

How I weep for you—I cannot see you now . . .
just thinking of all your days to come, the bitterness,
the life that rough mankind will thrust upon you.
Where are the public gatherings you can join,
the banquets of the clans? Home you'll come,
in tears, cut off from the sight of it all,
the brilliant rites unfinished.

And when you reach perfection, ripe for marriage,
who will he be, my dear ones? Risking all
to shoulder the curse that weighs down my parents,
yes and you too—that wounds us all together.
What more misery could you want?
Your father killed his father, sowed his mother,
one, one and the selfsame womb sprang you—
he cropped the very roots of his existence.

Such disgrace, and you must bear it all!
Who will marry you then? Not a man on earth.
Your doom is clear: you'll wither away to nothing,
single, without a child.

[Turning to CREON.]

Oh Creon,
you are the only father they have now . . .
we who brought them into the world
are gone, both gone at a stroke—
Don't let them go begging, abandoned,
women without men. Your own flesh and blood!
Never bring them down to the level of my pains.
Pity them. Look at them, so young, so vulnerable,
shorn of everything—you're their only hope.
Promise me, noble Creon, touch my hand!

[Reaching toward CREON, who draws back.]
You, little ones, if you were old enough
to understand, there is much I'd tell you.
Now, as it is, I'd have you say a prayer.
Pray for life, my children,
live where you are free to grow and season.
Pray god you find a better life than mine,
the father who begot you.

CREON: Enough.

You've wept enough. Into the palace now.

OEDIPUS: I must, but I find it very hard.

CREON: Time is the great healer, you will see.

OEDIPUS: I am going—you know on what condition?

CREON: Tell me. I'm listening.

OEDIPUS: Drive me out of Thebes, in exile.

CREON: Not I. Only the gods can give you that.

OEDIPUS: Surely the gods hate me so much—

CREON: You'll get your wish at once.

You consent?

OEDIPUS: I try to say what I mean; it's my habit.

CREON: I try to say what I mean; it's my habit.

OEDIPUS: Then take me away. It's time.

CREON: Come along, let go of the children.

OEDIPUS: No—
don't take them away from me, not now! No no no!

[Clutching his daughters as the guards wrench them loose and take them through the palace doors.]

CREON: Still the king, the master of all things?
No more: here your power ends.

None of your power follows you through life.

[Exit OEDIPUS and CREON to the palace. The CHORUS comes forward to address the audience directly.]

CHORUS: People of Thebes, my countrymen, look on Oedipus.

He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance,
he rose to power, a man beyond all power.

Who could behold his greatness without envy?

Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him.

Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day,

count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.

[Exit in procession.]

EURIPIDES

480–406 B.C.

Euripides' *Medea*, produced in 431 B.C., the year that brought the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, appeared earlier than Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, but it has a bitterness that is more in keeping with the spirit of a later age. If *Oedipus* is, in one sense, a warning to a generation that has embarked on an intellectual revolution, *Medea* is the ironic expression of the disillusion that comes after the shipwreck. In this play we are conscious for the first time of an attitude characteristic of modern literature, the artist's feeling of separation from the audience, the isolation of the poet. "Often previously," says *Medea* to the king,

Through being considered clever I have suffered much . . .
If you put new ideas before the eyes of fools
They'll think you foolish and worthless into the bargain;
And if you are thought superior to those who have
Some reputation for learning, you will become hated.

The common background of audience and poet is disappearing, the old certainties are being undermined, the city divided. Euripides is the first Greek poet to suffer the fate of so many of the great modern writers: rejected by most of his contemporaries (he rarely won first prize and was the favorite target for the scurrilous humor of the comic poets), he was universally admired and revered by the Greeks of the centuries that followed his death.

It is significant that what little biographical information we have for Euripides makes no mention of military service or political office; unlike Aeschylus, who fought in the ranks at Marathon, and Sophocles, who took an active part in public

affairs from youth to advanced old age, Euripides seems to have lived a private, an intellectual life. Younger than Sophocles (though they died in the same year), he was more receptive to the critical theories and the rhetorical techniques offered by the Sophist teachers; his plays often subject received ideas to fundamental questioning, expressed in vivid dramatic debate. His *Medea* is typical of his iconoclastic approach; his choice of subject and central characters is in itself a challenge to established canons. He still dramatizes myth, but the myth he chooses is exotic and disturbing, and the protagonist is not a man but a woman. Medea is both woman and foreigner—that is, in terms of the audience's prejudice and practice she is a representative of the two free-born groups in Athenian society that had almost no rights at all (though the male foreign resident had more rights than the native woman). The tragic hero is no longer a king, "one who is highly renowned and prosperous such as Oedipus," but a woman who, because she finds no redress for her wrongs in society, is driven by her passion to violate that society's most sacred laws in a rebellion against its typical representative, Jason, her husband. She is not just a woman and a foreigner, she is also a person of great intellectual power. Compared with her the credulous king and her complacent husband are children, and once her mind is made up, she moves them like pawns to their proper places in her barbaric game. The myth is used for new purposes, to shock the members of the audience, attack their deepest prejudices, and shake them out of their complacent pride in the superiority of Greek masculinity.

But the play is more compelling than that. Before it is over, our sympathies have come full circle; the contempt with which we regard the Jason of the opening scenes turns to pity as we feel the measure of his loss and the ferocity of Medea's revenge. Medea's passion has carried her too far; the death of Kreon (Creon) and his daughter we might have accepted, but the murder of the children is too much. It was, of course, meant to be. Euripides' theme, like Homer's, is violence, but this is the unspeakable violence of the oppressed, which is greater than the violence of the oppressor and which, because it has been long pent up, cannot be controlled.

