though I die,
I'll kill them and I'll brave the uttermost.
For by that mistress whom I reverence
More than all gods, and have called to be mine aid,
Hecate, throned beside mine inmost hearth,
Not one of them shall wring my heart unscathed;

Bitter and grievous shall their bridals be,
Bitter their union and my outlawry.
Come now, spare nothing that thy cunning knows,
Medea, of plotting and of artifice;
Now face thy danger—this shall put to proof
Thy courage. Thou seest thy wrongs—shalt thou be mocked
By Jason's match with the seed of Sisyphus—
Thou, sprung of a noble sire, the Sun's own race?
Cunning thou hast—art true-born woman, too,
And useless are we, men say, for noble ends,
But in all evil, skilled beyond compare.
(*She turns and goes in.*)

Chorus (*Strophe*).

Now backward the founts of the sacred streams are driven,
Changed is all and Justice becomes but as Wrong.
Crook'd are Man's counsels, and Faith in God's sight given
Fails, that aforetime was strong.
But of us the songs shall be other, and fame shall crown our days,
Yea, for Woman also comes her hour of praise,
Woman no more shall be scorned, a thing of shame in song.

(*Antistrophe.*)

And *they* shall be silenced, the bards of old that chide us,
Harping still their stories of false brides that fell.
Well that the Singer, Apollo, hath denied us
Song and the lyre's magic spell!
Else our tongues had given Man answer, and loud our lips had rolled
Strains to challenge his. Ay, well the years of old

Many a tale of the deeds 'twixt us and Man could tell!

Chorus (*Strophe*).

From home of old time, o'er the waves afar
Mad with thy passion thou fleddest, and past the Twin Crags that bar
The Euxine—to-day thou art
An exile, thy lord is taken,
And thou on thy bed must waken
Alone, till from hence forsaken
And shamed thou depart.

(*Antistrophe.*)

The might of man's oath in the world is dead;
Honour from Hellas the mighty to heaven again is fled.
Thou hast not a father's home
To find from the tempest hiding;
And now from thy lord dividing
Thy heart, and thy love o'erriding
A new queen is come.

(*Enter* JASON.)

Jason. Once more I see it,—as I so oft have seen—
What a hopeless curse a bitter temper is.
For thou, who mightst have found a home, a country,
By bearing lightly what thy betters planned,
Just for thy wanton tongue art banished hence.
To *me* it matters not,—nay, never cease
Upbraiding Jason as the worst of men—
But for thy words against the royal house
Be thankful that thou art no more than banished.
I for my part, indeed, was labouring hard
To calm the king; I wished thee to remain
But thou wouldst not mend thy folly, still reviling
The lords of Corinth. And so—thou art exiled.

And yet, though thus provoked, see, faithful still,
Here am I come with forethought for thy weal,
That thou and thy sons go not to banishment
In want or needing aught. For exile brings
Much evil with it; and hate me as thou wilt,
I can not ever bear ill-will to thee.

Medea. Vilest of men—well may I call thee that—
And mightiest of all tongue-valiant cowards,
Canst thou face me, face one thou hast wronged so?
Not boldness nor stout-heartedness is his,
Who dares confront the friends he has betrayed,
Nay, 'tis the worst of all the plagues of men,
'Tis shamelessness. But it is well thou camest;
Now I can curse thee to thy face and lighten
My very soul; and thou wilt wince to hear.
First—to begin my tale where all began—
I saved thee (as all who erst with thee set sail
From Greece on board the Argo surely know)
When thou wast bidden yoke the bulls whose breath
Was fire, and sow the field whose fruit was death.
And then the dragon, that in his twisted coils
Guarded the Golden Fleece, unsleeping still,
I slew, and lifted up before thine eyes
The light of life; my father and my home—
These I betrayed and followed thee to dwell
In far Iolkos under Pelion—
O heart that loved not wisely but too well!
Then I brought Pelias to an evil end
At the hand of his own daughters, and destroyed
Him and his house. All this I did for thee,
Thou villain, and now thou hast betrayed me, wed
Another bride, though I had borne thee sons.
Hadst thou been childless still, there were excuse
For seeking other ties. But vanished, void

All sanctity of oaths!—I know not, I,
Whether thou deemst the Gods that were are fallen
Or that since then the laws of Man are changed.
For thy conscience knows thou art forsworn to me.
(*She bows her head and gazes down at the hand she had stretched out to denounce him.*)
Alas, poor hand, poor knees that thou of old
Didst cling to so—how all for nought have we
Been fouled by a villain's touch, lost all our hope.
Come—thou true love—in thee I will confide.
(Much hope of help, in truth, I have from thee!)
No matter, thou shalt seem yet baser, questioned.
Whither must I turn now? To my father's home,
The country I betrayed to follow thee?
Or to Pelias' wretched daughters? Welcome sweet
That hearth would yield their father's murderess!
Ay, so it is; I have earned the hate of those
That loved me once at home; and those that I
Ought never to have wronged, to pleasure thee,
I have made mine enemies; and thou in thanks
Hast made me blest before the eyes of many
Women in Hellas.—A marvellous lord and loyal
I have in thee, poor victim that I am,
If I must go, exiled, cast out from Corinth,
Naked of friends, thy babes and I alone.
Lo, a fair smutch on the new bridegroom's name—
Beggars thy sons and I that saved thee once!
O God, why hast Thou given unto men
So sure a test of gold that 's counterfeit,
But upon man himself, whereby to know
The bad, no stamp hath Nature charactered
Chorus. Alas, how bitter 'tis and hard to heal,
When hearts are brought to strife with those they loved.
Jason. I need at least, it seems, be no mean pleader,

Ay, like some good shipmaster I must run
With sails close-reefed, good lady, to escape
This voluble and blustering wind of words.
Well,—since thou pilest up my debt to thee—
I hold the saving star of all my voyage
Was Love and Love alone of Gods and men.
Subtle thy *mind* is, but . . . and yet 'twere harsh
To tell at length how Love constrained thee then
With his unerring shafts to save my life.
I will not reckon too precisely with thee;
Whatever made thee kind, 'tis very well.
But—let me tell thee—thou hast gained far more
Than e'er thou gavest, by thus saving me.
For, first, in place of thine own barbarous home
Thou art come to live in Greece, hast learnt true justice
And use of laws, where right, not might, prevails.
All Hellas, too, has learnt how wise thou art,
Thou hast won a name; but if thou wert dwelling still
At the ends of earth, none would have heard of thee.
No golden treasuries for me, say I,
Nor sweeter gift of song than Orpheus had,
Unless my fortune's famous in the world.
This then my answer touching perils past,
Since thou hast challenged me to argument.
But as for these upbraidings of my marriage
With the royal house, I'll prove myself in this
First wise, next virtuous, and third, to thee
And these my sons, most loving.

(MEDEA *makes a gesture of impatience.*)

Nay, be still.

When I had travelled from Iolkos hither
With many a bitter trouble in my train,

What happier chance could I have lighted on
Than marriage for an outcast such as I
With a king's daughter? Not—what maddens thee—
Because I loathed thy love, or was grown amorous
Of a new bride, nor that she might out-do
Thy womb in fruitfulness—the sons I have
Suffice me; I complain not; but my aim
Was this, above all else, that we might live
Well and not pinched with want. (For well I knew
How from the poor man every friend takes flight.)
And thus I planned to rear our sons as fits
Their birth, and with the children born of thee
Companion those new sons I should beget,
That we might prosper, one united home.
For what need hast thou of children? (And it suits
My purpose well to make my sons unborn
Help those I have.) (Do these plans seem ill-laid?)
Not even thou couldst say it, wert thou not
Stung mad by jealousy. Ay, it has come to this—
You women think, while wedded faith is kept,
All's well, but once your wifehood suffers wrong,
What's best and highest ye deem beyond all else
Hateful. There should have been some other means
For children's birth, without creating women,
And then mankind might live exempt from ill.

Chorus. Cleverly, Jason, you have arrayed your words,
But yet I say—though you approve it not—
Your wife's betrayal is an evil deed.

Medea. Oh, in many a common thing I cannot take
The common creed; and I believe the villain
That's glib and plausible is punished worst.
He thinks his tongue will gloze his villanies
And stops at nought; and yet he's not so wise.
So thou. Have done with all thine eloquence,

Thy courtesies. One word will strike thee down.
Wert thou not vile, thou wouldst have sought consent
From me and married so, not thus by stealth.
Jason. A sweet compliance, doubtless, thou hadst given,
If I had told thee, seeing that even now
Thou canst not calm the rage thou hast at heart.
Medea. Ah, 'twas not that; but as thy years drew on,
A barbarian bride began to seem but shame.
Jason. I tell thee this—not for the woman's sake
Have I made this royal marriage that is mine.
It was, as I have told thee once, to save
Thee and breed up as brothers to my children
Sons of royal blood, a bulwark for our house.
Medea. I want no miserable prosperity,
And no such bliss as will but break my heart.
Jason. Ah, let me teach thee a better, wiser prayer.
Mayst thou ne'er deem thy blessings miserable,
And never think thine own good fortune bad.
Medea. Be insolent—thou canst, thou hast a home;
But desolate I and banished from the land.
Jason. 'Twas thine own choosing; blame none else for that.
Medea. How mine? Did I woo *thee*, and then betray?
Jason. For thy impious curses on the royal house.
Medea. Maybe I shall bring a curse no less on thine.
Jason. I tell thee, I'll not dispute these matters further.
But if thou'lt take, to help thy banishment
Or for thy children, a gift of gold from me,
Speak—I am ready most ungrudgingly
To give it and send tokens for my friends,
Who'll entertain thee. If thou refuse, thou'rt mad;
Come, calm thy wrath and thine the gain will be.
Medea. We will not turn to any friends of thine,
We will not take—so proffer not—thy gifts.

