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ON MEDEA'S GREAT MONOLOGUE (E. Med. 1021–80)*

In his new text of Euripides (Oxford, 1984) James Diggle shows that he has the courage of his convictions: he deletes the last twenty-five lines of Medea's great monologue. He is to be applauded for following *ratio et res ipsa* where it leads him and being undaunted by the sight of so much blood. No editor of Euripides before him, as far as I am aware, has ever been courageous enough to put these lines in square brackets, although their deletion had been a subject of discussion for exactly one hundred years at the time Diggle's edition appeared.

But though Diggle is to be praised for his courage in following reason, I believe he is mistaken. The arguments for excision are far from negligible, and defenders of the passage show a regrettable tendency to underestimate their force. But while I shall give these objections as much weight as any of those who urge deletion, I shall argue that there is a much more economical way of dealing with them than large-scale amputation. I shall accordingly pay close attention to the problems for which excision is the proposed solution, with inevitable repetition of earlier scholars' arguments. Since I have myself recommended athetesis of long passages on several occasions, I do not think I will be regarded as insufficiently alive to the possibility of interpolation or overly reluctant to wield the knife. In this instance, however, there are strong stylistic grounds for believing in the genuineness of most of the passage in question. When Philocleon recommends acquittal or the industrialist more environmental safeguards, their advice carries particular weight.

There is a great deal to be said for the proposal, first made by Bergk in 1884 and seconded in recent years by G. Müller, M. D. Reeve, and O. Zwielerlein, to excise lines 1056–80.¹ (a) Excision disembarasses us of a Medea who argues to herself (1051–61) 'I'll not kill the children but take them to Athens. But no, I must kill them because otherwise I will be leaving them to suffer outrage from the Corinthians.' Such an argument is nonsense, and those who attempt to justify it by reference to Medea's supposed state of mind would do well, as Reeve says, to 'favour the sceptical... with a demonstration that calculated illogicality was a recognized device in ancient poetry; or were the poets themselves thrown off balance by the emotion of their characters?' (p. 57 n. 11). No measures to eliminate this absurdity less drastic than excision of 1056–80 have thus far succeeded.

To see that this is so, one need only read E. Christmann's trenchant criticisms of attempts to defend the tradition, either without any change or with Hermann's *κεῖ*

* My debt to the editors and to two anonymous referees is unusually large. I would also like to thank Hugh Lloyd-Jones and K. H. Lee for their helpful comments.

¹ Excision was first proposed by T. Bergk, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, III (1884), 512 n. 14, who regarded 1021–55 and 1056–80 as alternative versions. The next major assault was G. Müller, 'Interpolationen in der Medea des Euripides', *SIFC* 25 (1951), 65–82. A full bibliography of the question is found in M. D. Reeve, 'Euripides, *Medea* 1021–1080', *CQ* N.S. 22 (1972), 51–61, who argues strongly for deletion. Three more recent discussions are O. Zwielerlein, 'Die Tragik in den Medea-Dramen', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 19 (1978), 27–63; H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Euripides, *Medea* 1056–80', *WüJbb* N.F. 6a (1980), 51–9; and H. Erbse, 'Zum Abschiedsmonolog der euripideischen Medea', *Archaiognosia* 2 (1981), 67–82, a reference I owe to Professor Lloyd-Jones.

μη̄ for ἐκεῖ.² Christmann's own suggestion (pp. 133–4) of a lacuna before 1059 in which Medea asks 'Werde ich nicht auf der Flucht mit meinen Kindern ergriffen werden, wenn die Braut durch meine *pharmaka* stirbt?' at least attempts to face the difficulty. Few, however, will be convinced that when Medea says that the crown and robe are even now killing the princess, what she means is that therefore escape from Corinth will be impossible. If she had not counted on escape, there would be no reason to secure asylum in Athens. And if *she* can escape, then, for all the audience know to the contrary, so can the children. The same consideration answers W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (Munich, 1968), pp. 158–60, who argues that it is because Medea is sorely pressed for time that she cannot rescue the children.

Most recently Erbse (pp. 69–73) has argued that once Medea has sent the children with the poisoned robe and crown, it is no longer possible to conceive of a version of the revenge that does not involve their death. The revenge-plan is an 'unteilbare Einheit', and in order to kill her rival, 'setzt Medea ihre Kinder aufs Spiel, und sie weiss genau, dass diese nach Gelingen des Anschlages der Rache der Korinther nicht entgehen werden'. But in Medea's first announcement of the revenge-plan, the death of the children is viewed not as an unavoidable corollary of their role as bringers of the poisoned robe but as something desirable in itself, part of the plan of destroying Jason's house (cf. 794) and of insuring that her enemies will not laugh at her (cf. 797). This is spelled out further in 803–10. Even after killing the princess, it is still open to Medea to reject this last and most extreme measure. The proof of this is that she actually discusses the possibility in 1044–8, only to reject it not on practical grounds but because her revenge requires it: she cannot let Jason off unpunished. To speak as if the rescue of the children were impossible on only practical grounds is not to describe the situation from Medea's point of view.