In this, as in the other Greek plays, the gods have their place. In *Oresteia* the will of Zeus is manifested in every action and implied in every word; in *Oedipus the King* the gods bide their time and watch Oedipus fulfill the truth of their prophecy, but in *Medea*, the divine will, which is revealed at the end, is enigmatic and, far from bringing harmony, concludes the play with a terrifying discord. All through *Medea* the human beings involved call on the gods; two especially are singled out for attention: Earth and Sun. It is by these two gods that Medea makes Aegeus swear to give her refuge in Athens, the chorus invokes them to prevent Medea's violence against her sons, and Jason wonders how Medea can look on Earth and Sun after she has killed her own children. These emphatic appeals clearly raise the question of the attitude of the gods, and the answer to the question is a shock. We are not told what Earth does, but Sun sends the magic chariot on which Medea makes her escape. His reason, too, is stated: it is not any concern for justice but the fact that Medea is his granddaughter. Euripides is here using the letter of the myth for his own purposes. This jarring detail emphasizes the significance of the whole. The play creates a world in which there is no relation whatsoever between the powers that rule the universe and the fundamental laws of human morality. It dramatizes disorder, not just the disorder of the family of Jason and Medea but the disorder of the universe as a whole. It is the nightmare in which the dream of the fifth century B.C. was to end, the senseless fury and degradation of permanent violence. "Flow backward to your sources, sacred rivers," the chorus sings, "And let the world's great order be reversed."

For a short, general survey of Euripidean drama, see B. M. W. Knox in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* (1985), pp. 316–39. Perceptive analyses of *Medea* can be found in Emily A. McDermott, *Euripides' Medea: The Incarna-*

tion of Disorder (1989), and E. Segal, ed., *Euripides, A Collection of Critical Essays* (1968). Knox, "The Medea of Euripides," and P. E. Easterling, "The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*," both in *Yale Classical Studies* 24 (1977), will also be helpful to students.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

The following list uses common English syllables and stress accents to provide rough equivalents of selected words whose pronunciation may be unfamiliar to the general reader.

Aegeus: ai'-jioos	Medea: me-dee'-uh
Aphrodite: a-froh-dai'-tee	Pelias: pee'-lee-as
Hecate: he'-kah-tee	Pieria: pai-ee'-ree-uh / pee-ehr'-ee-uh
Iolcus: yol'-kuhs / ee-ol'-kuhs	

Medea¹

CHARACTERS

MEDEA, princess of Colchis and wife of Jason	AIGEUS, king of Athens
JASON, son of Aeson, king of Iolcos	NURSE to Medea
TWO CHILDREN of Medea and Jason	TUTOR to Medea's children
KREON, king of Corinth	MESSENGER
	CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN

[SCENE—In front of MEDEA's house in Corinth. Enter from the house MEDEA'S NURSE.]

NURSE: How I wish the Argo² never had reached the land
Of Colchis, skimming through the blue Symplegades,
Nor ever had fallen in the glades of Pelion³
The smitten fir-tree to furnish oars for the hands
Of heroes who in Pelias⁴ name attempted
The Golden Fleece! For then my mistress Medea⁵
Would not have sailed for the towers of the land of Iolcos,
Her heart on fire with passionate love for Jason;
Nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias
To kill their father,⁶ and now be living here
In Corinth⁷ with her husband and children. She gave
Pleasure to the people of her land of exile,

1. Translated by Rex Warner. 2. The ship in which Jason and his companions sailed on the quest for the Golden Fleece. 3. A mountain in northern Greece near Iolcos, the place from which Jason sailed. The Symplegades were clashing rocks that crushed ships endeavoring to pass between them. They were supposed to be located at the Hellespont, the passage between the Mediterranean and Black seas. 4. He seized the kingdom of Iolcos, expelling Aeson, Jason's father. When Jason came to claim his rights, Pelias sent him to get the Golden Fleece. 5. Daughter of the king of Colchis who fell in love with Jason and helped him take the Golden Fleece away from her own country. 6. After Jason and Medea returned to Iolcos, Medea (who had a reputation as a sorceress) persuaded Pelias' daughters to cut Pelias up and boil the pieces, which would restore him to youth. The experiment was, of course, unsuccessful, and Pelias' son banished Jason and Medea from the kingdom. 7. On the isthmus between the Peloponnese and Attica, where they took refuge. In Euripides' time it was a wealthy trading city, a commercial rival of Athens.

And she herself helped Jason in every way.
 This is indeed the greatest salvation of all, —
 For the wife not to stand apart from the husband.
 But now there's hatred everywhere. Love is diseased.
 For, deserting his own children and my mistress,
 Jason has taken a royal wife to his bed,
 The daughter of the ruler of this land, Kreon.
 And poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the
 Vows they made to each other, the right hands clasped
 In eternal promise. She calls upon the gods to witness
 What sort of return Jason has made to her love.
 She lies without food and gives herself up to suffering,
 Wasting away every moment of the day in tears.
 So it has gone since she knew herself slighted by him.
 Not stirring an eye, not moving her face from the ground,
 No more than either a rock or surging sea water
 She listens when she is given friendly advice.
 Except that sometimes she twists back her white neck and
 Moans to herself, calling out on her father's name,
 And her land, and her home betrayed when she came away with
 A man who now is determined to dishonor her.
 Poor creature, she has discovered by her sufferings
 What it means to one not to have lost one's own country.
 She has turned from the children and does not like to see them.
 I am afraid she may think of some dreadful thing,
 For her heart is violent. She will never put up with
 The treatment she is getting. I know and fear her
 Lest she may sharpen a sword and thrust to the heart,
 Stealing into the palace where the bed is made,
 Or even kill the king and the new-wedded groom,
 And thus bring a greater misfortune on herself.
 She's a strange woman. I know it won't be easy
 To make an enemy of her and come off best.
 But here the children come. They have finished playing.
 They have no thought at all of their mother's trouble.
 Indeed it is not usual for the young to grieve.
 [Enter from the right the slave who is the TUTOR to MEDEA's two small
 CHILDREN. The CHILDREN follow him.]