Gifts from an evil hand can bring no good.
Jason. Yet none the less I call the Gods to witness
How ready am I to serve thee and thy sons,
But thine own good thou wilt not, in stubbornness
Spurning thy friends—thou shalt smart the worse for it. [*Exit* JASON.
Medea. Begone; by this thy heart is yearning, doubtless,
For thy new bride, thou hast left her doors so long.
Go, marry; but, God willing, it may be
Thou shalt have a wedding thou wilt wish undone.
Chorus (*Strophe*).
No loves of too fervent a flame
Have e'er brought gift of good to men,
Only dishonour and shame.
Yet, comes she gently, ah then
Love's Queen is sweetest of Gods to desire.
But spare me, Lady, thine arrows envenomed with Love's fire,
Spare me thy golden bow, so sure of aim!
(*Antistrophe.*)
May Modesty, rather, through life
Love *me*—best gift the high gods send.
Spare me, dread Cyprian, strife,
Wrangling and feud without end,
Nor drive my heart after new loves astray.
But honour love that endureth in peace, O Queen, and weigh,
Before thou wedd'st them, hearts of man and wife.
Chorus (*Strophe*).
Land that I love, city mine own,
Me from my country never
May the doom of the exile sever
Helpless, homeless, alone—
Saddest of sorrows on earth.

Let me die, let me die, let life for ever—
Life be taken, but never my home, from me.
This is worst of all woes that be—
To lose the land of our birth.

(*Antistrophe.*)

Lo, I have seen, this is no word
Marked as by chance repeated.
Since for thee thus forlorn, thus treated,
None to pity is stirred—
City nor kindred of thine.
Let him perish unloved, whoe'er hath cheated
Them that loved him, nor given his heart's own key
Freely into their hand. For he
Shall ne'er win love of mine.

(*Enter, in travelling dress,* King Aegeus.)

Aegeus. Medea, joy to thee: so I salute thee,
With fairest greeting that a friend may give.
Medea. Joy to thee too, son of the wise Pandion,
King Aegeus. Say, whence come you now to Corinth?
Aegeus. I come from Apollo's ancient oracle.
Medea. What took you to earth's centre-stone prophetic?
Aegeus. I sought how issue might be born of me.
Medea. What, has your life been childless to this day?
Aegeus. By some God-sent mischance I have no child.
Medea. Have you a wife? Live you unwedded still?
Aegeus. Nay, I have taken on me wedlock-bands.
Medea. What then did Phoebus tell you, touching children?
Aegeus. Things subtler than a human mind can grasp.
Medea. Is it right for me to hear God's oracle?
Aegeus. Ay, surely. For a wise wit's what it needs.
Medea. What was God's word then Say, if I may hear.

Aegeus. I must not loose the wineskin's jutting foot—
Medea. Till what is done? Till you have journeyed whither?
Aegeus. Till to my father's house I come again.
Medea. What errand, then, has made you sail to Corinth?
Aegeus. There is one Pittheus, lord of Troezene's land...
Medea. Ay, son, they say, of Pelops, a righteous man.
Aegeus. To him I would fain unfold God's oracle—
Medea. True, he is wise and versed in sacred things.
Aegeus. And dearest to me of all my leagued allies.
Medea (*sadly*). May all good befall you, all your wish come true!
Aegeus. What is it, why are your looks, your face so wan?
Medea. Mine, Aegeus, is the basest lord on earth.
Aegeus. Can it be? Come, tell me your unhappiness.
Medea. Jason has wronged me, who ne'er did wrong to him.
Aegeus. What has he done then? Speak more openly.
Medea. Found a new love, a new mistress of his home.
Aegeus. Can he have dared so vile a deed as this?
Medea. Be sure of it!—I am scorned, who once was dear.
Aegeus. Was it some passion, or hatred of your love?
Medea. O, a great passion, that left old love betrayed.
Aegeus. Then shame upon him if he is base as this!
Medea. It was a royal alliance fired his heart.
Aegeus. Offered of whom? Say on, what 's yet to tell?
Medea. Of Creon, king of this Corinthian land.
Aegeus. Why, lady, then you had good cause to grieve.
Medea. It is death to me. And I am banished too.
Aegeus. By whose command? Another tale of ill!
Medea. King Creon drives me from Corinth into exile.

Aegeus. Does Jason suffer it? This too I like not
Medea. Ah not in word; but he makes shift to hear it.
(*She throws herself on her knees before* AEGEUS.)
But by thy beard I do implore thee now
And suppliant I clasp thee by the knees,
Oh pity, pity my unhappiness
And do not see me cast out, quite forlorn.
Give me a place in Athens at thy hearth
So may God give thee sons to crown thy love.
And to thyself all happiness till death.
Ah, but you know not what you have found in me,
For I shall make you childless now no more,
But sire of sons. Such potent drugs I know.
Aegeus. For many reasons, lady, I am glad
To grant your prayer: first as a pious duty,
And then, too, for the sons you promise me,
Since touching that I am helpless utterly.
Well, thus it stands; if you shall come to Athens,
Then to protect you, justly, I will strive.
But, lady, be this one proviso made;
Carry you hence from this Corinthian land
I will not.) But, if by yourself you come
Beneath my roof, there you shall stay untouched,
I'll yield you up to none. Only from hence
Speed you by ways your own. I fain would be,
In strangers' eyes as well, free of reproach.
Medea. It shall be so; could I but have some pledge
Of this, I should have all my wish of you.
Aegeus. Do you not trust me? Or what ails you else?
Medea. Oh, I trust you. But the house of Pelias hates me,
And Creon too. Now, were you bound by oath,
You could not give me up, though they should try
To drag me back from Athens. But with words

Alone, to bind you, and no oath by heaven,
You might feel weak and find their embassies
Hard to gainsay; I know that I am feeble,
And theirs the greatness of a kingly house.
Aegeus. There is shrewd foresight, lady, in your speech.
Well, if you wish it, I will not refuse,
Since for me too it will be safer so,—
To show your enemies I have excuse—
And you will stand the surer. Name your gods.
Medea. Swear by the level Earth and my sire's sire,
The Sun, and all the heavenly gods beside . . .
Aegeus. That I will do, or not do, what? Say on.
Medea. That you yourself will never banish me,
Nor, if some enemy demand me of you,
While you have life, agree to give me up.
Aegeus. By Earth and the Sun's unsullied majesty
And all the gods, I swear to fulfil your word.
Medea. Enough; and what curse, if you should break your oath?
Aegeus. The curse that comes upon all godless men.
Medea. Go and God speed you!—for all is well, and I
Will come to Athens with what haste I may,
My will accomplished and my purpose won.
Chorus. But thee may the Son of Maia, I pray,
The wayfarer's Helper, speed home, and the goal
Of thy heart's desire mayst thou win by the way.
For noble of soul,
Aegeus, I have deemed thee this day.
[*Exit* AEGEUS.
Medea. O Zeus, O Zeus-born Justice, O bright Sun,
Now shall I triumph against mine enemies,
Now on the road, dear friends, my feet are set,
Now I can look for my foes to pay the price.
In Aegeus stands revealed,—my sorest need—

A haven of refuge for my plans at last;
Ay and from him the cable of my hopes
Shall be made fast when I am safe within
Athena's town and tower. Now all my plot
I'll tell thee—hearken, bitter though it be.
One of my household I shall send to Jason
Asking to see him once more face to face;
And when he comes I'll speak him honeyed words,
Saying that I am resigned and all is well,—
All for our good, and wisely planned of him.
And I shall pray him let my children stay;
Not that I would have left a child of mine
In a hostile land to be flouted by my foes;
But that I may weave death for Creon's daughter.
For I shall send them carrying gifts from me
To the bride, that she may save them banishment—
A fine-wrought robe, and golden diadem;
And if she takes those gauds and puts them on,
An awful death is hers and any man's
That touches her; such drugs I'll smear them with.
But I will say no more—yet Oh, my heart
Cries at the thought of what a deed I must
Do after that. For I must kill my children,
Mine own. There lives not who shall rescue them.
And having thus confounded all the house
Of Jason, I'll go hence and flee afar
My sweet babes' blood and my own bitter crime.
For bitterer yet, my friends, the laugh of foes.
So be it! What good is life? I have no land,
No home, no shelter in my misery.
Fool that I was, the day I ever left
My father's house confiding in the tongue
Of a Greek—ay him, God willing, I'll repay.
For he shall never see alive again

The sons I bore him, nor any other sons
Shall his new bride bring forth, since by my spells
She shall find an end as evil as herself.
Let no man think of me as mean or weak
Or a quiet soul,—nay, very far from it!—
As dangerous a foe as loyal friend.
For such are they that live most honourable.

