

# MEDEA

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# MEDEA: INTRODUCTION

## *The Play: Date and Composition*

Euripides' *Medea* was produced in 431 BCE as the first of his four plays entered in the annual dramatic competition. The other plays have been lost: *Philoctetes*, *Dictys*, and the satyr-play *Theristae* (*The Mowers*). Euripides took the third prize. Although *Medea* is one of his earliest securely dated plays to survive, he was probably over fifty years old when he wrote it and had already been competing in the dramatic contests for more than twenty years.

Some ancient scholars report that, according to Aristotle and his student Dicaearchus (fourth century BCE), Euripides revised a play called *Medea* by a certain Neophron (a prolific and successful rival Athenian dramatist) and passed it off as his own; a few even claimed that Euripides' *Medea* was in fact completely the work of Neophron and should be attributed to him. Various ancient commentaries cite passages from Neophron's *Medea* adding up to about twenty-four lines; these do not coincide exactly with Euripides' play, but they are very similar in content. Modern scholars are divided about what to make of all this: some think that Neophron's *Medea* did indeed precede and influence Euripides'; others have maintained instead that Neophron's play came later and that those who thought otherwise in antiquity were mistaken.

## *The Myth*

Medea is a well-known figure from archaic Greek epic and legend. Her name is derived from words meaning "counsel, plan, cleverness." Granddaughter of Helios (god of the sun), she possesses magic powers with which she can help or harm male heroes. In this regard she is similar to her aunt Circe. In some versions of the myth, Medea is a goddess, in others a human.

She plays a crucial role in the popular ancient Greek epic stories that told how the Argonauts, led by Jason, sailed to far-off Colchis on the Black Sea and overcame various challenges and obstacles in order to bring back the Golden Fleece with them to Greece—all aided decisively by Medea, who, out of love for Jason, betrayed her own family (the rulers of Colchis and guardians of the Fleece) and chose to put her sorcery at his service. It was through her powers and advice that Jason succeeded in putting a dragon to sleep and killing it, then harnessed fierce oxen with which he plowed furrows to sow the dragon's teeth, killed the armed men who sprang up from the teeth he had sown, and then managed to escape from Colchis and avenge himself on his enemies.

After Jason and Medea escaped they took up residence in Corinth, where they had children together. But Jason subsequently decided instead to marry the daughter of the king of Corinth (Creon). It is here that the action of Euripides' *Medea* begins: we see how Medea kills this new bride and her father and the children she had had with Jason, and then escapes from Corinth to Athens. Various ancient poets and local historians, some of them writing before Euripides, mentioned the death of Jason and Medea's children at Corinth—the local cult in which they were honored there is well attested—but gave different explanations for just how the children had died: that the Corinthians murdered the boys in a temple of Hera out of hatred for Medea; or that, after Medea had killed Creon and fled to Athens, leaving her children at the temple of Hera, Creon's relatives avenged themselves by killing the children; or that Medea tried to make the children immortal but something went wrong and they died. The idea that Medea deliberately killed her own children may or may not have been a new invention by Euripides (or Neophron).

After the events in Corinth, Medea goes on to Athens, where she marries King Aegeus and (in some versions) tries to kill his son Theseus. Years later she returns to her homeland Colchis, where she becomes queen. According to some versions, she ends up marrying Achilles after their deaths and reigning with him over the souls of the dead.

Euripides seems to have been particularly interested in Medea: before he composed this play he had already dramatized two other episodes from

the myths involving her, one about earlier events (*The Daughters of Pelias*) and one about later ones (*Aegeus*). But both of these plays are lost.

### *Transmission and Reception*

Although *Medea* was not particularly successful when it was first produced, it went on to become enormously popular and influential. It belongs to the group of ten plays by Euripides that were most widely diffused during ancient and medieval times. Its popularity among ancient readers is attested by a dozen papyrus fragments dating from the third century BCE to the sixth century CE. So it is perhaps not surprising that modern scholars have detected what seem to be numerous small interpolations in the text, probably due in some cases to expansion by directors or actors—further evidence for the play's continuing vitality on ancient stages.

Euripides' *Medea* exerted considerable influence upon later Greek and Roman versions of the story. Of Roman tragedies, we possess Seneca's *Medea* and know that Ovid wrote a highly regarded *Medea*, now lost. And the influence of Euripides' play is no less evident in such Greek and Roman narrative epics as Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. Most ancient versions of the Medea story emphasize her magic powers and concentrate on her more terrifying aspects. On south Italian vase paintings of the fourth and third centuries BCE, several of them clearly influenced by theatrical productions, Medea is often displayed killing her children or escaping with their bodies on her winged chariot. Pompeian frescoes show her anguished indecision about whether or not to kill the children. Later Roman sarcophagi frequently depict the terrible death of Creon's daughter and Medea's spectacular escape.