TUTOR: You old retainer of my mistress's household,
 Why are you standing here all alone in front of the
 Gates and moaning to yourself over your misfortune?
 Medea could not wish you to leave her alone.
 NURSE: Old man, and guardian of the children of Jason,
 If one is a good servant, it's a terrible thing
 When one's master's luck is out; it goes to one's heart.
 So I myself have got into such a state of grief
 That a longing stole over me to come outside here
 And tell the earth and air of my mistress's sorrows.
 TUTOR: Has the poor lady not yet given up her crying?

NURSE: Given up? She's at the start, not halfway through her tears.
 TUTOR: Poor fool, — if I may call my mistress such a name, —
 How ignorant she is of trouble more to come.
 NURSE: What do you mean, old man? You needn't fear to speak.
 TUTOR: Nothing. I take back the words which I used just now.
 NURSE: Don't, by your beard, hide this from me, your fellow-servant.
 If need be, I'll keep quiet about what you tell me.
 TUTOR: I heard a person saying, while I myself seemed
 Not to be paying attention, when I was at the place
 Where the old draught-players⁸ sit, by the holy fountain,
 That Kreon, ruler of the land, intends to drive
 These children and their mother in exile from Corinth.
 But whether what he said is really true or not
 I do not know. I pray that it may not be true.
 NURSE: And will Jason put up with it that his children
 Should suffer so, though he's no friend to their mother?
 TUTOR: Old ties give place to new ones. As for Jason, he
 No longer has a feeling for this house of ours.
 NURSE: It's black indeed for us, when we add new to old
 Sorrows before even the present sky has cleared.
 TUTOR: But you be silent, and keep all this to yourself.
 It is not the right time to tell our mistress of it.
 NURSE: Do you hear, children, what a father he is to you?
 I wish he were dead, — but no, he is still my master.
 Yet certainly he has proved unkind to his dear ones.
 TUTOR: What's strange in that? Have you only just discovered
 That everyone loves himself more than his neighbor?
 Some have good reason, others get something out of it.
 So Jason neglects his children for the new bride.
 NURSE: Go indoors, children. That will be the best thing.
 And you, keep them to themselves as much as possible.
 Don't bring them near their mother in her angry mood!
 For I've seen her already blazing her eyes at them.
 As though she meant some mischief and I am sure that
 She'll not stop raging until she has struck at someone.
 May it be an enemy and not a friend she hurts!
 [MEDEA is heard inside the house.]
 MEDEA: Ah, wretch! Ah, lost in my sufferings,
 I wish, I wish I might die.
 NURSE: What did I say, dear children? Your mother
 Frets her heart and frets it to anger.
 Run away quickly into the house,
 And keep well out of her sight.
 Don't go anywhere near, but be careful
 Of the wildness and bitter nature
 Of that proud mind.
 Go now! Run quickly indoors.

8. Checker players.

It is clear that she soon will put lightning
In that cloud of her cries that is rising
With a passion increasing. Oh, what will she do,
Proud-hearted and not to be checked on her course,
A soul bitten into with wrong?

[*The TUTOR takes the CHILDREN into the house.*]

MEDEA: Ah, I have suffered

What should be wept for bitterly. I hate you,
Children of a hateful mother. I curse you
And your father. Let the whole house crash.

NURSE: Ah, I pity you, you poor creature.

How can your children share in their father's
Wickedness? Why do you hate them? Oh children,
How much I fear that something may happen!

Great people's tempers are terrible, always

Having their own way, seldom checked,

Dangerous they shift from mood to mood.

How much better to have been accustomed

To live on equal terms with one's neighbors.

I would like to be safe and grow old in a

Humble way. What is moderate sounds best,

Also in practice is best for everyone.

Greatness brings no profit to people.

God indeed, when in anger, brings

Greater ruin to great men's houses.

[*Enter, on the right, a CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN. They have come to inquire about MEDEA and to attempt to console her.*]

CHORUS: I heard the voice, I heard the cry

Of Colchis' wretched daughter.

Tell me, mother, is she not yet

At rest? Within the double gates

Of the court I heard her cry. I am sorry

For the sorrow of this home. O, say, what has happened?

NURSE: There is no home. It's over and done with.

Her husband holds fast to his royal wedding,

While she, my mistress, cries out her eyes

There in her room, and takes no warmth from

Any word of any friend.

MEDEA: Oh, I wish

That lightning from heaven would split my head open.

Oh, what use have I now for life?

I would find my release in death

And leave hateful existence behind me.

CHORUS: O God and Earth and Heaven!

Did you hear what a cry was that

Which the sad wife sings?

Poor foolish one, why should you long

For that appalling rest?

The final end of death comes fast.

No need to pray for that.
Suppose your man gives honor
To another woman's bed.
It often happens. Don't be hurt.
God will be your friend in this.
You must not waste away

Grieving too much for him who shared your bed.