It is, of course, true that poets do not always feel themselves bound by strict logic. When some important poetic purpose cannot be otherwise achieved, the poet will not let everyday realism stand in the way. The double burial in the *Antigone*, for example, violates logic but serves the dramaturgy of the play. But even if we were to waive the objection against Medea's logic, we should still be hard put to say why Euripides should have *wanted* the motive of revenge to be replaced by that of necessity, especially since the revenge-motive will be reinstated at the end of the speech. When a poet pays a price in logic, he normally expects something in return. Defenders of the passage have not pointed to any convincing dramatic gain Medea's illogicality makes for the play.

(b) In the first and undoubted portion of her speech she uses language to describe her intentions that is clear to the audience but over the heads of the children, while in the last half she speaks at points with unmistakable plainness about her design. To be sure, the children are young, so young, in fact, that they do not understand that their mother is grieving, as 1040–1 make clear. It could be argued that they simply take no notice of Medea's adjuring of her anger to 'let them go' and 'spare my sons', and that only 1062–3, which anticipate 1240–1, are interpolated. But Euripides went to considerable trouble in the first half of the speech to achieve the kind of double discourse which he and his contemporaries clearly admired so much, and, other things being equal, consistency in this matter is a good thing.

(c) At 1053 she orders the children to go into the house. At 1069 they are inexplicably still on stage. Those who have studied most closely the 'grammar' of dramatic technique disagree on whether this is unacceptably anomalous staging.

² E. Christmann, *Bemerkungen zum Text der Medea des Euripides* (diss. Heidelberg, 1962), pp. 125–45.

Mastronarde thinks it is possible to stage the text as we have it. He claims that Medea's turning away from the children marks a break in 'contact', that the children (and an attendant he thinks accompanied them after the Paedagogus has been sent in) no longer listen to her. At the same time, the children are aware of Medea's exclamation ἀ ἀ, which causes them to halt.³

But it is hard to see how one can have it both ways: either the speech is analogous to those uttered to a character's retreating back, in which case they will pay no attention to what Medea says, or 'contact' is maintained, and the children will hear all of Medea's words. Bain, by contrast, formulates the quite unsurprising rule that orders given to mutes are carried out with little or no delay and shows that its apparent violations all conform to a small number of types. On this basis he examines our passage, for which he is unable to find a convincing parallel, and urges deletion of 1056–80.⁴

A possible parallel is adduced by Erbse (p. 68) from 89–105 of this very play. At 89, the Nurse (not the Paedagogus, as Erbse says) tells the children 'Go into the house, for all will be well, children'. They are still on stage to be addressed at 98 and are finally sent off quickly at 105. It should be noted, however, that the Nurse after her order to the children keeps talking to the Paedagogus, advising him to keep the children out of Medea's sight, and then addresses the children themselves. It is unthinkable for the Paedagogus to walk off in the middle of the Nurse's speech and unnatural for the children to leave before he does or while the Nurse is addressing them, especially since he is to guide them past the dangers. The execution of the order is delayed by the one who gave it. There can be no doubt that Bain is on strong ground when he claims that the transmitted text shows a technique that is very odd for the fifth century.

(d) Excision makes the structure of her speech clearer: Medea is resolved, she weakens once, but her resolve grows firm again and she goes off. In the transmitted text, we have four changes of mind. The only thing the last two changes add is the notion that now Medea must kill her children not to satisfy her desire for revenge but to save them from the wrath of the Corinthians. We have already seen reasons for regarding this as a blemish rather than an improvement, but even if we could persuade ourselves that Medea's portrait gained in depth from this piece of irrationality (by arguing, e.g., that it shows that Medea's maternal feelings are so strong that only her own unconscious subterfuge can defeat them), we must not fail to notice that 1078–80 take back even this, for Medea reverts to wrath as a motive for the murder and makes no further mention of its supposed necessity. The additional backing and filling therefore accomplishes nothing.