In modern times *Medea* has become one of the very best known of all ancient tragedies. The story of the woman who avenges herself upon her unfaithful husband by killing their children has become part of the popular imagination and has played an important role in such fields as politics (Medea's monologue on the troubles of women was cited regularly in meetings of the British suffragettes), psychoanalysis, and law. Besides the frequent productions of Euripides' play on stages throughout the world in

all languages, including ancient Greek—probably no other ancient play has been produced anywhere near as often in the twentieth century—the story has also inspired numerous new versions, including Franz Grillparzer’s dramatic trilogy *The Golden Fleece* (1819–21), Christa Wolf’s novel *Medea.Voices* (1996), Luigi Cherubini’s opera *Medea* (1797), Martha Graham’s dance drama *Cave of the Heart* (1946, with music by Samuel Barber), and films by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969) and Lars von Trier (1988). It has also been depicted in important paintings (Eugène Delacroix, 1862; Gustave Moreau, 1865) and sculptures (Auguste Rodin, 1865–70).

# MEDEA

## *Characters*

NURSE to Medea

TWO SONS of Medea and Jason

TUTOR to the two sons

MEDEA, princess of Colchis, wife of Jason

CREON, king of Corinth

JASON, son of Aeson, king of Iolcus

AEGEUS, king of Athens

SERVANT of Jason as messenger

CHORUS of Corinthian women

*Scene: Corinth, in front of Medea's house.*

*(Enter Nurse from the house.)*

NURSE

If only the swift *Argo* never had  
swooped in between  
the cobalt Clashing Rocks to reach the  
Colchians' realm;  
if only pines had never been chopped  
down among the woods  
of Pelion to put oars in the hands of  
those heroic men,  
who ventured forth to fetch the Golden  
Fleece for Pelias.

5

Medea, then, my mistress, never would

have sailed  
for Iolcus' towers, her heart infatuated  
with desire for Jason;  
nor spurred the daughters of old Pelias to  
kill their father,  
10 never would have settled here in Corinth  
with her husband and her sons.  
She managed though an exile<sup>o</sup> to delight  
the people of the land  
she'd joined, and gave support in every  
way to Jason—  
life's most secure when there is no  
conflict  
15 to alienate a woman from her man.  
But now ... now hatred rules, and loyal  
love is sick,  
since Jason has betrayed my mistress  
and their sons,  
by mounting the royal bridal bed  
beside the daughter of Creon, the  
monarch of this land.  
20 And so my poor Medea is disdained.

She cries, "What of his  
oaths?," recalls

the solemn pledge of his right hand, and  
prays the gods  
to witness what poor recompense she has  
received.  
Lying without food, she gives her body  
up to pain,  
25 and has been wearing down the nights  
and days with tears,

since she first found she had been  
wrongly treated by her man.  
Never lifting up her eyes from staring at  
the ground,  
she listens to her friends' advice no more  
than if she were a rock or sea-surf—  
except for when she turns her pale white  
30 neck,  
lamenting to herself for her lost father,  
country, home,  
which she betrayed to join the man who  
now dishonors her.  
She's learned from her catastrophe how  
much  
35 it matters not to lose your homeland.  
She hates the children, takes no pleasure  
in the sight of them.°  
I fear that she may plan some new  
mischief;  
her temperament is fierce, and she'll not  
tolerate  
mistreatment—I know too well what she  
is like.  
She fills me with alarm,  
that she will stab their livers with a  
40 sharpened sword,°  
entering by stealth the palace where the  
bed is laid,  
and kill both monarch and his daughter's  
new bridegroom,  
and so incur some even graver  
consequence,  
for she is fearsome—



45 and no one who picks a fight with her  
will find it easy to descant the victory  
chant.

*(Enter the two boys and their Tutor from the side.)*

But here the children come, fresh from their exercise,  
and unaware of all their mother's sufferings—  
young minds are not inclined to cares.

TUTOR

Old servant of my mistress' house,  
why are you standing solitary here  
outside the doors,  
50 bewailing troubles to  
yourself?  
How could Medea want to be left without  
you near?

NURSE

Old man, you who take care of the young sons of Jason:  
when affairs break badly for their masters,  
55 this can affect good slaves as well.  
And my distress reached such a pitch I felt compelled  
to come out here and tell the problems that beset  
my mistress to the earth and sky.

TUTOR

You mean she's still not stopped her grieving cries?

NURSE

60 You've no idea! Her pain's not even halfway through.

TUTOR

Poor fool—if I may say that of my betters—  
how little she knows yet about the latest downward turn.

NURSE

What's that, old man? Don't hold it back from me.

TUTOR

Nothing—I wish I had not said a thing.

NURSE

65 Do not, I beg you, hide this from your fellow slave.  
I shall keep quiet about these matters, if I should.

TUTOR

I overheard a person say—pretending not to hear  
as I drew near to where the old men sit  
and play their checkers, by the sacred spring of Peirene—  
70 I heard him say that Creon, lord of this land, intends  
to drive these children out from Corinth, with their mother.  
I do not know whether this rumor's true—I only hope it's not.

NURSE

Will Jason tolerate such treatment of his sons  
75 even if he has this feud against their mother?

TUTOR

Ancient ties become displaced by newer ones;  
and he's no friend to this house here.