MEDEA: Great Themis, lady Artemis,⁹ behold

The things I suffer, though I made him promise,

My hateful husband. I pray that I may see him,

Him and his bride and all their palace shattered

For the wrong they dare to do me without cause.

Oh, my father! Oh, my country! In what dishonor

I left you, killing my own brother for it.¹

NURSE: Do you hear what she says, and how she cries

On Themis, the goddess of Promises, and on Zeus,

Whom we believe to be the Keeper of Oaths?

Of this I am sure, that no small thing

Will appease my mistress's anger.

CHORUS: Will she come into our presence?

Will she listen when we are speaking

To the words we say?

I wish she might relax her rage

And temper of her heart.

My willingness to help will never

Be wanting to my friends.

But go inside and bring her

Out of the house to us,

And speak kindly to her: hurry,

Before she wrongs her own.

This passion of hers moves to something great.

NURSE: I will, but I doubt if I'll manage

To win my mistress over.

But still I'll attempt it to please you.

Such a look she will flash on her servants

If any comes near with a message,

Like a lioness guarding her cubs.

It is right, I think, to consider

Both stupid and lacking in foresight

Those poets of old who wrote songs

For revels and dinners and banquets,

Pleasant sounds for men living at ease;

But none of them all has discovered

How to put an end with their singing

Or musical instruments grief,

Bitter grief, from which death and disaster

⁹ The protector of women in pain and distress. Themis, a Titan, was justice personified. ¹ Medea killed him to delay the pursuit when she escaped with Jason.

Cheat the hopes of a house. Yet how good
If music could cure men of this! But why raise
To no purpose the voice at a banquet? For *there* is
Already abundance of pleasure for men
With a joy of its own.

[*The NURSE goes into the house.*]

CHORUS: I heard a shriek that is laden with sorrow.

Shrilling out her hard grief she cries out
Upon him who betrayed both her bed and her marriage.

Wronged, she calls on the gods,
On the justice of Zeus, the oath sworn,

Which brought her away
To the opposite shore of the Greeks

Through the gloomy salt straits to the gateway
Of the salty unlimited sea.

[*MEDEA, attended by servants, comes out of the house.*]

MEDEA: Women of Corinth, I have come outside to you

Lest you should be indignant with me; for I know

That many people are overproud, some when alone,

And others when in company. And those who live

Quietly, as I do, get a bad reputation.

For a just judgment is not evident in the eyes

When a man at first sight hates another, before

Learning his character, being in no way injured;

And a foreigner² especially must adapt himself.

I'd not approve of even a fellow-countryman

Who by pride and want of manners offends his neighbors.

But on me this thing has fallen so unexpectedly,

It has broken my heart. I am finished. I let go

All my life's joy. My friends, I only want to die.

It was everything to me to think well of one man,

And he, my own husband, has turned out wholly vile.

Of all things which are living and can form a judgment

We women are the most unfortunate creatures.³

Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required

For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies

A master; for not to take one is even worse.

And now the question is serious whether we take

A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape

For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage.

She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners,

And needs prophetic power, unless she has learnt at home,

How best to manage him who shares the bed with her.

And if we work out all this well and carefully,

And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke,

2. Foreign residents were encouraged to come to Athens but were rarely admitted to the rights of full citizenship, which was a jealously guarded privilege. 3. Athenian rights and institutions were made for men; the women had few privileges and almost no legal rights. Lines 230-31 refer to the dowry that had to be provided for the bride.

Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die.

A man, when he's tired of the company in his home,

Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom

And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.

But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone.

What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time

Living at home, while they do the fighting in war.

How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand

Three times in the front of battle than bear one child.

Yet what applies to me does not apply to you.

You have a country. Your family home is here.

You enjoy life and the company of your friends.

But I am deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of

By my husband,—something he won in a foreign land.

I have no mother or brother, nor any relation

With whom I can take refuge in this sea of woe.

This much then is the service I would beg from you:

If I can find the means or devise any scheme

To pay my husband back for what he has done to me,—

Him and his father-in-law and the girl who married him,—

Just to keep silent. For in other ways a woman

Is full of fear, defenseless, dreads the sight of cold

Steel; but, when once she is wronged in the matter of love,

No other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood.

CHORUS: This I will promise. You are in the right, Medea,

In paying your husband back. I am not surprised at you

For being sad. But look! I see our king Kreon

Approaching. He will tell us of some new plan.

[*Enter, from the right, KREON, with attendants.*]

KREON: You, with that angry look, so set against your husband,

Medea, I order you to leave my territories

An exile, and take along with you your two children,

And not to waste time doing it. It is my decree,

And I will see it done. I will not return home

Until you are cast from the boundaries of my land.

MEDEA: Oh, this is the end for me. I am utterly lost.

Now I am in the full force of the storm of hate

And have no harbor from ruin to reach easily.

Yet still, in spite of it all, I'll ask the question:

What is your reason, Kreon, for banishing me?

KREON: I am afraid of you,—why should I dissemble it?—

Afraid that you may injure my daughter mortally.

Many things accumulate to support my feeling.

You are a clever woman, versed in evil arts,

And are angry at having lost your husband's love.

I hear that you are threatening, so they tell me,

To do something against my daughter and Jason

And me, too. I shall take my precautions first.