Chorus. Since thou hast taken us to thy confidence,
For thine own sake—in the name of righteousness
On earth—I charge thee to forbear this thing.

Medea. It must be so; small blame indeed to thee
To speak so, for thou art not wronged like me.

Chorus. But, lady, will you bear to slay your sons?

Medea. 'Tis that will stab my husband to the heart.

Chorus. Yet you will be the most miserable of women.

Medea. Away!—all words are idle till 'tis done.

(*She turns to one of her women.*)

But do thou go—thee I can ever trust
For faithful service—and bring Jason hither.
But of this my plan say nothing, as thou art
Loyal to thy lady and true woman born.

Chorus (*Strophe*). [*Exit woman.*

The Sons of Erechtheus are happy from of old,
Whose seed is sprung of the gods, and a fair,
Most sacred land, untouched of the spoiler they hold.
Nurtured in glorious wisdom, bathed in the brightest of air,
They walk their gracious ways. And the story yet lingers
How it was here that the Nine, the sacred Singers,
Gold-tressed Harmony once did bear.

(*Antistrophe.*)

And there where the waves of the fair Kephīsos flow,
'Tis said the Cyprian dwelleth for aye

And fills the water-brooks, and sends softly to blow
Whispering winds over Athens. Sweet are the roses each day
New-wreathed amid her hair. And there sit at her sending
Throned beside Wisdom her Loves, to all men lending
Surest succour on Virtue's way.

(*Strophe.*) Shall Athens, so kindly to bless
All that e'er sought her,
Greet *thee*, child-murderess?
Shall she whom God's own streams water
Hold *thee* with the guilt thou bearest?
Ah, think, canst thou strike that blow?
Ah, think what a deed thou darest!
We pray—by thy knees—O spare them,
O slay not thy children so,
Thou, thou that didst bear them.

(*Antistrophe.*)
How then shalt thou harden thy will,
Blind to compassion?
Make heart and hand fulfil
Thüs deed thou dost grimly fashion?
Ay, how shalt thou see them before thee,
And stifle thine own babes' breath
Unweeping? Nay, when they implore thee
And plead for their lives, thou'lt never
Dare redden thy hands with death,
Unpitying ever!

(*Enter* JASON.)

Jason. I come at summons, since, despite thy hate,
I will not grudge thee this much, but will hear—
What new thing is it thou wouldst have from me?

Medea. Jason, I pray you pardon what I said
Before. You must be patient with my temper,
For there has been much loving-kindness done
Between us once. And, meanwhile, with myself
I have held converse, with sharp self-reproach:
'O stubborn fool, why am I then so mad,
Bitter with those who counsel me so well,
At variance with the rulers of the land
And my own lord, who does what's best for me,
Wedding a royal bride that she may bear
Brothers for my own sons? Come, why not cease
This passion?—for what ails me?—seeing that Heaven
Provides so well. Have I not sons, do I
Not know that we are friendless exiles now?'
Taking these things to heart, I saw the depths
Of my own folly and how vain my anger.
So now I praise you, hold you for most prudent
In making this alliance, and myself
A fool—I should have helped in these your plans,
Joined in your marriage, stood beside the bed
And joyed in loving tendance on your bride.
But what I am I am—I'll not say bad—
But woman; therefore it was wrong in you
To grow as bad yourself and counter so
Folly with folly. But I give in now,
Own I was wrong before, and have learnt better.
Children, my children, hither from the house!

(*The* CHILDREN *appear with their* ATTENDANT.)

Come forth and greet your father, join with me
In welcome, with your mother put away
The old breach of our love. For now is peace
And wrath has fled away. Come, take his hand.

(*She bursts into tears.*)

Ah, how my heart forebodes some unforeseen

Disaster—O children, will ye live indeed
Long, long to stretch out so those dearest hands?
Poor wretch that I am, how tearful am I grown
And timorous! The tears are on my cheeks
To see my strife with your father healed at last.
Chorus. From my eyes too the pale tears start. O may
Misfortune never grow to worse than this!
Jason. Wife, I can praise thee now, nor will I blame
Thy former part. It is indeed but nature
For women to take it ill when secretly
A husband traffics in some other love.
However now thou hast chosen the better part
And come to see at last, though late, whose judgement
Must win the day,—as befits a prudent woman.
And you, my children, your sire has not forgotten,
But, with God's grace, made your lives safe and sure.
I look to see you yet, with your new brothers,
The mightiest men within the bounds of Corinth.
Come, lads, grow up, and all the rest your father
Shall do for you, and the gods that love our house.
Ah, may I see you sprung with goodly growth
To youth's full flower, and trampling on my foes.

(*He suddenly notices that* MEDEA *has burst out weeping afresh.*)

But thou, Medea,—why do the pale tears flow
Across thy cheeks,—thy white neck bowed away?
Art thou not glad because of what I say?
Medea. Nothing. A passing thought of these my sons.
Jason. But why should these our children make thee sigh?
Medea. I bore them once, and when you prayed for them
Long life, I sadly thought, 'Shall it be so?'
Jason. Take heart. For I shall well provide for them.
Medea. I will. I will indeed believe your words.

But women are weak and ready with their tears.
But of the things I had to say to you,
Part now is said, part I have yet to tell.
Since the king wills my banishment from Corinth,—
And for me too, I see, 'tis better so,
That I should live out of your way and theirs,
Since I am thought the foe of all your house—
Therefore I go in exile from the land;
But, for your sons, that you may watch their nurture,
Pray Creon, that they be not banished hence.
Jason. I know not if he'll hear me. Try I must.
Medea. Your wife at least—bid her beseech her father.
Jason. I will. I doubt not I shall win her over.
Medea. She's no true woman else. But I will take
My own share in this task, and send her gifts,—
Fairer are none, I know, on earth this day—
A fine-wrought robe, a golden diadem,
Borne by my children's hands. Come, quickly now!
Some servant bring those royal robes to me.

(*A maiden goes in.*)

Not one, but a thousand blessings shall be hers,
With thee, of all men noblest, for her lord,
And mistress of that splendour which the Sun
Himself, my father's father, gave his race.

(*She reappears, with a casket, which* MEDEA *takes from her.*)

Come, children, take these bridal-gifts of mine
And bear them to that royal bride in bliss.
She'll find them gifts that she will not despise.
Jason. But, foolish woman, why strip thyself of these?
Thinkst thou the royal house hath need of raiment.
Ay, or of gold? Do thou keep, not proffer, these.
For if my wife has any care for me,
No gifts, I know, will weigh with her like Jason.
Medea. Let be!—they say the very gods are won
By gifts, and gold to men's more eloquent

Than a thousand prayers. Hers is Fortune now,
Her God makes great and a new queen reigns to-day;
And to save my children exile, life itself
I would gladly barter, not my gold alone.
Now, children, go you to that golden home
Where your father's late-won bride, my mistress, dwells
And pray to her, beseech her, to be saved
From exile, and give her these. With her own hands,—
This is most needful—let her take my gifts.
Go now, be speedy; and may you bring fair news
Back to your mother that her will is won.

(*Exeunt* JASON, CHILDREN *and* ATTENDANT.)

Chorus (*Strophe*).

No hope for the life of the lads is left us now,
None, for already they pass to the slaughter;
Now the bride shall take the bright crown they have brought her,
Take it and death, poor maid, as well,—
Her own hands shall bind that crown of Hell
Round her own golden brow.

(*Antistrophe.*)

The robes in their beauty unearthly gleaming there
To don that deftly-wrought crown shall betray her,
And with Death the bride for her bride-sleep shall lay her.
Such is the prison-house of Doom
Wherein she shall fall, poor maid. The tomb
Waits her, and none shall spare.

(*Strophe.*) Thou too, O unhappy man, thou,
ill-wed with her, the child of kings—
Thine own hand murdereth

In its blindness thy children; thy lady it brings
Anguish and horrible death.
How far thy fall is from happier things!

(*Antistrophe.*)

And *thy* sorrows too do I mourn,
O mother, thou that wilt strike dead
The children born of you,
To requite him the shame that he did to thy bed,
When, for a love that was new,
Thy lord betrayed thee, and from thee fled.

(*Enter the* ATTENDANT *with the two* CHILDREN.)

Att. Lady, your sons stand here reprieved from exile,
Your gifts the royal bride with ready hands
Has welcomed. *There* your children's peace is made.
How now?
Why do you look aghast at your good fortune?

Medea (*sobbing*). Oh! Oh!

Att. This is no cry attuned to such good tidings.

Medea. Oh, woe once more! *Att.* Have I disclosed some happening
I know not of—my good news but a dream?

Medea. Thy news is what it is. I blame thee not.

Att. Why then your downcast looks? Eyes full of tears?

Medea. Old man, I cannot help it. Thus the gods—
Or my own guilty folly has ordained.

Att. Take heart. Some day your sons shall bring you home.

Medea. Alas ere that I shall send others home.