Other difficulties concern the wording and the thought of the end of the speech. (e) In 1078 *κακά* seems to have a different sense from *κακοῖς* in 1077, 'wrongs' instead of 'misfortunes'. This is sloppy stylistically and suggests confusion of thought. (f) More important is *βουλευμάτων* in 1079. This is a strange word to use for the knowledge that she is doing wrong. Furthermore, while the word here denotes considerations that tell against the murder, in 1044, 1048, and every other place except 886 where Medea uses it, it refers to her plan of revenge.

³ D. J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979), p. 110. Incidentally, I do not see why he posits an attendant in addition to the Paedagogus. K. H. Lee, *per litteras*, asks 'Why get rid of the Paedagogus if not to leave Medea alone with the children?'

⁴ D. Bain, *Masters, Servants and Orders in Greek Tragedy: Some Aspects of Dramatic Technique and Convention* (Manchester, 1981), p. 33. See also his earlier *Actors and Audience: A Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 26–7.

(g) Lastly, lines 1078–80, famous in antiquity and modern times alike, express in striking and memorable language a theme that is conspicuously absent from the rest of the play. This point is made well by Zwierlein (p. 35):

[W]enn man sich bei der Bestimmung des tragischen Gehaltes von den berühmten Versen 1078ff. leiten lassen müsste, wäre man gezwungen, einen Widerstreit zwischen Leidenschaft und besserem Wissen in das Stück hineinzutragen, der dort sonst keine Rolle spielt – und der auch in seiner sprachlichen Ausgestaltung höchst verdächtig ist.

Lines of such ‘high sentence’, we instinctively feel, ought to be important for the meaning of the whole. Yet those who start from them are able to say little to the point about the play,⁵ while critics who begin with the shape of the play as a whole and who interpret Medea’s great speech (correctly, in my view) not as a process of decision, but as the revelation of the cost to Medea of a decision already taken, are not able to explain satisfactorily why its last three lines are phrased as they are. This, of course, is scarcely a conclusive argument for excision, but it has some weight. Any solution that can meet this objection will be that much more persuasive.

Thus far, the case for excision rests upon the striking convergence of arguments which, though weighty, are not when taken singly absolutely decisive. It must be noticed where they converge most clearly and where they seem to diverge. It is impressive that the beginning of the trouble is clearly marked: arguments (a), (b), (c), and (d) all point to 1056. The signposts for the end of the trouble are less impressively univocal. For while 1078–80 suggest the hypothesis that the whole twenty-five-line passage is an interpolation, (a), (b), and (c), and possibly (d), could be set to rights by shorter deletions.

When we turn to the linguistic case against these lines our doubt about where the trouble ends increases. Our knowledge of the grammar, metre, vocabulary, and style of the fifth century rests on more instances than that of its dramatic technique, and violations of these regularities thus constitute stronger evidence. It is hard to imagine a truly convincing case against a long passage that did not contain at least some items of this kind, though of course one cannot logically exclude the possibility of an interpolator who made no such errors. When we consider our passage from this point of view, a curious fact emerges: our putative interpolator has offended several times in the first nine lines against these linguistic norms. Thereafter, unless we are willing to ascribe to him the anapaest in 1077, which is almost certainly due to corruption, he writes verse that is technically perfect and (apart from the problem of *κακοῖς* and *κακά*, to be discussed below) stylistically impressive.

Here are the first nine lines:

ᾄ ᾄ·
 μὴ δῆτα, θυμέ, μὴ κύ γ' ἐργάσῃ τάδε·
 ἕασον αὐτούς, ὦ τάλαν, φείσαι τέκνων·
 ἐκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ζῶντες εὐφρανοῦσί σε.
 μὰ τοὺς παρ' Αἰδῆι νερτέροισι ἀλάστορας,
 οὔτοι ποτ' ἔσται τοῦθ' ὅπως ἐχθροῖς ἐγὼ
 παῖδας παρήσω τοὺς ἔμοιός καθυβρίσαι. 1060
 πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη καταθανεῖν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χρῆ,
 ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν οἷπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν.
 πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κοῦκ ἐκφεύζεται·

The difficulties are the following: (1) The most important is in 1064: of the two possible ways of reading this line (*ταῦτα* as the death of the children or of the

⁵ See the trenchant criticisms of both the *geistesgeschichtliche Schule* and the *Seelendrama* approach in E. Schlesinger, ‘Zu Euripides’ Medea’, *Hermes* 94 (1966), 26–53 and Lloyd-Jones’s summary (p. 51) of the *fin-de-siècle* currents of thought that gave rise to them.

princess) the one that would allow the line to be Attic Greek is ruled out by the context. It is impossible to understand *ταῦτα* as the death of the princess or to supply her as the subject to *ἐκφεύξεται*. The first of these statements will be evident to anyone who reads 1059–64 without thinking of what he knows is to follow. As for the second, it ought to be self-evident, once the principle is stated, that if two third-person verbs in one line are connected by 'and' and the first has a subject expressed, the other will have the same subject unless this impression is corrected in the following line. The subaudition of 'she', recommended by Verrall and others, is virtually impossible.⁶ The only way to give our two verbs different subjects would be to assume a lacuna after 1064, e.g.

*πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κοῦκ ἐκφεύξεται
(κὸρη Κρέοντος μὴ οὐ θανεῖν κακῆ κακῶς).*

It follows then that *ταῦτα* is the subject of both verbs and refers to the death of the children. We must therefore translate 'These things are in any case (as good as) done and will not be avoided'.⁷ While opinions may differ about the acceptability of the perfect in this sense (see Reeve, p. 53 and n. 3), *ἐκφεύξεται* as a passive is contrary to Attic usage. (See LSJ s.v.) What we have then is a clumsy and ungrammatical line intended to end the passage before it with a note of inevitability and finality, qualities which the logic of the preceding lines, as we have seen, in no way justifies.

(2) 1062–3 have long been ejected as a histrionic borrowing from 1240–1, where they are perfectly in place. They do, however, seem to be necessary to such argument as there is, as Reeve (p. 53) noted, for without them 'Medea will not have announced her intention of killing the children between the opposite announcement in 1056–8 and the parenthetic reference to killing them in 1068'. Editors have frequently bracketed just these two lines, both because of the exact repetition and because Medea should not be made to speak so plainly in front of the children. But since the lines are really indispensable, the passage would seem to stand or fall together. The suspicion is strong that the author of 1056–64 is borrowing from elsewhere in the play, and it becomes even stronger when we see that he seems to have modelled 1061 closely on 782. Borrowing of this sort is, of course, a well-known habit of interpolators.

Other points are less weighty: (3) *τοὺς παρ' Αἰδίη νερέτερος* (1059) is pleonastic. (4) *ἐκεῖ* (1058) here must mean 'at Athens', a somewhat vague reference. Contrast the expressive use of the word to mean the other world in 1073.

The lines thus betray their origin by the illogicality of their argument, a palpable grammatical error, and the fact that they borrow from elsewhere in the play. It is not hard to see the motive for their manufacture. Neophron, whether he was the

⁶ Erbse (p. 73) writes '*Ταῦτα* kann nur [!] das Attentat bezeichnen, und als Subjekt zu *ἐκφεύξεται* versteht man mühelos [!] die Person, für die es kein Entrinnen gibt'. One can only gasp at Erbse's audacious dogmatism. The possibility many scholars regard as by far the less likely of two is described as the *only* possibility, and the suppletion many consider impossible is 'effortless'.

Kvičala proposed transposing 1064 to follow 1066, as one of my anonymous readers pointed out. This makes it easier to supply Creon's daughter, though one would still welcome a parallel to the change of subject between two third-person verbs in the same line connected by 'and'. This remedy would also commend itself more if there were not so many other problems in the passage.

⁷ Steidle, p. 160 n. 51, suggests that, grammatically difficult as it may be, *ταῦτα* must be the subject of *ἐκφεύξεται* and the verb must be taken either as a passive or – better – as active, with suppletion of *τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι*. His clear-sighted rejection of the other alternatives is to be commended, but his last suggestion – supported by no parallels – strikes me as desperate. It may be that at some point a Greek wrote *ταῦτα οὐκ ἐκφεύξεται* and meant by it 'these things shall not escape fulfilment', but I doubt whether it was a fifth-century dramatist who did so.

fifth-century poet or, as Page plausibly argued, a fourth-century descendant, made his Medea apostrophise her *thumos*. The author of 1056–64 thought that Euripides could be improved by the addition of similar high fustian⁸ and dramatic suspense raised by yet two more changes of mind.

The contrast with 1065–80 is marked.