NURSE

Then we are ruined if we have to add

this new disaster to the one we've not yet drained.

TUTOR

80 But you at least keep quiet and spread no word of this—  
it's not the time to let our mistress find this out.

NURSE

Do you hear how your father's turned against you, children?  
I won't say "curse him," since he is my master still.  
But he has been exposed as false toward his closest kin.

TUTOR

85 And who has not? Have you found out so late  
that every person loves himself more than those close to him,  
some justly, some for profit's sake?<sup>o</sup>  
And so the father of these boys does not feel love for them,  
because of his new bride.

*(To the children.)*

NURSE

All will be well; now, children, go inside.

*(To the Tutor.)*

90 And you should keep them well secluded  
from their mother for so long as she remains  
in such an agitated state; don't let them near.  
I've seen her cast a savage look at them,  
as though she's contemplating doing something to them.  
I know for sure she won't relent her anger  
until she's struck some victim to the ground—

95

but when she does, may it be enemies, not friends.

MEDEA [*singing from inside*]

*Oh, in pain, in pain,*

*I'm so unhappy, I ...*

*oh for me, for me,*

*if only I could die.*

NURSE [*chanting throughout this scene while Medea continues to sing from inside*]

*As I said, dear children, your mother is stirring*

*her passion, bestirring her fury.*

100 *Now hurry indoors; don't stray in her sight,*

*don't even go near, keep well away*

*from her violent mood,*

*the wild hate of her passionate will.*

105 *Hurry along, quickly inside.*

*It is all too clear that she's going to ignite*

*this cloud of complaint now billowing*

*from its beginning to yet hotter resentment.*

*What will she do, now that her heart*

*has been so envenomed,*

110 *proud to its core, tough to restrain?*

*(Exit the two boys and the Tutor into the house.)*

*(Inside.)*

MEDEA

*The suffering I have endured, endured,*

*calling for bitter lament aloud!*

*Accursed children of a hated mother,*

*I wish you were done for along with your father.  
To hell with the family, all of the house.*

NURSE

115 *Oh no, terrible! Why should your children  
share in the guilt of the crimes of their father?  
Why should you hate them?  
I'm utterly stricken with fear for your safety,  
poor children. Rulers have dangerous natures:*  
120 *subjected to little, controlling much,  
they are not inclined to relent from their passions.  
Better to live in the ways of fair-sharing:  
the height of ambition for me is to live out my life  
without much, but entirely secure.*  
125 *The word "moderation" sounds first  
in our speaking, and is easily best in enactment.  
Exaggeration can never provide  
sound balance for humans.  
And if ever a god gets angered against*  
130 *some household, the payoff's yet greater disaster.*

*(Enter Chorus of Corinthian women.)*

CHORUS [*singing throughout this scene, while the Nurse continues to chant  
and Medea sings from inside*]

*I heard her call, I heard her cry,  
Medea's pain, the Colchian.  
So she has still not settled calm?  
Old woman, tell. I heard her voice*  
135 *from deep inside her mansion gates.  
The sufferings of this household cause  
me pain—my friendship's blended close.*

NURSE

*No household exists any more—it's all gone.*  
140 *He is possessed by his royal embraces;*  
*she is eroding her life away*  
*deep in her chamber, my lady,*  
*her spirit encouraged not the slightest*  
*by any suggestion from any well-wisher.*

*(Inside.)*

MEDEA

*May lightning shatter my skull;*  
145 *life no longer brings gain.*  
*May I find shelter in death,*  
*freed from this hated life.*

CHORUS

STROPHE

*O Zeus, Earth, and shining Sky,*  
*do you hear the wailing cry*  
150 *of the inauspicious bride?*  
*Why crave for that unwanted bed,*  
*poor woman? Death comes with all speed.*  
*Don't pray for dying, no.*  
155 *If your husband worships so*  
*at his newfound marriage-couch,*  
*don't be torn by him so much.*  
*Zeus will be your advocate;*  
*so don't pine away so much,*  
*wasting for your old bedmate.*

*(Inside.)*

MEDEA

160    *Artemis and mighty Themis,  
see the pain that I'm enduring,  
I who had my cursed husband  
tied by strong bonds of his swearing.  
May I see him and his consort  
and their palace ripped in pieces,  
payment for the ways they dared first*  
165    *to mistreat me with injustice.  
O my father, O my city,  
after killing my own brother,  
in disgrace I had to leave you,  
lost my fatherland forever.*

NURSE

*You hear her calling aloud on Themis*  
170    *and on Zeus, the protector of oaths  
binding on humans? My mistress will never  
relent from her anger with some petty gesture.*

CHORUS

ANTISTROPHE

*I wish she would meet with us,  
and engage us face to face;  
I wish she would heed our voice*  
175    *to see if she might relent  
from her heavy-hearted rage  
and the passion of her heart.  
May I never stand apart*

*from supporting my own friends.  
But, you, please return indoors,  
180 fetch her, bring her here outside,  
tell her we are on her side;  
quick, before she does some harm  
against those inside her home—  
because her intense distress  
comes upon her at a pace.*