Att. Still other mothers too have lost their sons.
Mortals must shoulder their unhappiness.

Medea. So will I do. But go within the house,
Prepare for the children what they need each day.

[*Exit* ATTENDANT.

O children, children, to you a home is left,
A city where, away from my sad heart,
Orphaned ye shall abide for ever now.
But I shall be hunted into other lands,
Ere I have joy in you or see you happy,
Ere I have decked out bed and bride for you,
Decked your bride-bed and held your marriage-torch.
Ah, woe is me for my own stubborn heart!
'Twas vainly then, my sons, I nurtured you,
Vainly for you I wore myself with toil,
Barren my travail when I brought you forth.
Ah in old days I had brave hopes of you—
O misery!—that you should tend my age
And lay me out with loving hands in death,
That men should envy me. 'Tis perished now,
That happy dream. Henceforth bereft of you
I shall drag out my bitter, tortured days,
And your dear eyes shall no more smile on me,
But open on another life than this.
O children, children, why do you watch me thus,
Smiling on me the last of all your smiles?
O God, what shall I do? Dear friends, my heart
Fails me at sight of their bright childish eyes.
I could not do it. Farewell, mine ancient plan.
My children I will take from Corinth with me.
Why should I, only to wring their father's heart
By hurting them, suffer far worse myself?
I will not do it. So, my plan, farewell . . .
And yet what ails me? Shall they mock at me
Letting my enemies escape unscathed?
I must face all. O craven heart of mine
To listen to the voice of weakness so!
Children, go in.

(*They go in;* MEDEA *turns on the Chorus.*)

And if any stand here now
Whom purity forbids to share my rite
Of sacrifice, let them take heed to it,
Look to themselves. I will not hold my hand . .
O! O!
Yet stay, O stay, my heart, do not this deed!
Ah let them go, thou wretch, spare thine own sons.
Their life shall be thy joy in other lands . . .
No, by the avenging fiends that people Hell,
It shall not be, I will not leave my children
For hands of those I hate to wanton with.
The deed is done and they shall not escape.
E'en now the crown is round her brows, e'en now
There in my robes, I know, the royal bride
Dies. Nay, the saddest of all paths must I
Tread now and send those twain a sadder still.—
My children—I would see them.

(*They are brought again from the house.*)

O little ones,
Come, give your mother now your hands to hold.
O dearest hand, O dearest lips to me,
O form and face so noble and so young,
May you be blest—elsewhere. For gladness here
Your father takes from you. O loved embrace,
O soft, smooth skin and sweetest childish breath,
Farewell, farewell. For I can face your eyes
No more, my grief is more than I can bear,
And now I see what evil I shall do
But yet my hate o'ermasters all my wisdom—
Root of the bitterest of the ills of men.

[*Exit* MEDEA *with her children.*

Chorus. Oft, often aforetime my thoughts have wandered
O'er reasonings subtle and hard to find,

And where wisdom disputed, there I too have pondered
On secrets too vast for a woman's mind.
For with woman too dwelleth one of the Muses,
To teach her a wisdom all her own;
Ah not with them all—but some She chooses,
(Who tries many women, not all refuses)
To woman too are the Muses known.
And I say that they whom no boy calls father,
With never a child, are the happiest ones,
That these are the fortunate, these, far rather
Than sires of sons.
For men that are childless, not discerning
If sons bring joy in the end or woe,
Are blest in their barrenness, never learning
The griefs that the others know.
But those that have sons by their hearths upspringing,
The sweetest of blossoms—yet ever there
I see how the sires for the sons' upbringing
Are vexed and troubled with ceaseless care,
Are vexed to gather to leave behind them
Enough for their heirs, unknowing still
What they shall find them,
For whom they have laboured, or good sons or ill.
And, last of them all, one crowning sorrow
For all men living lieth in wait,
E'en though they lack not bread for the morrow,
Though their children ripen to man's estate,
Though noble of heart prove the sons that they cherish,
Yet if God ordain that it so befall,
In a flash Death has swept their sons to perish
In Hades' Hall.

Then where griefs are so many, what profits our passion
For children, that suffers the gods at will
For mortals to fashion
This grief, yet bitterer still?

(*Re-enter* MEDEA, *alone.*)

Medea. Friends I have waited long upon my fate,
In expectation what shall there betide.
And lo! now, one of Jason's bodyguard
I see at hand—and well his labouring breath
Shows that he comes hotfoot with news of ill.

(*A messenger runs in.*)

Mess. Thou impious doer of a fearful deed,
Fly, fly!—Medea, fly—leave nought untried,
Nor chariot by land nor ship by sea.
Medea. What has befallen to need this headlong haste?
Mess. The royal bride is dead this very hour
And Creon her father, by thy poisons slain.
Medea. Most noble tale! My benefactor thou
Shalt be henceforward counted, and dear friend.
Mess. What! Woman, art thou sane, not raving mad,
Thou that hast laid a king's house desolate
And laughest at the tale and fearest not?
Medea. I have mine answer to these words of thine.
But hurry not, good fellow, tell me all
The manner of their dying. Thou'lt make my joy
Double, if only 'twas a right evil end.
Mess. When with their father your two little ones
Came and passed on within the bridal palace,
We servants, that were sorry for your wrongs,
Rejoiced, and straight from ear to ear 'twas whispered,
That you and your lord had healed your ancient breach.
Some kissed the hands and some the golden heads
Of your two boys, and I, in my great joy,

Followed their steps within the women's bower.
Then she we now call mistress in your stead,
Not noticing at first the little pair,
Only on Jason turned with eyes of passion,
But the next instant covered up her face
And bowed her bright cheek angrily away,
Piqued at the children's presence. But your husband
Began to soothe the girl's sharp bitterness;
And said, 'Be not unkind to those that love thee.
Cease from thine anger, turn not thy head away,
Let those thy lord holds dear, be dear to thee.
Nay, take the presents, and persuade thy father
To spare these children exile, for my sake.'
But once she saw that raiment, then she changed,
Gave all her husband asked; scarce was he gone
With the two children from the house, ere she
Took up the broidered robe and put it on
And set the golden circlet round her curls
And in the shining mirror smoothed her locks,
Smiling upon her lifeless likeness there.
Then rising from her throne she paced about
Her room, on white feet tripping delicately,
Exulting in her presents, glancing down
Often and often towards her pointed toe.
But then there came a grisly sight to see,
For she changed colour and with trembling limbs
Backward she staggered and scarce reached her seat
In time to save her sinking on the ground;
Then some old serving-woman, that maybe
Thought it a visitation sent from Pan
Or some god else, upraised a chant of praise;
Until she saw downstreaming from her lips
White foam and her eyeballs twisted out of sight
And bloodless all her face. A counter-strain

To her first chant the woman lifted then—
Wild lamentation. Of her handmaids one
Rushed to her father's chamber, one to tell
Her new lord of his bride's misfortune. All
The palace thundered with fast-hurrying feet.
But by the time a nimble walker turning
Back up the stadium's length, might touch the goal,
From her speechless, eyeshut trance the hapless girl
Woke with a scream. For a twofold agony
Was working on her, since about her brows
That golden circlet blazed with a wondrous stream
Of all-devouring fire and those fair robes
The children brought to her, unhappy maid,
Ate into her fair flesh. Up from her throne
She leapt and fled aflame, this way and that
Shaking her head and long locks, as she strove
To fling the crown from off her. But the gold
Held fast immovably; and as she tossed
Her head, the flames blazed out with doubled fierceness.
So to the earth in her great agony
She fell,—and scarce had any known her face
Save her own father. For where the eyes had been
And that fair face, was all obliterate,
While from her crown flowed mingled blood and fire
And from her bones the very flesh, like gum
Wept from the pine, beneath the unseen fangs
Of the poison, melted—a fearful thing to see.
So all we feared to lay hand on the dead—
For her doom had taught us wisdom.
But now on a sudden, knowing not her fate,
Rushed her unhappy father to the room
And fell upon the dead and screamed aloud
And clasped her in his arms and kissed her, crying

'O my poor child, what god hath given thee
So foul an end as this; and childless left
Without thee thy old sire, so soon to die?
O child, my child, would I could die with thee!'
But when he had ceased from moan and lamentation
And tried to lift his old limbs up again,
He found himself close-tangled with the robe
As ivy round its laurel. *Then* began
Grim wrestlings. For he strove to wrench away
His knee, but the dead clung fast; and when he tugged,
Each time he tore his old flesh from the bone,
Until at length, fordone, he breathed his last,
Poor wretch—his anguish worse than he could bear.
There side by side the girl and her old father
Lie stretched in death—a goodly tale to hear!
But, for thy case, let me not speak of it;
Thou wilt know well the way to baffle justice.
But to me now, as ever, human life
Seems but a shadow, and I frankly say
That those who seem so wise, so subtle-tongued,
Bring on themselves the heaviest penalty.
For no man born enjoys true happiness,
And fortune's tide may make some luckier
Than others are, but no, not happier.

Chorus. God, as it seems, this day in retribution
Fastens on Jason sorrow after sorrow.
Ah, hapless girl, how pitiful thy fate,
Daughter of Creon, who art fled away
To the halls of Death because of Jason's love!