I tell you, I prefer to earn your hatred now

Than to be soft-hearted and afterwards regret it.
 MEDEA: This is not the first time, Kreon. Often previously
 Through being considered clever I have suffered much.
 A person of sense ought never to have his children
 Brought up to be more clever than the average.
 For, apart from cleverness bringing them no profit,
 It will make them objects of envy and ill-will.
 If you put new ideas before the eyes of fools
 They'll think you foolish and worthless into the bargain;
 And if you are thought superior to those who have
 Some reputation for learning, you will become hated.
 I have some knowledge myself of how this happens;
 For being clever, I find that some will envy me,
 Others object to me. Yet all my cleverness
 Is not so much. Well, then, are you frightened, Kreon,
 That I should harm you? There is no need. It is not
 My way to transgress the authority of a king.
 How have you injured me? You gave your daughter away
 To the man you wanted. O, certainly I hate
 My husband, but you, I think, have acted wisely;
 Nor do I grudge it you that your affairs go well.
 May the marriage be a lucky one! Only let me
 Live in this land. For even though I have been wronged,
 I will not raise my voice, but submit to my betters.
 KREON: What you say sounds gentle enough. Still in my heart
 I greatly dread that you are plotting some evil,
 And therefore I trust you even less than before.
 A sharp-tempered woman, or for that matter a man,
 Is easier to deal with than the clever type
 Who holds her tongue. No. You must go. No need for more
 Speeches. The thing is fixed. By no manner of means
 Shall you, an enemy of mine, stay in my country.
 MEDEA: I beg you. By your knees, by your new-wedded girl.
 KREON: Your words are wasted. You will never persuade me.
 MEDEA: Will you drive me out, and give no heed to my prayers?
 KREON: I will, for I love my family more than you.
 MEDEA: O my country! How bitterly now I remember you!
 KREON: I love my country too,—next after my children.
 MEDEA: O what an evil to men is passionate love!
 KREON: That would depend on the luck that goes along with it.
 MEDEA: O God, do not forget who is the cause of this!
 KREON: Go. It is no use. Spare me the pain of forcing you.
 MEDEA: I'm spared no pain. I lack no pain to be spared me.
 KREON: Then you'll be removed by force by one of my men.
 MEDEA: No, Kreon, not that! But do listen, I beg you.
 KREON: Woman, you seem to want to create a disturbance.
 MEDEA: I will go into exile. *This* is not what I beg for.
 KREON: Why then this violence and clinging to my hand?
 MEDEA: Allow me to remain here just for this one day,

So I may consider where to live in my exile,
 And look for support for my children, since their father
 Chooses to make no kind of provision for them. 340
 Have pity on them! You have children of your own.
 It is natural for you to look kindly on them.
 For myself I do not mind if I go into exile.
 It is the children being in trouble that I mind.
 KREON: There is nothing tyrannical about my nature, 345
 And by showing mercy I have often been the loser.
 Even now I know that I am making a mistake.
 All the same you shall have your will. But this I tell you,
 That if the light of heaven tomorrow shall see you,
 You and your children in the confines of my land, 350
 You die. This word I have spoken is firmly fixed.
 But now, if you must stay, stay for this day alone.
 For in it you can do none of the things I fear.
 [Exit KREON with his attendants.]
 CHORUS: Oh, unfortunate one! Oh, cruel!
 Where will you turn? Who will help you? 355
 What house or what land to preserve you
 From ill can you find?
 Medea, a god has thrown suffering
 Upon you in waves of despair.
 MEDEA: Things have gone badly every way. No doubt of that. 360
 But not these things this far, and don't imagine so.
 There are still trials to come for the new-wedded pair,
 And for their relations pain that will mean something.
 Do you think that I would ever have fawned on that man
 Unless I had some end to gain or profit in it? 365
 I would not even have spoken or touched him with my hands.
 But he has got to such a pitch of foolishness
 That, though he could have made nothing of all my plans
 By exiling me, he has given me this one day
 To stay here, and in this I will make dead bodies 370
 Of three of my enemies,—father, the girl and my husband.
 I have many ways of death which I might suit to them,
 And do not know, friends, which one to take in hand;
 Whether to set fire underneath their bridal mansion,
 Or sharpen a sword and thrust it to the heart, 375
 Stealing into the palace where the bed is made.
 There is just one obstacle to this. If I am caught
 Breaking into the house and scheming against it,
 I shall die, and give my enemies cause for laughter.
 It is best to go by the straight road, the one in which 380
 I am most skilled, and make away with them by poison.
 So be it then.
 And now suppose them dead. What town will receive me?
 What friend will offer me a refuge in his land,
 Or the guarantee of his house and save my own life? 385

There is none. So I must wait a little time yet,
 And if some sure defense should then appear for me,
 In craft and silence I will set about this murder.
 But if my fate should drive me on without help,
 Even though death is certain, I will take the sword
 Myself and kill, and steadfastly advance to crime.
 It shall not be,—I swear it by her, my mistress,
 Whom most I honor and have chosen as partner,
 Hecate,⁴ who dwells in the recesses of my hearth,—
 That any man shall be glad to have injured me.
 Bitter I will make their marriage for them and mournful,
 Bitter the alliance and the driving me out of the land.
 Ah, come, Medea, in your plotting and scheming
 Leave nothing untried of all those things which you know.
 Go forward to the dreadful act. The test has come
 For resolution. You see how you are treated. Never
 Shall you be mocked by Jason's Corinthian wedding,
 Whose father was noble, whose grandfather Helios.⁵
 You have the skill. What is more, you were born a woman,
 And women, though most helpless in doing good deeds,
 Are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers.