NURSE

*I'll do this—although I'm afraid  
185 that I'll never prevail on my mistress—  
I'll try as a favor.  
Yet she glares like a lioness with new cubs  
at anyone who comes close and offers her any suggestion.  
190 You'd be right to conclude that the people  
of olden times were stupid and lacking in wisdom  
when they invented poems  
to accompany feasts, celebrations, and dinners,  
sweet ornamentations of life.  
Still no one has found out the way  
195 to abolish our harrowing griefs  
with poetic powers  
or with songs and elaborate strings—  
griefs that result in the deaths and terrible mishaps  
that overturn households.  
Yet that would have offered us profit:  
to medicine these troubles with music.  
200 Why bother with loudly voiced singing for nothing,  
when feasting is garnished with pleasure?  
All by itself the rich banquet provides*



*full satisfaction for people.*

CHORUS

205     *I have heard her tearful moans  
and the piercing words she cries  
out against that guilty husband  
who betrayed their marriage ties.  
She has borne unjust abuse  
and she calls out aloud on Themis,  
guardian of the oaths of Zeus,*  
210     *oaths that ferried her to Hellas  
over ocean's inky dark,  
opening a salt-sea exit  
through the daunting Black Sea's lock.*

*(Enter Medea from the house.)*

MEDEA [*speaking*]

Women of Corinth, I have come outside to show  
215     you have no cause to tarnish me with blame.  
Understand: I'm all too well aware  
that many people are perceived as arrogant—  
some privately, others in public life—and there are those  
who gather a bad name for idleness by lying low.  
Do not suppose there's any justice rests  
in people's eyes: they hate on sight,  
220     before they get to know a man's real inner core,  
although he's done no wrong to them.  
And therefore foreigners should take especial care  
to be in tune with the society they join—  
nor would I give approval even to a native man<sup>o</sup>

who foolishly offends his fellow citizens through selfishness.  
225 But in my case, this new and unforeseeable event  
has befallen me and crushed my spirit,  
so that I've lost delight in life—I long to die, my friends.  
I realize the man who was my all in all  
has now turned out to be the lowest of the low—my husband.  
230 We women are the most beset by trials  
of any species that has breath and power of thought.  
Firstly, we are obliged to buy a husband  
at excessive cost, and then accept him as  
the master of our body—that is even worse.  
235 And here's the throw that carries highest stakes:  
is he a good catch or a bad?  
For changing husbands is a blot upon  
a woman's good repute; and it's not possible  
to say no to the things a husband wants.  
A bride, when she arrives to join new ways  
and customs, needs to be a prophet to predict  
240 the ways to deal best with her new bedmate—  
she won't have learned that back at home.  
And then ... then if, when we have spent a deal of trouble  
on these things, if then our husband lives with us  
bearing the yoke without its being forced,  
we have an enviable life.  
But if he does not: better death.  
But for a man—oh no—if ever he is irked  
245 with those he has at home, he goes elsewhere  
to get relief and ease his state of mind.  
He turns either to some close friend or to someone his age.°  
Meanwhile we women are obliged  
to keep our eyes on just one person.

They, men, allege that we enjoy a life  
secure from danger safe at home,  
while they confront the thrusting spears of war.  
250 That's nonsense: I would rather join  
the battle rank of shields three times  
than undergo birth-labor once.  
In any case, your story's not at all the same as mine:  
you have your city here, your father's house,  
delight in life, and company of friends,  
255 while I am citiless, deserted,  
subjected to humiliation by my husband.  
Manhandled from a foreign land like so much pirate loot,  
here I have no mother, brother, relative,  
no one to offer me a port, a refuge from catastrophe.  
So I would like to ask this one small thing of you:  
260 if I can find some means or some device  
to make my husband pay the penalty to quit me  
for the wrongs he's done, stay silent, please  
—also the man who's given him his daughter, and the bride herself.

Although a woman is so fearful in all other ways—  
no good for battle or the sight of weaponry—  
265 when she's been wrongly treated in the field of sex,  
there is no other cast of mind more deadly, none.

CHORUS LEADER

I will do this: you're justified inflicting punishment,  
Medea, on your husband. I am not surprised you feel such pain.

*(Creon approaches from the side.)*

270

I see King Creon coming to announce some new decision.

CREON

Grim scowling scourge against your husband—

yes, that's you, Medea:

I proclaim that you must leave this land in banishment,  
and take your pair of sons along with you.

And no delay allowed.

I am myself the arbiter of this decree,

275 and I shall not go home before I have made sure  
I've thrown you out beyond the borders of this land.

MEDEA

Aiai!

Utter, complete catastrophe for me!

My enemies are in full sail,  
and I have no accessible haven  
to land me from this storm of hell.

280 But I'll still ask, although I am so poorly treated: say,  
what reason have you, Creon, for expelling me like this?

CREON

I am afraid of you—no point in mincing words—

I am afraid you'll work incurable mischief  
upon my daughter.