Medea. My friends, the deed's resolved—that with all haste
I will slay my children and set forth from Corinth,
Not, hesitating here, yield up my sons

For other and unkinder hands to kill.
Die they must, either way; and since they must,
Then I will slay them that did bring them forth.
Come steel thyself, my heart. Why linger on
Delaying to do that dreadful deed thou must?
The sword, O miserable hand, the sword—
Take it and onward to that bitter race
Which thou must run! No weakening now, no thought
Of thy sons, how dear they are, how thou didst once
Give birth to them. For this one little day
Forget thy babes and, after, weep for them.
For though thou slay them, yet well-loved were they,
Thine own,—and I a miserable woman.

Chorus (*Strophe*).
O Earth, look on this! Shining ray
Of the Sun, turn thine eye, and look, where she stands—
Yon she-wolf of murder—O quick, stay her hands
Ere whom she gave life to, herself shall slay.
From thy golden race first sprang her line,
And now, take thou heed lest blood divine
By man's hand be shed.
O hear, God-born Light of the World, stay her first,
O stay her, and drive her far hence, the accurst!
In whom Hell's Avengers a fiend's soul have bred.

(*Antistrophe.*)
In vain were they reared? Ends it so?
In vain born and loved, for no better fate,
O thou that from far through the sea's grimmest Gate,
The blue Clashing Rocks, didst come long ago?
O hapless one, why does anger weigh

So hard on thy heart, and lust to slay?
For their guilt, that sin
Against their own race, hath stern punishment;
And fast falls disaster from high Heaven sent
On their homes for ever, that shed blood of kin.

Children (within).
Oh! Oh!

A Woman.
What! Hear you the children? Hear you the cry?

Another.
Alas, wretched woman, what misery!

1*st Child.*
Oh! Oh! From mother's hand where shall I run?

2*nd Child.*
I know not, brother dear, we are undone.

A Woman.
What now? Break we in? 'Twere best, Oh, 'twere best
To save them from death . . .

1*st Child.*
Yea, save us in God's name. Sore is our need.

2*nd Child.*
On us the murder-net sweeps close indeed.

Women (beating at the door).
Thou wretch, is it stone, or steel in thy breast?
Whom thou gavest breath,
Shall thy own hand slay, fruit that once thy own womb hath blest?

Other Women.
One, one woman only, long years before
Hath slain, so they tell, the sweet babes she bore,
Ino, god-maddened, she whom Hera drave
Forth from her home to wander and to rave.

Her children she slew, the ill-starred, and then
Plunged sheer to the sea,
Yea o'er the sea-cliff's edge headlong she leapt,
And both her children with her deathward swept.
But what thing shall ever seem dread again?
O old tragedy
Of a woman's love, what a curse hast *thou* been to men!

(*Enter* JASON *with guards.*)

Jason. You women that beside this doorway stand,
The doer of these fearful deeds, Medea,—
Lingers she yet within or is she fled?
Needs must she hide her in the bowels of earth,
Or to the height of heaven wing her way,
To shun the vengeance of the royal house.
Thinks she to murder the princes of the land
And then herself escape unscathed from hence?
But, indeed, I think not of her, but my children,
Since evil for her evil those she wronged
Shall render. I have come to save my sons,
Lest the royal kin should harm them in revenge
For that foul murder which their mother did.

Chorus. Unhappy Jason, you know not your own
Misfortunes; else you had not spoken so

Jason. What do you mean? Does she seek, then, my life too?

Chorus. Your sons have died beneath their mother's hand.

Jason. What wilt thou say? Oh, thou hast broken me.

Chorus. Think of your children as alive no more.

Jason. Where has she slain them? Within there or without?

Chorus. Open the gates and you shall see them dead.

Jason. Quickly, my men! Come force the doorlocks here,
Loosen the fastenings. Let me see this curse
Twofold—the dead, and her—O my revenge!

(MEDEA *appears on the roof in a chariot drawn by winged dragons.*)

Medea. What dost thou breaking, levering up our gates,
To find thy dead and me that did the deed?
Give o'er thy labour. If thou wouldst aught with me,
Speak what thou wilt,—hands thou shalt never lay
On me—so goodly a chariot hath the Sun,
My sire's sire, sent to keep me from my foes.
Jason. Thou monster, thou most hateful of all women
To God and me and all the race of men,
Thou that hast dared to draw on thine own sons
The sword—a mother!—made shipwreck of my age,
Childless—and having done this, blenchest not
To face the sun and earth, red with thy guilt,
Most horrible,—Hell take thee! Ah, too late
Am I grown wise, that was not wise of old,
When from a barbarous hearth, a savage shore
To a Greek home I brought thee, O thou curse,
Traitress to thine own father, thine own land,
That nurtured thee. On me the gods have loosed—
On me—the avenging fiends that followed thee,
Because thou slewest thy brother at the hearth
Ere thy foot touched the deck of fair-prowed Argo.
Such thy beginning! Then, made wife to me
And mother of my sons, these thou hast slain
For wanton jealousy. There is no woman
Throughout all Hellas would have dared this deed—
And yet before them all I chose out thee
For wife,—a bitter bridal and my ruin—

Thee, tigress and not woman, bloodier
Than any Scylla of the Tyrrhene sea.
And yet ten thousand curses would not bite
Thy heart—so brazen art thou. O begone,
Devil, child-murderess. Leave me to mourn
My destiny, who never now shall have
Joy of my new-won love, nor evermore
Speak to the sons alive that I begot
And bred to boyhood,—lost, for ever lost.
Medea. could have answered many things to these
Thy charges; but to Father Zeus 'tis known
What I have done to thee and thou to me.
It was not for thee to put my bed to shame
And then live easy, laughing me to scorn,
Nor for thy queen nor Creon thy matchmaker
To hound me hence with all impunity.
Therefore come call me tigress, if thou wilt,
And Scylla lurking by the Tyrrhene sea,
For I have rightly wrung the heart of thee.
Jason. Thou sufferest too, thou sharest in my pain.
Medea. Ay, surely. 'Tis welcome, so *thou* mock'st me not.
Jason. My sons, what an evil mother did ye find!
Medea. Children, what death your father's vice hath brought!
Jason. At least 'twas not my hand that brought them death.
Medea. No, 'twas thy pride and thy new-fangled wedding.
Jason. Didst thou find jealousy fit cause for murder?
Medea. Thinkst thou that women find *that* so light to bear?
Jason. If they are pure; but all is vile in thee.
Medea. Well these are dead, and that will stab thee home.

Jason. These are, methinks, a curse upon thy head.
Medea. The gods know who began this misery.
Jason. They know then thy abominable soul.
Medea. Hate, if thou wilt: but I loathe thy bitter snarl.
Jason. I thine; but 'tis not hard for us to part.
Medea. How then? What wouldst thou? I am right glad to go.
Jason. Give me my dead to weep o'er and to bury.
Medea. Nay, with my own hands I will bury them
Within the close of Hera of the Cape,
Where none that hate me shall insult the dead
And disentomb their dust; and for this land
Of Sisyphus a solemn festival
With rites in full I'll found for evermore
In recompense for this my godless deed.
But I myself shall seek Erechtheus' land
To dwell with Aegeus, old Pandion's son.
And thy ill life as ill a death shall end,
A fragment left of Argo crush thy head,—
Sour ending to thy marriage made with me!
Jason. May thy children's Curse, and the Doom of the slayer
Bring death to thee.
Medea. Forsworn, who shall hear thee? What God heed the prayer
Of the breaker of hospitality?
Jason. Out on thee, foul infanticide!
Medea. Go, get thee home and bury thy bride.
Jason. I go—with two sons dead and cold.
Medea. Ah thy grief is to come; wait till thou art old.
Jason. O sons that I loved! *Medea.* Their mother, not thou.
Jason. Loved!—whom thou slewest . . . *Medea.* To torture thee now.

Jason. O woe, woe is me. How I long in vain
To print one kiss on their lips again.
Medea. Now thou dost call on them, now they are dear,
But then thou didst spurn them. *Jason.* By God, I implore
Let me touch their soft skin, let me clasp them near.
Medea. Vain words: thou shalt not for evermore.
Jason. O God, dost thou hear how her scorn denieth
My prayer—this foul, child-murdering
Tigress? Aloud my sad heart crieth,
Upon all Heaven, to mark this thing,—
How thou hast forbidden my arms to enfold them,
To bury these children whose blood thou hast shed.
Ah why were they born but for me to behold them
By thy hand—dead!

(MEDEA's *chariot rises in the air and disappears.*)

Chorus. In the treasure of Zeus lieth many a lot,
What the gods ordain no man foreknows;
For what seemed sure, ensueth not,
And what none dreamed of, they dispose:
E'en such this story's close.

NOTES

1. This opening passage has become famous. It is imitated by the Roman poet Ennius (*c.* 200 B.C.) in an interesting extant fragment. Thirteen hundred years later the Byzantine Passion Play, *Christus Patiens* (11th–12th century) begins thus with a Euripidean prologue spoken by the Virgin Mary :

> Ah would the snake had never entered Eden,
> That in its glens the serpent ne'er had hid !