καὶ δὴ ἴπι κρατὶ στέφανος, ἐν πέπλοισι δὲ	1065
νύμφη τύραννος ὀλλυται, κάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ.	
ἀλλ', εἶμι γὰρ δὴ τλημονεστάτην ὁδὸν	
καὶ τοῦδε πέμψω τλημονεστέραν ἔτι,	
παῖδας προσεπιεῖν βούλομαι· δότ', ὦ τέκνα,	
δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιᾶν χέρα.	1070
ὦ φιλιτάτη χεῖρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα	
καὶ σχῆμα καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενές τέκνων.	
εὐδαιμονοῖτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ· τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε	
πατὴρ ἀφείλετ'. ὦ γλυκεία προσβολή,	
ὦ μαλθακὸς χρῶς πνεύμα θ' ἤδιστον τέκνων.	1075
χωρεῖτε χωρεῖτ'. οὐκέτ' εἶμι προσβλέπειν	
οἷα τε ἴπρὸς ὑμᾶς† ἀλλὰ νικῶμαι κακοῖς.	
καὶ μανθάνω μὲν ὅσα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά,	
θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,	
ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.	1080

Here the style is vigorous, lucid, rhetorically pointed, and passionate, better poetry, as Reeve candidly admits, than the corresponding fragment of Neophon.⁹ These lines would do credit to any fifth-century dramatist. Whether or not we believe in an interpolator who can write as well as this (even Euripides did not always attain this degree of polish), it seems clear that 1065–80 exhibit a talent of an entirely different order from 1056–64, that they are the work of a writer who does not need to borrow because he can write tragic trimeters superlatively himself. Two separate interpolations remain a possibility, but that is an expensive hypothesis.

It is not merely that the author commits no palpable errors. His style has positive virtues, and his characteristic mannerisms are those of the great age of Attic tragedy. His management of enjambment at 1065, 1069, 1073, and 1074 gives a suppleness to the speech. In 1068 he caps an already strong expression with a comparative modified by ἔτι (cf. *Alc.* 1082, *Hip.* 914, [A.] *PV* 987, etc.). In 1072 *σχῆμα* is a Euripidean *Lieblingswort* to describe how a beloved object strikes the eye (cf. *Alc.* 912, *Andr.* 1 with Stevens's notes, *Hec.* 619, but also *S. Phil.* 952). Anadiplosis filling the first half of a trimeter (1076) is a mannerism of Euripides (cf. *Alc.* 328, 1093, *Med.* 711, *Hclid.* 225, 574, *Andr.* 678, 980, *Ion* 425, etc.) but is also Sophoclean (*Aj.* 854, *OT* 830, *Phil.* 814, 816, etc.).

There is a strong indication then that the end of the trouble may not be 1080 but

⁸ There are not many passages in Greek tragedy which deserve to be called 'high fustian' more richly than 1056–8:

Nay, nay, my pride and anger, do not so!
Let be, hardhearted wretch, spare thou my sons!
Living with me shall they make glad thy heart.

Translation is more than usually adequate. Note that the author either makes Medea apostrophise her anger, and the pronouns in 1058 ('me' and 'thy' above) distinguish her *thumos* from Medea herself, which is a frigid conceit; or the *thumos* is Medea herself, in which case the pronouns in 1058 are just bad writing.

⁹ Reeve says (p. 56 n. 4), 'As regards the rhetorical structure of the two [Neophon and Euripides] Jachmann is right, but there is more poetry in *Med.* 1056–80 (1069–75).' I note that he seems to wish to exclude from this praise the earlier lines in the passage, which shows, I think, that his *Stilgefühl* agrees roughly with mine.

1064. Stylistically, only 1056–64 are at all suspicious. And, as it happens, excision of just these lines provides us with four of the advantages of wholesale athetesis.

For if we remove 1056–64, (a) Medea has already answered her own suggestion to take the children to Athens by reaffirming the necessity of revenge. That answer stands, and Athens is mentioned no more. (The consideration 'I must kill the children or the Corinthians will' belongs in her next monologue, where she is no longer considering *what* to do but *when*.)

(b) The language that would most clearly reveal to the children Medea's intention to harm them is at 1056–8 and 1062–3. Lines 1068 and 1073–4, by contrast, are no more explicit than 1046–7. (It is unnecessary to suppose that Medea's *ἔκει* in 1073 has any meaning whatever for the children. This is true not only in view of their age, which is presumed not to notice the pointedly vague references by which adults mask their meaning, but also by virtue of the general convention in tragedy by which even adults pay no heed to incongruities in another character's ambiguous speech that would not have passed unnoticed in real life. Cf. *Tro.* 260–71, where Hecuba does not press Talthybius on the strange details of his account of Polyxena, and *Hel.* 1418, where Theoclymenus takes no notice of Helen's odd wish.)