And many things combine toward this fear of mine:

285 you are by nature clever and well versed  
in evil practices; and you are feeling bruised  
because you've been deprived of the embraces of your man.  
And I have heard—so people say—you're threatening  
some act against the giver in this marriage

and the taker and the given bride.  
Therefore I'm going to move before that happens.

290 Better to be hated by you, woman, now  
than to be soft, and later groan for it.

MEDEA

O misery ... not for the first time  
reputation's  
done me harm and damaged my  
whole life.

A man who knows what he's about  
should never have  
295 his children taught to be more clever  
than the norm.

They get a name for idleness, and  
only earn  
resentful spite from citizens.

The stupid ones, if you bring  
new ideas to them,

will view you as not clever but  
impractical.

300 And if you are perceived to be  
superior  
to those who are supposed to be the  
subtle ones,  
society will brand you as a  
troublemaker.

I myself have shared this fate:  
because I'm clever, I am resented by  
some people,  
and in some eyes I'm idle and in  
others opposite to that, °

305

and for others I'm a nuisance.  
Yet, in any case, I'm not so very  
clever ...  
But still, you say you are afraid of  
me ... for what?  
Becoming victim of some outrage?  
No, don't be scared of me, Creon.  
There is no call for me to do offence  
against the king.  
What injury have you done me?  
You gave your daughter to the man  
your heart proposed.  
310 It is my husband; he's the one I hate:  
your actions were, I think, quite  
sensible.  
So now I don't begrudge your happy  
state—  
go on, enjoy your wedding, and  
good luck to you all!  
And let me live on in this country  
here—  
since, even though I have been done  
injustice,  
315 I'll hold my peace, subdued by those  
who have more power.

CREON

Your words are soothing to the ear;  
but I still have a horror that inside your head  
you're hatching plans for something bad.  
I trust you all the less than I did previously.  
A woman acting in hot blood

320 is easier to guard against—it is the same with men—  
than one who's clever and stays secretive.  
No—on your way immediately; don't give me speeches.  
It's fixed, decided, and you have no art that can contrive  
to let you stay among us here as enemy to me.

MEDEA

No, no, I beg you by your  
knees,  
and by your newly married  
daughter.

CREON

325 Why waste your breath? You'll never change my mind.

MEDEA

You're going to banish me,  
and feel no pang of conscience for my prayers?

CREON

I am. I don't hold you closer than my own family.

MEDEA

My fatherland, how strongly I recall you now ...

CREON

And mine, after my children, is my closest bond.

MEDEA

330 Ah, passion is such a deadly ill for humankind!

CREON

Well, that depends upon the luck of those involved.

MEDEA

O Zeus, make no mistake about  
who is responsible for all these trials.

CREON

Get out, you crazy woman, and so relieve me of my pains.

MEDEA

Your pains? I have enough of those myself.  
I don't need more from you.

CREON

335 I'm going to get my men to march you off by force.

*(Seizing his hand.)*

MEDEA

No, no, please don't resort to that, I beg of you, Creon.

CREON

It's clear you're set upon an ugly squabble, woman.

MEDEA

I shall submit to banishment:  
that's not the thing I'm pleading for.

CREON

Then why maintain this grip? Why not release my hand?

MEDEA

340 Please just allow me to remain today, one day,  
and give me time to fix arrangements for



my banishment, and make provisions for my boys,  
seeing that their father does not care enough  
to organize a thing for his own sons.  
Pity them—you're a father after all: it's only natural  
345 that you should feel some kindness for them.  
I'm not concerned about myself and exile,  
but them—I weep that they're subjected to distress.

CREON

My character is not at all tyrannical;  
and often I have suffered harm through my softheartedness.  
350 So now—I'm well aware of my mistake—  
you shall obtain this none the less.  
I tell you clear, however: if the sun god's coming light  
still looks upon you and your boys  
within the borders of this land, it means your death.  
This word of mine is irreversible.  
355 For now, if you must stay, then stay for one day more.°  
You can't do anything I fear.

*(Exit Creon to the side, leaving Medea with the Chorus.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Unfortunate woman!°  
Oh, oh, sunk in your misery,  
where, where on earth can you turn?  
360 to what protector, to what home, to what land  
to save you from your troubles?  
Some god has cast you adrift, Medea, amidst  
an unchartable tempest of troubles.*

MEDEA

Everything has turned out badly—no one could deny.  
365 But don't suppose this is the way the course will run.  
There are still struggles waiting for the newlyweds,  
and for the man who made this match, big troubles still.  
Do you suppose I ever would have groveled to him now  
except to gain advantage and resource?  
370 I would not have spent words on him, not taken hold of him.  
But he has plumbed such depths of foolishness  
that, when he could have foiled my plans  
by driving me away, he's let me stay for this one day—  
the day on which I shall make dead meat of my enemies—  
375 all three: the father and his daughter and my husband.  
I have a wealth of ways to post them to their deaths,  
and I'm not sure which one to make the first, good friends.  
Should I engulf the bridal home in flames,  
or stab their livers through with whetted blade,  
380 employing stealth to infiltrate  
the chambers where their bed is laid?  
But there's this one obstruction: if I get caught  
while entering to work my plot, then I'll be put to death,  
and hand my enemies the final laugh.  
So best to take the straightest route—  
385 my special inborn skill in drugs—  
and so by potions send them off.  
So be it!  
But then what next? Suppose they're dead:  
what city then will take me in?  
What friend will grant asylum and a home that is secure,  
providing safety for my person? There is nobody.  
And so I'll bide my time a little while,

390

and if some stronghold that can keep me safe appears,  
deceit and secrecy will be my means to make this kill.  
If that turns out to be impossible, and I'm exposed,  
then I shall take a sword, although it means my death,  
and slaughter them myself.  
I'll push my daring to its violent end.