Five centuries later still a Renaissance Latin play on Joseph by Theodor Rhodius (1612) opens with a similar utterance by the nurse of Potiphar's wife :

> Utinam tulisset nunquam in Aegyptum pedem
> Josephus ille . . .
>
> Ah would that Joseph ne'er had entered Egypt !

And lastly, in 1810, perched on the top of the Symplegades themselves, Byron scribbled his parody :

> O how I wish that an embargo
> Had kept in port the good ship Argo !
> Who, still unlaunched from Grecian docks,
> Had never passed the Azure Rocks ;
> But now I fear her trip will be a
> Damned business for my Miss Medea. . . .

2. The Symplegades or 'Clashing Rocks' were at the opening of the Bosphorus into the Black Sea. The *Argo* was the first ship to dart uncrushed between them ; thenceforth they were rooted in their place. Paley saw in them a memory of prehistoric icebergs in the Euxine ; but the story may have arisen simply from the way a channel seems to open and close as one sails up and down it. The phrase '*Winged* her way' may possibly allude to a form of the story found later in Apollonius Rhodius, who tells how from the *Argo*, like the Ark, an experimental dove was loosed. The bird flew through with the loss of her tail-feathers ; the ship followed with the loss of her stern-ornament. Cf. Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon* :

> When the dove dipped her wing
> And the oars won their way
> Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the straits of Propontis with spray.

46. There is a charming picture in Morris's *Jason* of the children playing over the winning of the Golden Fleece—how they

> oft shall go
> Where nigh the sea the wind-swept beech-trees grow,
> And with a grey old woman tending them,
> Shall make an Aea of some beech-tree's stem—

with flocks of wool, that sheep have left on the bushes, for the Fleece, and a snake killed by the shepherds for the Guardian Dragon.

49. The Greek *paidagōgos* was responsible not for any teaching, but for the general safe-keeping, of his charges. A slave chosen, in theory at least, for particularly trusty character, he looked after his master's son or sons, half Argus, half 'fidus Achates', from their sixth or seventh year, when they left the care of the women, to their eighteenth, when they became *epheboi*, and had doubtless already become rather more than he could manage. The *paidagōgos* of Creusa plays an important part in the *Ion*.

69. The fount of Peirēne was supposed to take its name from a nymph who melted into tears and became a spring, through grief for her dead son. Beside it Bellerophon caught Pegasus. Its associations and the fact that good water is in Greece generally a luxury, made it the pride of Corinth. The ancient city is to-day a village, but Peirene still flows among her ruins, facing the landlocked Gulf with Helicon and the snows of Parnassos beyond.

112. Perhaps Medea, who speaks from within doors, has at this point caught sight for a moment of the children, who entered the house at line 105.

125–30. Here we have expressed, as Greek writers are never tired of expressing it, that immemorial commonplace, which is the corner-stone of Greek morality—the doctrine of the Modest Mean. It is summed in the two words inscribed on Apollo's Delphic shrine, 'Nothing too much'; it is the moral pointed by countless popular tales like that of Croesus and Solon; it is the foundation of the ethics of Aristotle himself. Obedience to it was the cardinal Greek virtue, *Sophrosyne*; its transgression the Greek deadly sin, *Hubris*. 'Nothing too much' is the First Commandment of Hellas, as 'Know thyself' is the Second. It seems to us too obvious and too general; but if the wisdom of the Greeks never ceased reiterating it, it was because their Southern blood was always forgetting it. It is impossible to recapture the feeling of a Greek audience, unless you realize how intense were the familiar associations and the importance attached to these two maxims.

131. Parodos, or entrance song of the Chorus.

167. When the *Argo* was pursued by Aeetes, Medea delayed her father by slaying her brother Apsyrtos, who accompanied her, and scattering his limbs. While Aeetes gathered them for burial, the fugitives escaped. Tomi, the place of Ovid's exile, was the traditional scene of the tragedy (τέμνω, 'to cut': cf. Ov. *Trist.* iii. 9), though Euripides (cf. 1334 below) regarded the murder as occurring in the palace at Colchis.

190–203. Of this passage Dr. Johnson made two versions, one a parody of the style of Gray's *Elegy*, and the other serious. The latter, together with the Greek —more than two hundred and twenty words altogether —was copied out by the great scholar Poson within a circle an inch and a half in diameter. The parody begins:

> Err shall they not, who resolute explore
> Time's gloomy backward with judicious eyes;
> And scanning right the practices of yore
> Shall deem our hoar progenitors unwise.

> They to the dome when smoke with curling play
> Announced the dinner to the region round,
> Summoned the singer blythe and harper gay
> And aided wine with dulcet-streaming sound.

196–200. Cf. David with Saul.

211. The gate of the Euxine is the Bosphorus. 'Midnight' is stressed, because only special urgency would make a Greek seaman break through his established custom of sailing only by daylight.

214–409. First Epeisodion (stretch of dialogue between two choric songs).

214. When Timoleon the Corinthian came to deliver Sicily, he is said to have put to death his captured enemy, Euthymus of Leontini, for having encouraged his fellow-citizens to resist by a derisive misapplication of this line, telling them not to be afraid because

> '*Women* of Corinth now are come abroad.'

(In the Greek the same form serves for third person plural and for first person singular.)

215–18. The translation of these lines is uncertain; in any case, Medea, with that due observance of the rules of rhetoric which marks the set speeches in Euripides, begins by an attempt to conciliate her audience and remove the prejudices they may feel against her. It might be the opening of a speech by an Athenian 'metic' or resident-alien in an Athenian court.

237. At Athens divorce was more difficult for the wife, though by no means impossible.

245. The seclusion of Athenian women of the better classes was very strict. Even after marriage they were not supposed to show themselves in the street, except for special reasons and with an attendant. The symbol of their respectability was the home-keeping tortoise.

250. This proud defence has become famous. I know nothing to stand beside it except the annihilating retort of Nora Helmer to her husband Torvald, in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*:

> *Torvald.* No man sacrifices his honour, even for one he loves.
> *Nora.* Millions of *women* have done so.

267. The Chorus keep their promise of silence, horrified as they are by Medea's savagery, to the end. Indeed in all Greek plays, since the Chorus has to remain on the stage, it has to share in any plot hatched by the actors. At the same time such loyalty is not untrue to Greek life; segregated as women were in Athens, with even special rites and mysteries of their own, they could show a solidity, an *esprit de corps* such as modern social relations between the sexes do not in general excite. Cf. *Iph. in Taur.* 1061–2: there the escape of Iphigeneia and Orestes similarly depends on the secrecy of the Chorus of Greek captive women. Cf. too the legendary murder of their husbands by all the women of Lemnos.

288. According to Plutarch when Philip of Macedon was assassinated, after having, like Jason, put away his first wife, the mother of Alexander the Great, in favour of a new bride, the murderer was said to have sounded beforehand the young Alexander; whose only reply was to quote this ominous line:

Both groom and bride and father of the bride.

294–301. This bitterly ironical passage on 'the blessings of education' probably contains an allusion to the Athenian persecution of philosophy, with particular reference to the fate of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, the friend of Pericles and Euripides, who had been accused of impiety, and driven from Athens shortly before the date of this play (431). In 415 the same fate befell Protagoras, who in his flight was drowned at sea: 'Ye have slain, O Greeks, ye have slain the nightingale of the Muses, the wizard bird that did no wrong' (tr. Bury). In 408 the poet himself found Athens intolerable; in 399 came the crowning crime, the execution of Socrates.

332. Creon's mention of the chances of 'circumstance' recalls to Medea her passionate desire that the guilty Jason may fare as he deserves; hence the sudden imprecation. Plutarch relates that Brutus in the agony of defeat at Philippi uttered this line with its appeal for the vengeance of Heaven on the guilty; similarly in the year before (43 B. C.) Cicero is said to have been reading the *Medea* in his litter when he was overtaken and murdered by the soldiers of Antony.

378. In one version of the story Medea actually did burn the palace.

397. Hecate, patron-goddess of witches, an image of whom Medea keeps beside her hearth.

405. **seed of Sisyphus,** (1) because Sisyphus was the legendary founder of Corinth; (2) because, as befitted the father of a commercial hard-bargaining people, he was famous as the most cunning and deceitful of men. One story made him the parent of the wily Odysseus. So here the epithet is used with the double sense, (1) Corinthian, (2) treacherous.

406. Medea's father Aeetes was son of the Sun, and brother of Circe.

408–9. With grim irony Medea quotes the current disparagement of woman; she is about to put this glib theory of men into practice—to the cost of one of them.

410–30. First Stasimon (Song of the Chorus after taking up their position in the Orchestra).

421. Old poets are meant, such as Hesiod with his tale of Pandora, Archilochus, and especially Simonides of Amorgos (*c.* 650 B. C., not to be confused with the more famous Simonides of Ceos), who wrote a satire on women, classifying them according to the various animals they most resembled—dog, sow, ape, etc. Of course, the Chorus could not allude to these particular poets without an anachronism; but the audience recognized the sort of writer meant. Cf. the fragment of Hipponax (*c.* 540 B. C.):

Two days is woman sweet: the day she's wed,
The day she's carried from your doorway, dead.