CHORUS: Flow backward to your sources, sacred rivers,
 And let the world's great order be reversed.
 It is the thoughts of *men* that are deceitful,
 Their pledges that are loose.
 Story shall now turn my condition to a fair one,
 Women are paid their due.
 No more shall evil-sounding fame be theirs.

Cease now, you muses of the ancient singers,
 To tell the tale of my unfaithfulness;
 For not on us did Phoebus,⁶ lord of music,
 Bestow the lyre's divine
 Power, for otherwise I should have sung an answer
 To the other sex. Long time
 Has much to tell of us, and much of them.

You sailed away from your father's home,
 With a heart on fire you passed
 The double rocks of the sea.
 And now in a foreign country
 You have lost your rest in a widowed bed,
 And are driven forth, a refugee
 In dishonor from the land.

Good faith has gone, and no more remains
 In great Greece a sense of shame.
 It has flown away to the sky.

4. The patron of witchcraft, sometimes identified with Artemis; Medea has a statue and shrine of her in the house. 5. The sun, father of Medea's father, Aeëtes. 6. Apollo.

No father's house for a haven
 Is at hand for you now, and another queen
 Of your bed has dispossessed you and
 Is mistress of your home.

[Enter JASON, with attendants.]

JASON: This is not the first occasion that I have noticed
 How hopeless it is to deal with a stubborn temper.
 For, with reasonable submission to our ruler's will,
 You might have lived in this land and kept your home.
 As it is you are going to be exiled for your loose speaking.
 Not that I mind myself. You are free to continue
 Telling everyone that Jason is a worthless man.
 But as to your talk about the king, consider
 Yourself most lucky that exile is your punishment.
 I, for my part, have always tried to calm down
 The anger of the king, and wished you to remain.
 But you will not give up your folly, continually
 Speaking ill of him, and so you are going to be banished.
 All the same, and in spite of your conduct, I'll not desert
 My friends, but have come to make some provision for you,
 So that you and the children may not be penniless
 Or in need of anything in exile. Certainly
 Exile brings many troubles with it. And even
 If you hate me, I cannot think badly of you.

MEDEA: O coward in every way,—that is what I call you,
 With bitterest reproach for your lack of manliness,
 You have come, you, my worst enemy, have come to me!
 It is not an example of over-confidence
 Or of boldness thus to look your friends in the face,
 Friends you have injured,—no, it is the worst of all
 Human diseases, shamelessness. But you did well
 To come, for I can speak ill of you and lighten
 My heart, and you will suffer while you are listening.
 And first I will begin from what happened first.
 I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it
 Who was a ship-mate of yours aboard the Argo,
 When you were sent to control the bulls that breathed fire
 And yoke them, and when you would sow that deadly field.
 Also that snake, who encircled with his many folds
 The Golden Fleece and guarded it and never slept,⁷
 I killed, and so gave you the safety of the light.
 And I myself betrayed my father and my home,
 And came with you to Pelias' land of Iolcos.
 And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom,
 I killed him, Pelias, with a most dreadful death
 At his own daughters' hands, and took away your fear.

7. These lines refer to ordeals through which Jason had to pass to win the fleece and in which Medea helped him. He had to yoke a team of fire-breathing bulls, then sow a field that immediately sprouted armed warriors, and then deal with the snake that guarded the fleece.

This is how I behaved to you, you wretched man,
 And you forsook me, took another bride to bed
 Though you had children; for, if that had not been,
 You would have had an excuse for another wedding.
 Faith in your word has gone. Indeed I cannot tell
 Whether you think the gods whose names you swore by then
 Have ceased to rule and that new standards are set up,
 Since you must know you have broken your word to me.
 O my right hand, and the knees which you often clasped
 In supplication, how senselessly I am treated
 By this bad man, and how my hopes have missed their mark!
 Come, I will share my thoughts as though you were a friend,—
 You! Can I think that you would ever treat me well?
 But I will do it, and these questions will make you
 Appear the baser. Where am I to go? To my father's?
 Him I betrayed and his land when I came with you.
 To Pelias' wretched daughters? What a fine welcome
 They would prepare for me who murdered their father!
 For this is my position,—hated by my friends
 At home, I have, in kindness to you, made enemies
 Of others whom there was no need to have injured.
 And how happy among Greek women you have made me
 On your side for all this! A distinguished husband
 I have,—for breaking promises. When in misery
 I am cast out of the land and go into exile,
 Quite without friends and all alone with my children,
 That will be a fine shame for the new-wedded groom,
 For his children to wander as beggars and she who saved him.
 O God, you have given to mortals a sure method
 Of telling the gold that is pure from the counterfeit;
 Why is there no mark engraved upon men's bodies,
 By which we could know the true ones from the false ones?
 CHORUS: It is a strange form of anger, difficult to cure
 When two friends turn upon each other in hatred.
 JASON: As for me, it seems I must be no bad speaker.
 But, like a man who has a good grip of the tiller,
 Reef up his sail, and so run away from under
 This mouthing tempest, woman, of your bitter tongue.
 Since you insist on building up your kindness to me,
 My view is that Cypris⁸ was alone responsible
 Of men and gods for the preserving of my life.
 You are clever enough,—but really I need not enter
 Into the story of how it was love's inescapable
 Power that compelled you to keep my person safe.
 On this I will not go into too much detail.
 In so far as you helped me, you did well enough.
 But on this question of saving me, I can prove