395 For, by the mistress I revere above all, fellow worker,  
Hecate, who has her place in the recesses of my hearth,  
not one of them shall rack my heart with pain  
and get away with it.

I shall make sure this match of theirs is turned  
to bitter anguish; bitter also that man's  
400 marriage arrangements and attempt to exile me.

So down to work, Medea,  
don't relax one jot of all your expertise  
in schemes and in contrivances.

On to the dreadful test; now's the time to try your mettle.  
You see what your position is: you must not become  
405 a laughingstock because of Jason's union with this Sisyphean  
dynasty.

You're from a noble father and descended from the Sun.  
You have the expertise. What's more, we are born women.  
It may be we're unqualified for deeds of virtue:  
yet as the architects of every kind of mischief,  
we are supremely skilled.

*(Medea stays on stage.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

410 *Pure rivers are running their currents upstream,*

*order and everything's turned upside down,  
the dogmas of men are exposed as mere sham,  
oaths by the gods prove no longer firm ground.*  
415 *The stories of women shall be about-turned,  
so that my life shall achieve proper glory,  
new value is coming for our female kind,  
420 no longer shall slanders pollute our story.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*The poems of long-ago bards shall no more  
portray us as fickle, untrustworthy friends—  
bias because lord Apollo forbore  
425 to implant his lyrics in feminine minds.*  
*Otherwise we could have answered with songs,  
back to the masculine sex, that long years  
can easily open up tales of men's wrongs,  
430 no less than their narratives all about ours.*

STROPHE B

*You, Medea, sailed off from  
your father's house,  
with your heart on fire with love;  
and cut your course  
in between the matching rocks  
435 of Bosphorus' straits;  
and you've had to treat as home  
an alien place,  
where you've lost your marriage bed—  
no husband there.*  
*Last, you're driven, stripped of rights,  
far from this shore.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Dead and gone the bonding charm  
of oaths men swear;  
440 Shame's deserted Greece and flown  
into the air.  
You, poor woman, cannot claim  
a father's roof,  
place to move your anchorage,  
sheltered from grief.  
And another woman rules  
over your bed,  
a royal princess, who controls  
445 your house instead.*

*(Enter Jason from the side.)*

JASON

This is far from the first time that I  
have observed  
a fiery temper is an uncontrollable  
disaster.  
You could have held on to this place,  
even this house, by patiently  
complying with  
the plans of your superiors;  
450 instead, all thanks to your demented  
rant,  
you're getting thrown out from this  
land.  
Not that I care about myself: you  
can go on abusing Jason,  
calling him the worst of men

indefinitely.

But after all the things you've said  
against the ruling family,  
count it as profit that your  
punishment is only exile.

455 I've constantly been trying to calm  
down  
the enraged ruler; and I wanted you  
to stay.

But you refuse to curb your stupid  
tongue,  
forever slandering the king.  
And so—exile for you.

Yet even after this I've not  
deserted my own kin:

460 I've come because I'm looking out  
for you,  
woman, to make quite sure that you  
do not depart in poverty,  
together with our boys, nor under  
any need.  
Exile brings many disadvantages  
along with it—  
and even if you feel the deepest hate  
for me,  
I never could reciprocate ill will for  
you.

MEDEA

465 You cheating rat! That's my response to  
you,  
the lowest phrase that I can find to fit  
your cowardice.

You come to us, you come to us,  
when you have proved yourself our  
most detested enemy.  
to gods, to me, and all the human race.<sup>o</sup>  
This is not merely daring or self-  
confidence,  
470 to treat your kin despicably,  
and then to look them in the eye.  
It is the worst of all the ills that plague  
mankind:  
sheer deadness to human decency.  
Yet you did well to come—since I can  
speak,  
and ease my spirit, by condemning  
you;  
and you will suffer pain through  
hearing it.  
475 I shall begin our story from the start.  
I saved your life—and all the Greeks  
who went aboard  
the *Argo* with you are aware of that—  
when you were sent to set the yoke  
upon the bulls with breath of fire,  
and plant the ploughland with a crop of  
480 death.  
Meanwhile the serpent which kept  
sleepless watch  
over the Golden Fleece, with  
implicating coils,  
I killed—and raised for you the  
torchlight of survival.  
By my own choice I was a traitor to my

home and father,  
and accompanied you to Iolcus under  
Pelion—  
485 from impulse rather than from careful  
thought.  
I killed off Pelias, so that he died most  
horribly,  
at his own daughters' hands—and thus  
extinguished his whole line.  
And after all these favors you have had  
from me,  
you stinking rat, you have betrayed me,  
and found a new wife for your bed—  
this even though we have begotten  
sons.