(c) Only six-and-one-third, not fifteen-and-one-third, lines now intervene between Medea's ordering of the children into the house and her announced intention to say farewell to them. It is not merely a matter of the time needed to say these respective line-groups (22 seconds versus 55 seconds in my reading) but of the kind of things that fill the interval. In the transmitted version, Medea orders the children into the house, and they ignore her and stand by while she turns away from them and debates with herself in words clearly not intended for their ears and formally addressed to her *thumos*. With 1056–64 removed, 1065 becomes, as I shall show below, a continuation of the discourse begun in 1053. 'Go into the house. I shall not change my purpose. The time is short. But I want to say farewell first.' There is no sharp shift in the audience Medea is addressing. The imperative, of course, is addressed to the children and the rest to the Chorus. But since Medea has all along been speaking to the children but speaking over their heads to herself and to the Chorus, the distinction is not sharp. Whenever she speaks in this speech, the children are part of her audience. Since she continues to speak in the same vein after giving her order, she herself delays its being carried out. A parallel passage from this play is 89–105, discussed above. Bain's 'rule' is thus saved, for her order is not carried out because it is countermanded by the giver a few seconds later.

(d) There is now only one weakening of purpose, that in 1040–7. Thereafter Medea recovers the firmness of her resolve and keeps it, in spite of the wrenching of her maternal feelings, to the very end of the speech.

Before proceeding to the end, where problems still await us, we must pause to examine the passage closely at the point of excision. It will be seen that 1065ff. join up with 1055 at least as well as with 1064. Here are 1053–70:

χωρεῖτε, παῖδες, ἐς δόμους. ὅτω δὲ μὴ	
θέμις παρῆναι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι θύμασιν,	
αὐτῶι μελήσει· χεῖρα δ' οὐ διαφθερώ.	1055
καὶ δὴ 'πὶ κρατὶ στέφανος, ἐν πέπλοισι δὲ	1065
νύμφη τύραννος ὀλλυται, κάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ.	
ἀλλ', εἶμι γὰρ δὴ τλημονεστᾶτην ὀδόν	
καὶ τοῦδε πέμψω τλημονεστῆραν ἔτι,	
παῖδας προσειπεῖν βούλομαι· δότ', ὦ τέκνα,	
δότ' ἀσπᾶσθαι μητρὶ δεξιᾶν χεῖρα.	1070

'I shall not weaken my hand', says Medea, resolved once more. 'Lo (or "in fact" or "already")¹⁰ the crown is on the head and the royal bride is perishing, I know it full well.' (This fact means that there will be little if any time for delay.) 'But, since I go now on an utterly wretched path and must send these children on a path more wretched still, I wish to speak to them.' There is a change of mind only about when they are to go in. Medea decides to say farewell to them first. As she speaks to them, she is overcome once more with the magnitude of her loss but this time without any change of mind. Lines 1078–80 express, as we shall see, her determination to persist in the face of her own personal misery.

The last three problems concern 1076–80. They all have the same source, a misunderstanding of the passage that is evident in citations of it in antiquity and has only begun to be challenged in our day. It is to be doubted whether misquotation has ever had so great an effect on the interpretation of a work of literature. We are familiar with inaccurate citation: 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing' (Pope wrote 'learning'), 'Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new' (Milton wrote 'woods'), etc. We are also familiar with the misapplication of famous phrases, like Hamlet's 'a custom more honoured in the breach than in th'observance' cited as if it meant a custom more often broken than kept instead of one more *creditable* to break than to keep. *Med.* 1078–80 has certainly suffered the second and probably the first of these two kinds of misquotation. And since the passage is both prominent and memorable, these misquotations have had a large effect on the interpretation of the whole play.

Moralists in antiquity, beginning with Chrysippus, quote these lines as an expression of the conflict between moral insight and passion.¹¹ The meaning they use them to express is 'I see what wrong I am about to commit, but passion is stronger than my insight, passion, which causes the greatest harm to mortals', i.e. to those who suffer at the hands of the passionate. This reading has gone unchallenged until quite recently. But both Christmann and Lloyd-Jones see what the lines must mean if they are to make any contribution to the play and if their Greek is to make sense: 'I cannot look at you, for I am overwhelmed by my misery. And I know clearly what misery I shall suffer, yet my anger is more powerful than my calculation, anger which causes the greatest harm to mortals', i.e. not to others but to the wrathful themselves. In

¹⁰ See Denniston, *GP* 250–2 for the use of non-connective *καὶ δὴ* to mark 'vivid perception by mind, ear, or eye', 'the provision or completion of something required by the circumstances', and as an approximation to *ἤδη*. Fortunately we need not assign our passage exclusively to one of these categories.