8. Aphrodite, goddess of love.

You have certainly got from me more than you gave.
 Firstly, instead of living among barbarians,
 You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways, 525
 How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.
 And all the Greeks considered you a clever woman.
 You were honored for it; while, if you were living at
 The ends of the earth, nobody would have heard of you.
 For my part, rather than stores of gold in my house 530
 Or power to sing even sweeter songs than Orpheus,
 I'd choose the fate that made me a distinguished man.
 There is my reply to your story of my labors.
 Remember it was you who started the argument.
 Next for your attack on my wedding with the princess: 535
 Here I will prove that, first, it was a clever move,
 Secondly, a wise one, and, finally, that I made it
 In your best interests and the children's. Please keep calm.
 When I arrived here from the land of Iolcos,
 Involved, as I was, in every kind of difficulty, 540
 What luckier chance could I have come across than this,
 An exile to marry the daughter of the king?
 It was not,—the point that seems to upset you—that I
 Grew tired of your bed and felt the need of a new bride;
 Nor with any wish to outdo your number of children. 545
 We have enough already. I am quite content.
 But,—this was the main reason—that we might live well,
 And not be short of anything. I know that all
 A man's friends leave him stone-cold if he becomes poor.
 Also that I might bring my children up worthy 550
 Of my position, and, by producing more of them
 To be brothers of yours, we would draw the families
 Together and all be happy. You need no children.
 And it pays me to do good to those I have now
 By having others. Do you think this a bad plan? 555
 You wouldn't if the love question hadn't upset you.
 But you women have got into such a state of mind
 That, if your life at night is good, you think you have
 Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
 You will consider your best and truest interests 560
 Most hateful. It would have been better far for men
 To have got their children in some other way, and women
 Not to have existed. Then life would have been good.
 CHORUS: Jason, though you have made this speech of yours look well,
 Still I think, even though others do not agree, 565
 You have betrayed your wife and are acting badly.
 MEDEA: Surely in many ways I hold different views
 From others, for I think that the plausible speaker
 Who is a villain deserves the greatest punishment.
 Confident in his tongue's power to adorn evil, 570
 He stops at nothing. Yet he is not really wise.

As in your case. There is no need to put on the airs
Of a clever speaker, for one word will lay you flat.

If you were not a coward, you would not have married

Behind my back, but discussed it with me first.

JASON: And you, no doubt, would have furthered the proposal,

If I had told you of it, you who even now

Are incapable of controlling your bitter temper.

MEDEA: It was not that. No, you thought it was not respectable

As you got on in years to have a foreign wife.

JASON: Make sure of this: it was not because of a woman

I made the royal alliance in which I now live,

But, as I said before, I wished to preserve you

And breed a royal progeny to be brothers

To the children I have now, a sure defense to us.

MEDEA: Let me have no happy fortune that brings pain with it,

Or prosperity which is upsetting to the mind!

JASON: Change your ideas of what you want, and show more sense,

Do not consider painful what is good for you,

Nor, when you are lucky, think yourself unfortunate.

MEDEA: You can insult me. You have somewhere to turn to.

But I shall go from this land into exile, friendless.

JASON: It was what you chose yourself. Don't blame others for it.

MEDEA: And how did I choose it? Did I betray my husband?

JASON: You called down wicked curses on the king's family.

MEDEA: A curse, that is what I am become to your house too.

JASON: I do not propose to go into all the rest of it;

But, if you wish for the children or for yourself

In exile to have some of my money to help you,

Say so, for I am prepared to give with open hand,

Or to provide you with introductions to my friends

Who will treat you well. You are a fool if you do not

Accept this. Cease your anger and you will profit.

MEDEA: I shall never accept the favors of friends of yours,

Nor take a thing from you, so you need not offer it.

There is no benefit in the gifts of a bad man.

JASON: Then, in any case, I call the gods to witness that

I wish to help you and the children in every way,

But you refuse what is good for you. Obstinate!

You push away your friends. You are sure to suffer for it.

MEDEA: Go! No doubt you hanker for your virginal bride,

And are guilty of lingering too long out of her house.

Enjoy your wedding. But perhaps,—with the help of God—

You will make the kind of marriage that you will regret.

[JASON goes out with his attendants.]

CHORUS: When love is in excess

It brings a man no honor

Nor any worthiness.

But if in moderation Cypris comes,

There is no other power at all so gracious.

O goddess, never on me let loose the unerring
Shaft of your bow in the poison of desire.

Let my heart be wise.

It is the gods' best gift.

On me let mighty Cypris

Inflict no wordy wars or restless anger

To urge my passion to a different love.

But with discernment may she guide women's weddings,

Honoring most what is peaceful in the bed.

O country and home,

Never, never may I be without you,

Living the hopeless life,

Hard to pass through and painful,

Most pitiable of all.

Let death first lay me low and death

Free me from this daylight.

There is no sorrow above

The loss of a native land.

I have seen it myself,

Do not tell of a secondhand story.

Neither city nor friend

Pitied you when you suffered

The worst of sufferings.

O let him die ungraced whose heart

Will not reward his friends,

Who cannot open an honest mind

No friend will he be of mine.

[Enter AIGEUS, king of Athens, an old friend of MEDEA.]

AIGEUS: Medea, greeting! This is the best introduction

Of which men know for conversation between friends.

MEDEA: Greeting to you too, Aigeus, son of King Pandion,

Where have you come from to visit this country's soil?

AIGEUS: I have just left the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

MEDEA: And why did you go to earth's prophetic center?

AIGEUS: I went to inquire how children might be born to me.

MEDEA: Is it so? Your life still up to this point childless?

AIGEUS: Yes. By the fate of some power we have no children.

MEDEA: Have you a wife, or is there none to share your bed?