490 If you had been still childless, then it  
might have been  
forgivable for you to hanker for this  
coupling.  
The trust that underlies your oaths is  
lost:  
so I'm not sure if you believe the gods  
of old  
no longer wield their power, or else  
that novel rules  
are now established for mankind—

495 since you must know full well that you  
have not made good your oaths to me.  
Ah, my right hand, the hand that you so  
often took,

clasping my knees, how  
foully you have been



exploited by a cheating coward—  
and how mistakenly I aimed my hopes!  
Now look, I shall consult you as a  
friend—  
500 though how can I expect to gain some  
benefit from you?—  
yet all the same, by being asked, you'll  
be exposed  
as even worse. Where shall I turn now?  
Maybe my father's house?—the very  
house and fatherland  
that I betrayed for you, to travel here.  
Or to the wretched daughters of King  
Pelias?  
505 yes, they would give me a warm  
welcome back,  
when it was I who killed their father.  
For that is how I stand: object of hatred  
for my kin at home,  
I've made the people whom I should  
have treated well  
my enemies—all for your sake.  
And as reward you made me, to be  
sure,  
510 the happy woman in the eyes of many  
girls in Greece.  
O yes, in you I have a husband  
marvelous and true—  
since that is why I am to be expelled  
from here  
to wander as a refugee, devoid of  
friends,

alone with my poor children, all alone.  
That is a fine reproach to grace the  
new-made groom:  
515 his children beggars wandering  
along with her who saved your life.  
O Zeus, you've given us the clear  
criteria to test  
if gold is counterfeit: so why is there no  
stamp of guarantee  
marked on the human body to  
discriminate which ones  
among our men are fakes?

CHORUS LEADER

520 When those who have been close collide in conflict,  
their anger is incurable and terrible.

JASON

It seems I'm going to have to prove myself as orator,  
and, like a skillful captain, reef my sails  
in to the very edge, if I'm to navigate  
525 before your windy and unbridled talk, woman.  
For my part, since you emphasize so much my debt to you,  
it's my belief that it was Cypris  
alone of gods and humans steered my voyage clear of harm.  
You may well have a subtle mind,  
530 but modesty forbids me to relate just how Desire  
compelled you with unerring shafts to keep my body safe ...  
but I'll not go into too fine detail there.  
The benefits you really did for me were well and good.  
Yet in return for my survival you've received  
535 far greater profits than you have contributed—

as I'll explain. First you inhabit Greece  
instead of some barbarian land;  
you've gotten to experience the rule of justice and the law,  
without consideration for the threat of force.  
The Greeks have all found out about your cleverness;  
540 you're famous for your gifts.  
If you inhabited the furthest fringes of the world,  
then no one would have heard of you.  
I would not ask for vaults of gold, or for the gift to sing  
yet more melodiously than Orpheus,  
unless my fortune brought me also great celebrity.  
545 So much then for my efforts made on your behalf—  
it was you after all embarked on this debate.  
I turn now to your condemnations  
of the royal match that I have made.  
Concerning this I'll demonstrate that I was clever first,  
second restrained, and third I've been  
550 a constant friend to you and to my sons.  
No, please keep quiet.  
When I moved here from Iolcus land, I brought with me  
a number of intractable misfortunes.  
So what prescription could I have discovered  
more fortunate than to win the hand, although an exile,  
of the king's daughter, and to marry her?  
555 Not, as gnaws away at you, because I came to hate  
sleeping with you, besotted by desire for my new bride.  
Nor am I set on rivalry to father many children,  
since I've no complaint with those I have—they are enough.  
My motive is the highest of priorities:  
that is for us to live a prosperous life,

560

and not go short—remembering that every friend  
will run a mile from those who are impoverished.  
I wish to raise my children as befits my noble house,  
and father brothers for these sons I've had by you;  
to put them on a par, to unify the line,  
and so achieve a happy life.

- 565 For you ... what need of children do you have?  
Whereas for me it cashes in a gain to benefit  
my living sons through those as yet unborn.  
Not bad, my long-term planning?  
You would agree, if you were not so stung by thoughts of sex.  
You women go so far as to believe,  
570 as long as your sex life goes well, then everything is fine;  
but then if some misfortune strikes the realm of bed,  
you count what's best and finest as your deepest hate.  
I say it should have been a possibility  
for mankind to engender children from some other source,  
and for the female sex not to exist.  
575 That way there'd be no troubles spoiling human life.

CHORUS LEADER

Jason, you've laid out a speech all sparkling  
with fine embellishments, and yet in my opinion,  
although I may be speaking contrary to yours,  
you're doing wrong with this betrayal of your wife.