¹¹ Strictly speaking, we cannot tell from Galen, our source, just how Chrysippus interpreted these lines. He seems to have used them in an argument about the nature of the conflict between reason and passion, maintaining that the passions are really a form of judgement: see *SVF* III, p. 124 and compare II, pp. 255–6. Galen objected that the lines contradict Chrysippus' thesis. But whether Chrysippus thought that Medea's lines showed passion overcoming moral judgement or prudent self-regard is not recoverable. Other authors, however, make it clear that at some point Medea's lines became a tag to express the defeat of one's sense of moral obligation, especially toward others. See Galen, *CMG* v.306 K. (= III 3.14–16 in P. De Lacy's edition [Berlin, 1978–80]), Plutarch, *De vit. pud.* 533d, who names perjury and other similar crimes as the bad things one knows well one is doing when giving in to improper requests, and Lucian, *Apol.* 10. This interpretation is taken over by B. Snell, 'Das früheste Zeugnis über Sokrates', *Philologus* 97 (1948), 125–35 and *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), 47–69. It subtly influences much subsequent discussion of the play. See for example H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (3rd ed., rpt. 1970), p. 196.

Readers interested in the discussion of this speech by Stoics and others will profit from C. Gill, 'Did Chrysippus understand Medea?', *Phronesis* 28 (1983), 136–49, a reference I owe to Professor Reeve.

other words, in these lines Medea's desire for vengeance overcomes not her sense of right and wrong but her prudent desire to avoid pain.

This interpretation answers all of the last three objections for (e) it means that *κακοῖς* in 1077 and *κακά* in 1078 have precisely the same reference, the misery that Medea's action will entail for Medea herself. Now (f) *βουλευμάτων* in 1079 means not 'knowledge of right and wrong' but simply 'thoughts, deliberations, calculations', a much more natural meaning for the word. Cf. *Hec.* 744 where Agamemnon says that he is unable to divine the path Hecuba's thoughts are taking, *ᾧ δὲ βουλευμάτων*.¹² There is in fact a parallel at 1044–5:

*χαιρέτω βουλεύματα
τὰ πρόσθεν· ἄξω παῖδας ἐκ γαίας ἐμούς.*

As Christmann points out (p. 138), the attributive *τὰ πρόσθεν* implicitly contrasts one plan, which aims at satisfying her sense of revenge, with another plan, to rescue the children. When Medea contrives the ruin of her enemies, that is a *βούλευμα*. When she calculates and tried to avoid the harm revenge will cause to herself, the same word applies. It is calculations of this latter sort that are overborne in our passage by Medea's wrath.

(g) Lastly, these lines are now central and not peripheral to the play. Nowhere else does Medea concern herself with the morality of killing her children, as the philosophers who quote her make her do. When once she has chosen the means of avenging herself on Jason, the chief question is whether she is willing to pay the full price this revenge demands. (Cf. 791–2, 818–19, 1036–7, 1046–7, 1246–50.) Lines 1078–80 sum up Medea's decision by insisting both on its terrible cost and on its inevitability. It is noteworthy that Zwierlein, in the article which argues for athetesis of 1056–80, summarises the play in words that could almost be a paraphrase of 1076–80:

So ergibt sich denn der folgende unauf lösliche *tragische Konflikt*: Die Rache ist im Interesse der Selbstachtung unausweichlich; zureichende Rache bietet nur die Ermordung von Jasons Kindern. Dieser Mord stürzt sie, die liebende Mutter, selbst in tiefstes Leid, das sie ein Leben lang beweinen wird (p. 35).

The Medea we have rescued from the distortions of the quoters is the same heroic Medea we see in the first half of this speech and elsewhere in the play. The nearest parallel to Medea's lines here has likewise been misunderstood by those who are eager to write *Geistesgeschichte*: Phaedra's speech at *Hip.* 373ff. is also about how men avoid or fail to avoid disaster to themselves, not injury to others.¹³

The only real obstacle to this interpretation is that *δρᾶν κακά* in 1078 must mean roughly the same as *παθεῖν κακά* or *πράσσειν κακῶς*. Here I suggest that the passage

¹² That *βουλευμάτων* in 1079 cannot mean 'moral insight, knowledge of right and wrong' is clear both from the word itself and from its use elsewhere in the play. Emendations have been proposed, e.g. *μαθημάτων* (Koechly) or *σωφρόνων* for *τῶν ἐμῶν* (Stadtmueller), but they lack any probability. Diller's attempt to make *κρείσων* mean 'in control of' and Dihle's attempt to interpret *θυμός* as Medea's tenderer feelings and to read the whole passage as a renunciation of her plans have been justly rejected. See H. Diller, *Hermes* 94 (1966), 267–75; A. Dihle, 'Euripides' Medea', *SB Heidelberg*, Phil.-hist. Kl. 5 (Heidelberg, 1977); Diller is answered by Reeve, p. 59 n. 2, Dihle by Zwierlein, pp. 35–7.