433. The Twin Crags are the Symplegades. See on 1–2.

439–40. Perhaps an allusion to the state of Greece at the opening of the Peloponnesian War, which began

with many accusations of treaty-breaking on both sides, not to mention the treacherous Theban attack on Plataea in these very weeks. True, the statement is rather vague; but in 431, as in 1914, topical allusions of this sort would be very quickly seized by an audience.

440. **to heaven again**: a reminiscence of Hesiod's vision of the final iniquity of mankind (*Works and Days*, 197–200):

> Then to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth,
> To join the Gods and quit the race of men,
> Wrapping their beauty in fair robes of white
> Conscience and Righteousness shall flee away.

446–626. Second Epeisodion.

465. **well may I call thee that**: referring to 451–2 above.

479. **whose fruit was death**: because armed men sprang from the dragon's teeth sowed in it.

485. **Iolkos under Pelion.** See an atlas. The site of Iolkos is dominated by the great snow-capped ridge of Pelion (5,350 ft.), whose slopes, contrasting strangely with the stony barrenness of most Greek mountain-sides and dotted to-day with the 'Four and Twenty Villages', famous for their prosperity, overhang the land-locked Gulf of Pagasai.

490. The lack of children to perpetuate one's race and pay the due honours at and after death was to the Greek a terrible calamity and a sufficient ground for divorce.

496–7. i. e. when Jason was begging Medea's aid at Colchis. The regular form of supplication consisted in grasping the beard or hand and clasping the knees —gestures, one imagines, originally intended simply to prevent the person supplicated from looking aside, striking the suppliant, or walking away from him.

507–8. **those that I ought never to have wronged**: the daughters of Pelias.

519. **no stamp**: The Greek *charakter* = (1) 'the stamp on a coin'; (2) (by an easy metaphor) 'character'. In Eng., of course, the metaphor has been forgotten.

520–1. Cf. Coleridge, *Christabel*:

> And to be wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain.

529. **Subtle thy mind is, but—**: 'you have a woman's passionate heart' is what he was about to add.

536–8. Perhaps the bitterest example in the play of that bitter form of satire in which the victim is made to satirize himself out of his own unconscious mouth, as, for instance, in her much more genial way, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*.

543. Orpheus is specially relevant in Jason's mouth, not merely as the Prince of Minstrels, but also as having been one of the Argonauts.

565–7. Tragic Irony. Medea is soon to prove she can dispense with children; and Jason's 'benefit' is to be death.

593–4. Jason's treachery has not even the excuse of an overmastering passion for the princess of Corinth. At the same time, it must be remembered that this remark would not seem so calmly odious to a Greek, for whom *un mariage de convenance* was the normal and accepted thing, as to us, whom the idea of marrying for money or position repels. Morris, handling the subject from the romantic standpoint, has to make his Jason infatuated by Creon's daughter.

600. **wiser.** The repeated allusions we have had to Medea's wisdom add a certain point here. She has something still to learn. Jason bids her pray for the wisdom but to 'Know Herself'.

613. **tokens.** Two friends, or a guest parting from the host who had entertained him, would break a knuckle-bone or coin, each keeping half, just as lovers in ballads do. Any such tallies of his, entrusted by Jason to Medea, would be identified by his friends and serve instead of letters of introduction.

627–62. Second Stasimon. Theme of the first half: 'Nothing too much' in Love.

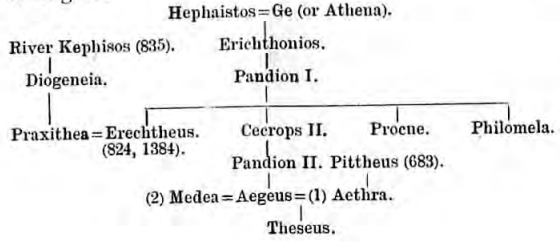
644. **from my country**: The Greek word 'citiless' had an intensity of meaning hard to reproduce in

English. The fellowship and culture that made life noble, the citizenship that made it complete, the very justice that made it bearable—all these were the fruits of that process of 'settling together' which turned the Hellene from the boor we still find in Hesiod, to the Athenian of Pericles, in love with his city as with a mistress; and all these the exile forfeited. To this day the returned emigrant in the vales of Sparta or Arcadia will tell you that Chicago or Baltimore is the place for him, the place he is going back to.

663-823. Third Epeisodion. The Aegeus episode is not very satisfactory. Aristotle criticized his appearance as an unlikely coincidence; we find him in character rather a stick. But remember that such was the traditional story; and that Aegeus had a patriotic interest for Athenians, such as an English audience may feel at the intervention of Queen Elizabeth, or British troops in the nick of time.

Professor Murray suggests that the unhappiness of the childless Aegeus gives Medea the idea of making Jason childless too. But the child-murder is already anticipated quite at the beginning of the play (cf. 90–4, 112–14). There is certainly, however, an artistic balance in Medea's relations with these two men, her friend and her enemy. Children she gives (717–18) and children she takes away. How terrible her power!

665. **Pandion:** there are two Pandions, the more famous father of Procne and Philomela and the father of Aegeus.



668. The Delphic Omphalos (lit. 'navel'— so called because Delphi was supposed to be the centre of the earth) was a round-topped cylindrical stone which stood in the temple of Apollo near the eternal fire of laurel and fir. It was probably really an old fetish stone absorbed in the later worship of Apollo, as the black Kaaba stone at Mecca was taken over by Mahomet as 'the stone of Abraham'. So the Omphalos was supposed to be the grave of the dragon Python slain by Phoebus. It had on it two golden eagles in allusion to the legend that two eagles released at opposite ends of the earth met in their flight at central Delphi.

682. Look at the map; Aegeus would normally come by ship, like the modern tourist, from Cirrha, the port of Delphi, to the Isthmus; from the other side of which, at Cenchreae, like St. Paul, he would re-embark for Athens. Medea quite naturally asks why he has turned, out of his direct route, to Corinth; he explains that he is going south-east to Troezen.

688. It is the tone of intense sadness in which Medea speaks this line that first makes Aegeus realize that there is something wrong.

731–48. Medea urges Aegeus to pledge himself irrevocably by an oath; she *pretends*, because that will give him more excuse for refusing her extradition; *really*, because she distrusts him and because her intended crime, of which he knows nothing yet, will make her all the harder to protect and easier to betray.

754. The regular formula being, 'If I break faith, may I suffer such and such penalties'. Cf. the Latin *foedus ferire*, the sacrificial pig being struck with the prayer, 'If we break faith, so may God strike us'.

759. Hermes, son of Maia, daughter of Atlas, and of Zeus.

763. Aegeus disappears, without a word of farewell, as suddenly as he came. It may be that, rather overcome by these unexpected commitments, he is anxious to get away; it would be awkward, too, to meet Jason or Creon.

786. Corneille in his *Médée* introduces here an alteration by no means for the better, making Créuse (Glauke) so attracted by the dress Médée is wearing that she importunes Jason to beg it for her. When Médée acquiesces and sends it, a courtier suggests that it may be poisoned and it is accordingly tried first on a woman in prison awaiting execution. The poison is, however, too subtle to attack any but the destined victim. Finally Créuse is consumed by it, and her father and Jason stab themselves.

824-65. Third Stasimon.

824-5. **The Sons of Erechtheus:** see genealogical table on l. 665.

826. The Athenian people were as proud of being 'autochthonous' (i. e. come of ancestors sprung from the very soil of Attica, aboriginals unmixed with invader or immigrant) as gentlemen of Norman blood are supposed to be of exactly the opposite (cf. the royal Attic pedigree from Ge and Kephisos). Thucydides, however, who is no romantic, attributes the undoubted freedom of Attica from invasion merely to its not being worth invading by reason of its barrenness.

829-30. **the brightest of air:** On an ordinary day I have seen from the summit of Pentelicos, quite clearly defined, the blue peaks of Chios 100 miles away.

832. The springing of the Muses from Harmonia is only found here; the common legend made them the daughters of Mnemosyne, Memory. In either case the allegory is transparent. Cf. Pericles' praise in the Funeral Speech of the gracious many-sidedness of the true Athenian.

836. **Cypris:** Aphrodite in her wider role as goddess not only of human love, but of the lush fertility of Nature (cf. the *Venus genetrix* of Lucretius). In the place just outside Athens, by the Ilissos, called Κῆποι, 'The Gardens', was a temple and a famous statue of her; and it is interesting that her worship as 'Aphrodite in the Gardens', according to tradition, was founded by Aegeus.

844-5. 'Strong Loves of all godlike endeavour
Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.'
(Murray.)

A great passage which looks forward at once to Thucydides and to Plato. For it recalls that famous summons of Pericles in the Funeral Speech to his hearers 'to contemplate in daily activity the greatness of Athens and to become her lovers'; indeed, if this be the actual phrase of Pericles, spoken in the winter of this year, who knows if he was not thinking of this very chorus? And it recalls, too, the teaching of Plato, after Wisdom's city upon Earth had fallen, of the wise man's love of Good and Beauty itself in the heavenly city of the ideal. (Cf. Plato, *Sympos.* 180, and the Epigram of Marianus, Mackail, *Greek Anthol.* xii. 46.)