AIGEUS: There is. Yes, I am joined to my wife in marriage.

MEDEA: And what did Phoebus say to you about children?

AIGEUS: Words too wise for a mere man to guess their meaning.

MEDEA: Is it proper for me to be told the God's reply?

AIGEUS: It is. For sure what is needed is cleverness.

MEDEA: Then what was his message? Tell me, if I may hear.

AIGEUS: I am not to loosen the hanging foot of the wine-skin⁹ . . .

MEDEA: Until you have done something, or reached some country?

9. Cryptic; probably not to have intercourse.

AIGEUS: Until I return again to my hearth and house.
 MEDEA: And for what purpose have you journeyed to this land?
 AIGEUS: There is a man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.¹
 MEDEA: A son of Pelops, they say, a most righteous man.
 AIGEUS: With him I wish to discuss the reply of the god.
 MEDEA: Yes. He is wise and experienced in such matters.
 AIGEUS: And to me also the dearest of all my spear-friends.²
 MEDEA: Well, I hope you have good luck, and achieve your will.
 AIGEUS: But why this downcast eye of yours, and this pale cheek?
 MEDEA: O Aigeus, my husband has been the worst of all to me.
 AIGEUS: What do you mean? Say clearly what has caused this grief.
 MEDEA: Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.
 AIGEUS: What has he done? Tell me about it in clearer words.
 MEDEA: He has taken a wife to his house, supplanting me.
 AIGEUS: Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that.
 MEDEA: Be sure he has. Once dear, I now am slighted by him.
 AIGEUS: Did he fall in love? Or is he tired of your love?
 MEDEA: He was greatly in love, this traitor to his friends.
 AIGEUS: Then let him go, if, as you say, he is so bad.
 MEDEA: A passionate love,—for an alliance with the king.
 AIGEUS: And who gave him his wife? Tell me the rest of it.
 MEDEA: It was Kreon, he who rules this land of Corinth.
 AIGEUS: Indeed, Medea, your grief was understandable.
 MEDEA: I am ruined. And there is more to come: I am banished.
 AIGEUS: Banished? By whom? Here you tell me of a new wrong.
 MEDEA: Kreon drives me an exile from the land of Corinth.
 AIGEUS: Does Jason consent? I cannot approve of this.
 MEDEA: He pretends not to, but he will put up with it.
 Ah, Aigeus, I beg and beseech you, by your beard
 And by your knees I am making myself your suppliant,
 Have pity on me, have pity on your poor friend,
 And do not let me go into exile desolate,
 But receive me in your land and at your very hearth.
 So may your love, with God's help, lead to the bearing
 Of children, and so may you yourself die happy.
 You do not know what a chance you have come on here.
 I will end your childlessness, and I will make you able
 To beget children. The drugs I know can do this.
 AIGEUS: For many reasons, woman, I am anxious to do
 This favor for you. First, for the sake of the gods,
 And then for the birth of children which you promise,
 For in that respect I am entirely at my wits' end.
 But this is my position: if you reach my land,
 I, being in my rights, will try to befriend you.
 But this much I must warn you of beforehand:
 I shall not agree to take you out of this country;

1. In the Peloponnese. Pittheus was Aigeus' father-in-law. Corinth was on the way from Delphi to Troezen. 2. Allies in war, companions in fighting.

But if you by yourself can reach my house, then you
 Shall stay there safely. To none will I give you up.
 But from this land you must make your escape yourself,
 For I do not wish to incur blame from my friends.
 MEDEA: It shall be so. But, if I might have a pledge from you 715
 For this, then I would have from you all I desire.
 AIGEUS: Do you not trust me? What is it rankles with you?
 MEDEA: I trust you, yes. But the house of Pelias hates me,
 And so does Kreon. If you are bound by this oath,
 When they try to drag me from your land, you will not 720
 Abandon me; but if our pact is only words,
 With no oath to the gods, you will be lightly armed,
 Unable to resist their summons. I am weak,
 While they have wealth to help them and a royal house.
 AIGEUS: You show much foresight for such negotiations. 725
 Well, if you will have it so, I will not refuse.
 For, both on my side this will be the safest way
 To have some excuse to put forward to your enemies,
 And for you it is more certain. You may name the gods.
 MEDEA: Swear by the plain of Earth, and Helios, father 730
 Of my father, and name together all the gods. . . .
 AIGEUS: That I will act or not act in what way? Speak.
 MEDEA: That you yourself will never cast me from your land,
 Nor, if any of my enemies should demand me,
 Will you, in your life, willingly hand me over. 735
 AIGEUS: I swear by the Earth, by the holy light of Helios,
 By all the gods, I will abide by this you say.
 MEDEA: Enough. And, if you fail, what shall happen to you?
 AIGEUS: What comes to those who have no regard for heaven.
 MEDEA: Go on your way. Farewell. For I am satisfied, 740
 And I will reach your city as soon as I can,
 Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end.
 [AIGEUS goes out.]
 CHORUS: May Hermes, god of travelers,
 Escort you, Aigeus, to your home!
 And may you have the things you wish 745
 So eagerly; for you
 Appear to me to be a generous man.
 MEDEA: God, and God's daughter, justice, and light of Helios!
 Now, friends, has come the time of my triumph over
 My enemies, and now my foot is on the road. 750
 Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.
 For this man, Aigeus, has been like a harbor to me
 In all my plans just where I was most distressed.
 To him I can fasten the cable of my safety
 When I have reached the town and fortress of Pallas.³ 755
 And now I shall tell to you the whole of my plan.

3. Athens, city of Pallas Athene.