¹³ Phaedra's whole speech has been badly misunderstood, largely because of its imagined relevance to the history of ideas. On the argument of the speech, see D. Claus, 'Phaedra and the Socratic Paradox', *YCS* 22 (1972), 223–38 and D. Kovacs, 'Shame, Pleasure, and Honor in Phaedra's Great Speech', *AJP* 101 (1980), 287–303. Another good parallel is *Alc.* 1080, tellingly cited by Steidle (n. 2 above), p. 148 n. 82 against Snell's *Geistesgeschichte*.

has suffered not only from the misapplication but also from the inaccurate citation of the quoters. The moralists who quote these lines all read *δρᾶν μέλλω* in 1078 while all of our MSS. except L read *τολμήσω*. The text of the quoters is what is printed by most modern editors. This seems contrary to the canons of critical practice, for in addition to the fact that the main tradition of an author is more likely to preserve the truth than the indirect tradition, *δρᾶν μέλλω* looks like a simplification or trivialisation of *τολμήσω*, while it is hard to see what could have induced anyone, copyist or quoter, with *δρᾶν μέλλω* before him to write *τολμήσω*.

But while *τολμήσω* is more likely than *δρᾶν μέλλω* on purely transcriptional grounds to be what Euripides wrote, its strongest claims are those of sense. The verb *τολμάω* has both an active sense, 'dare', and a passive sense, 'endure', but the active, like the passive, contains an element of suffering and endurance (the root is cognate with Latin *tuli*), of steeling oneself to do a thing in the teeth of inclination. The word might be passive here, as it is at *Alc.* 277, 985, *Hec.* 326, 333, *HF* 307, and fr. 702.¹⁴ But the active gives good sense as well: Medea will steel herself to inflict *kaka* and thus suffer them herself. This reading thus removes the only obstacle to the interpretation of Christmann and Lloyd-Jones, and the passage translates itself:

And I know well what grief I shall endure, but my wrath overbears my calculations, wrath that brings mortal men their gravest hurt.¹⁵

Knowing as we do the hazardous conditions under which Greek tragedy has come down to us, in particular its susceptibility to interpolation by actors, we cannot refuse on principle to delete even long passages of passable verse if they are ruinous to their context and if a strong linguistic case can be made:¹⁶ *Cuncta prius temptanda, sed inmedicabile vulnus ense recidendum est*. We are well quit, as Reeve says, of all the *Geistesgeschichte* that has been written on the basis of *Med.* 1078–80, as well as of all the anomalies noted above. But when the text is about to undergo the amputation of one of European drama's most powerful passages, and the linguistic indications are so dubious, it is time to get a second opinion. In my judgement, minor surgery is all that is necessary.¹⁷

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¹⁴ Another example may be *Med.* 1051, where we should perhaps read *τολμητέον τάδ'*; This makes the reference of *τάδε* easier to understand besides making *ἀλλά* function more naturally.

¹⁵ It is not only a heroic Medea we see here but also, as I will argue elsewhere, a Medea who is the unwitting agent of higher powers, which use her for their ends without concerning themselves with the ruin of her happiness. Line 1080 suggests the Achilles theme of a wrath that brings ruin on its object (a ruin that is both deserved by him and intended by the agent, as Achilles' wrath brought harm to Agamemnon and the Greeks) but that also causes misery to the wrathful man himself, both effects belonging to the inscrutable ordinance of Zeus.

¹⁶ I have elsewhere recommended deletion of lengthy passages on the ground that they stand in varying degrees of contradiction with their context: *Andr.* 333–51 (*HSCP* 81 [1977], 148–56), *Ion* 595–606 and 621–32 (*TAPA* 109 [1979], 116–24), *Sup.* 442–55 and *Pho.* 549–67 (*GRBS* 23 [1982], 31–50). In all instances there is a strong linguistic case to be made.

¹⁷ Since I am not the first to propose minor surgery, I ought to make clear why I am not satisfied with other proposals. G. A. Seeck, 'Euripides *Medea* 1059–68: A Problem of Interpretation', *GRBS* 9 (1968), 291ff., suggests deleting 1060–3. This eliminates the motif of external necessity for the murder but leaves the desperate problem of 1064 exactly where it was. Lloyd-Jones (p. 56) suggests deleting 1059–63, but the absence of any adversative in 1064 to show that Medea has changed her mind once more is a serious drawback. In addition, 1064 remains a problem.