866-975. Fourth Epeisodion.

881. **exiles:** i. e. from Iolkos after the murder of Pelias.

900. 'How I forebode some stroke of unseen ill!' By 'unseen' Medea means her hidden plot; but her hearers take it merely of the hidden future.

901. There is no idea here, as has been suggested, of the children, as mourners, stretching out their arms towards their father's grave. Medea merely means, 'Will you live long to give your dear embraces?'

944-5. Jason fancies himself as having an irresistible way with women. With bitter flattery Medea humours him.

948. Repeated from 786, where it occurs in Medea's revelation of her plot, this line serves finely to remind us now of the grim resolve behind her fawning: it is like the clash of arms from within the Wooden Horse.

953. Again bitter agony.

957. **in bliss:** the Greek word has a double meaning: (1) 'blessed' in the ordinary sense: (2) 'one of the blessed dead', with whom the bride is soon to be numbered.

958. **that she will not despise:** once more a *double entendre*. Not to be despised, because (1) so costly, (2) so deadly.

959. Jason's instinctive meanness hates the mere idea of giving.

972. Like the 'shirt of Nessus' sent by the innocent Dejanira to her husband Heracles, the poisoned robe of Medea began to act when warmed by contact with the human body. Hence the need that Glauke herself should be the first to take robe and crown from their casket.

976–1001. Fourth Stasimon.

1002–1250. Fifth Epeisodion.

1016. **I shall send others home**: the Greek uses the regular word for bringing exiles home; Medea really means 'bring down to death', 'to their *long* home'.

1019–82. A very famous scene in antiquity. Medea's agony of indecision is represented in wall-paintings found at Pompeii, and was the subject of a great picture by Timomachus of Byzantium (1st century B.C.), which was bought for a fabulous price by Julius Caesar.

1021–3. The abiding city is, of course, not Corinth, but the grave.

1053–5. A parody of the ordinary sacrificial formula (cf. Verg. *Aen.* vi. 258 'Procul o, procul este, profani'), 'Let those too *impure* to be present, depart: if any stays, on his own head be it!' Medea with a glance at the Chorus, says, 'Let those too *pure* to be present at *my* sacrifice go'; i. e. 'If you are shocked (and stay), that is your concern'.

1073. **elsewhere**: ostensibly in Athens (cf. 1058), really in the other world.

1078–9. Lines famous in antiquity, though since eclipsed by Ovid's terser adaptation, 'Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor'. To Socrates with his 'Virtue is Knowledge' they must have seemed one of the many lies of the poets; but here Euripides is wiser than his friend.

1081. An interlude of lyric relief. Where the modern spectator recruits himself with ten minutes in the theatre buffet, the Greek listened to a burst of music and poetry.

For an historic example of woman as philosopher one may recall Diotima of Mantinea, who taught Socrates.

1112–15. This particular question of children or childlessness is one that vexed Euripides; in other plays he gives sometimes this, sometimes a doubting, sometimes an opposite answer.

1142. **in my great joy**: had he not been carried away by emotion, he would not have so forgotten himself as to intrude on the women's part of the house, which in Greece was jealously secluded.

1144. **we now call mistress**: a vivid touch. She was so full of life a moment since; he cannot realize that she is dead.

1162. **lifeless likeness**: a foreboding of her imminent fate.

1166. She lifts her foot and points her toe the better to admire her dress.

1172–3. To the primitive mind any fit or seizure seems possession by a spirit. The Greeks attributed them especially to Pan, the god of wild nature, who sends those sudden fits of unreasoning, 'panic' fear, which still seize the wanderer on the lonely hills. But they might also be the work of the Nymphs, who are still dreaded by the Greek peasant, of Dionysos, Hekate, or Cybele. Accordingly the old woman raises a propitiatory chant of ecstatic worship, dreadfully appropriate here, for the ὀλολυγή was uttered at sacrifices, *at the moment when* the victim was struck down (Homer, *Od.* iii. 450). Here it breaks on us like the 'awful, jubilant voice' of Tennyson's Dying Swan; and the sacrificial metaphor Medea has already introduced at l. 1054.

1181–2. A Greek race-course was double, with a track running up one side, turning round a post at the far end, and coming back, parallel, to the starting end, i. e. 'of the shape of a hairpin' (Bayfield). These two parallel tracks were called the 'legs' (κῶλα), and were each 1 *stadion* or furlong in length: the Stadium at Olympia is 210 yds. long. So that our walker re-

turning up the course would have covered 420 yds., nearly a quarter of a mile, when he reached his goal. (Time, at 5 miles an hour = nearly 3 minutes.)

1221. He alludes reproachfully to Medea's bloodthirsty eagerness in 1134–5.

1251–92. Fifth Stasimon. The metre is dochmiac, i. e. made up of feet called dochmii, of which the standard type is ∪ – – ∪ –, but with a good deal of freedom in variation (– – – ∪ –, ⏑ – ∪ –, ∪ – – –, ⏑ – – ∪ ∪ –, ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ –). Cf. in Eng. 'The wíse kángaróos | all wéar léather shóes'. As in the other lyrics an attempt has been made to preserve the metre in the translation.

1255.

Sun
|
Aeetes
|
Medea
|
Children

The fiends who urge her are the Avenging Spirits who wait on crimes (in this case the murders of Apsyrtos and Pelias), and who make one member of a guilty house their 'murdering minister', their 'scourge of God', wherewith to punish another. Thus in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus the guilty Clytemnestra, having killed her lord, speaks of herself as the incarnation of the Curse of the House of Atreus, its Erinys in fleshly form. Remember, too, the scene in the *Eumenides*, where the Sun-god hunts the Erinyes from his pure Delphic shrine; here his own descendant has become one.

1263. See on l. 2.

1264. There is an allusion to the old name of the Black Sea, at the entrance of which the Symplegades stood. Called originally ὁ Ἄξεινος πόντος, 'the Friendless Sea', because of the murderous barbarians who infested its shores (cf. the human sacrifices to the Tauric

Artemis in the Crimea), it had its name changed, euphemistically, to Εὔξεινος = 'the Friendly'; just as the Erinyes were turned into Eumenides, 'the Gracious Ones', and, by the Romans, Maleventum in Samnium (? Μαλόεντα, 'Apple Town') into Beneventum.

1275–81. On the behaviour of the Chorus see Introduction, p. 21.

1282. **one woman**: Ino, wife of Athamas, king of the Boeotian Orchomenos, plotted the sacrifice of her step-children, Phrixos and Helle; they were only saved by the arrival of the winged ram with the Golden Fleece, who flew away with them to Asia. Then Hera sent madness on Athamas, so that he thought Ino and her two sons a lioness with two cubs; he killed one and Ino leapt into the sea with the other in her arms. Such is the common version; that followed by Euripides seems to have differed in some details.

1308. The egoist still!

1317. Medea appears above the house-roof 'in the machine', which represents her dragon-chariot,—herself, as it were, her own *dea ex machina*. She has with her the bodies of the children.

1334. See on 167.

1342. The Tyrrhene Sea extended down the west coast of Italy as far as the Straits of Messina, where Scylla and Charybdis were.

1379. **Hera of the Cape**: she had a temple on a cape near Sicyon, the next city to Corinth along the Gulf to westward.

It is, of course, to a contemporary festival familiar to his audience that Euripides here alludes. Greek plays are often thus bound up with some local worship of legendary dead; from which indeed Tragedy itself probably arose.

1382. **Sisyphus**: see on 405.

1384. **Erechtheus**: see on 665.

1385. By Aegeus Medea was said to have had a son Medos, from whom sprang the race of the Medes.

1386–7. The story was that the world-weary Jason went and lay down under the stern of *Argo*, which

had been drawn up on shore at the Isthmus as an offering to Poseidon:

> And whether loosed by some divinity,
> Or that the rising wind from off the sea
> Blew full upon it, surely I know not—
> But when the day dawned, still on the same spot,
> Beneath the ruined stem did Jason lie
> Crushed, and all dead of him that here can die.
> (Morris.)

1389—end. Anapaests.

1396. She alludes not merely to the horror of loneliness; Jason had now no γηροβοσκός, no one to support his age. And in the heroic period a childless old man might suffer neglect and ill-usage, even if he were a king, like Peleus and Oeneus, grandfather of Diomede.

With this quiet moaning close it is interesting to contrast the end of the *Medea* of Seneca (4 B. C.–A. D. 65): there she sails off in her dragon-chariot, pursued by Jason's last wild cry:

> Per alta vade spatia sublimi aethere,—
> testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.
>
> Sail through the lofty spaces of high heaven,
> Witness, where'er thou goest, that gods are not.

1415–19. A sort of combined dramatic *Nunc Dimittis* and *Magnificat*, which is found at the end of four other plays of Euripides, and is possibly interpolated here.

1415. For the metaphor, cf. the Homeric picture of the two jars in the house of Zeus, from one of which he *deals out* evil fortune, from the other good; giving to some men both, to some the first only, but to none the second alone.

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