MEDEA

- I'm very different from most of humankind,  
580 since, in my book, the clever yet unjust speech maker  
should be punished with the heaviest fine.  
For, confident that he can dress injustice in fine words,

he is emboldened to stop short of nothing.  
Yet he is not so clever as all that—  
which goes for you as well.  
So don't come all respectable and eloquent with me.  
585 I have one argument to knock you flat:  
if you were not a filthy coward, you should  
have first persuaded me to give approval  
for your knotting these new marriage ties—  
not tried to keep it secret from your kin.

JASON

Oh yes, I think it very likely you  
would have endorsed my case quite happily,  
if I'd but mentioned this new match to you—  
considering that even now you cannot bear  
590 to drain away the seething rage that fills your heart.

MEDEA

It was not that that led you to hold back;  
it was because a non-Greek wife would not, you thought,  
enhance your status in your later years.

JASON

Let me make clear: my motive for espousing the royal bed  
I now possess was not the woman in it—  
595 but, as I've said before, the wish to keep you safe,  
and to beget royal siblings for my sons, a safeguard for my line.

MEDEA

I would not wish to live a prosperous life  
that brings me misery;

nor do I want prosperity that eats away my soul.

JASON

600 I'll tell you how to change your mind, and to be seen  
as far more sensible: don't ever take good things  
to be objectionable; and don't regard yourself  
as miserable when in fact you are most fortunate.

MEDEA

Humiliate me, go ahead!  
You can, since you have somewhere you can turn,  
while I'm deserted and must leave this land.

JASON

That's what you chose.  
605 Don't try to pin the blame on anyone except yourself.

MEDEA

What did I do? Did I betray you, then,  
by getting into bed with a new wife?

JASON

No, but by calling down unholy curses on the royal house.

MEDEA

I did. I am a curse upon your house as well.

JASON

Well, I'll participate no more in these adjudications.  
610 But if you'd like to draw upon assistance from my means  
to help the children and yourself in exile, then say the word.  
I am prepared to hand out generously,

and to send tokens to my friends elsewhere  
to have them treat you well.  
If you refuse this, woman, you're a fool.  
615 Give up your angry fit, and you will be far better off.

MEDEA

I have no wish to beg for favors from your friends,  
and I will not accept a penny, so do not offer anything to us.  
Donations from a low-life cheat confer no benefit.

JASON

Well, all the same, I call upon the gods  
620 to witness that I am prepared to furnish all I can  
to make provision for the boys and you.  
Yet in return you spurn these goods,  
and willfully you push away your friends.  
As a result your hardships will be all the worse.

MEDEA

Just go. So long away from your bedroom,  
you must be overcome with yearning  
for your freshly bridled bride.  
625 Go on, perform the newlywed. Perhaps—  
pray god fulfill this word—perhaps this wedding  
will turn out to be a bedding that you mourn. °

*(Exit Jason to the side. Medea stays on stage.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Desire that overwhelms us*

*with infatuation*  
630 *does not encourage virtue*  
*and good reputation.*  
*If her approach is gentle,*  
*Cypris makes life blissful,*  
*sweetest of gods; but never*  
*target me, great mistress;*  
*don't draw your golden bowstring*  
*in my direction, winging*  
*me an unerring arrow,*  
635 *tip besmeared with longing.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*May moderation please me—*  
*that's the gods' best favor;*  
*and may dread Cypris never*  
*shake my heart with fervor;*  
*nor bring on angry quarrels*  
*and unending clashes,*  
640 *by making me inflamed for*  
*other men's embraces.*  
*May she employ her judgment*  
*wisely to encourage*  
*concord, by fairly settling*  
*women's beds in marriage.*

STROPHE B

645 *My fatherland, my home place,*  
*may I be never homeless,*  
*have never the relentless*  
*life story of the helpless,*



*most pitiable of all pains.  
Before that may my death-day  
650 dark overcome this life-day.  
There can be no disaster  
that is more destructive  
than to be deprived of  
your fatherland, your home place.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*I see from my own witness,  
655 not secondhand from others:  
for you there is no city,  
no friend who will feel pity,  
not now that you have suffered  
the worst that can be suffered.  
The man who is ungracious,  
may death end his disgraces;  
660 who disrespects his dearest,  
refusing to unfasten  
the latch of honest thinking.  
I never shall befriend him.*

*(Enter Aegeus from the side.)*

AEGEUS

Medea, happiness to you:  
there is no finer prologue known with which to greet a friend.

MEDEA

May you be happy also, Aegeus, offspring  
665 of wise Pandion. Where have you come from,  
to be passing through this country here?

AEGEUS

I've journeyed from Apollo's venerable oracle.

MEDEA

And why did you consult the prophet at earth's navel-stone?

AEGEUS

To find out how I might get children as my heirs.

MEDEA

670     Good heavens, have you reached your age  
          still childless?

AEGEUS

Some dispensation of the gods has left me childless, yes.

MEDEA

And do you have a wife,  
or have you never known the bond of wedlock?

AEGEUS

I have a wife who shares my marriage bed.

MEDEA

And what did Phoebus say to you about begetting children?

AEGEUS

675     Words far too subtle for a man to fathom.

MEDEA

Is it permissible for me to hear the oracle?

AEGEUS

It is—it does, indeed, call for a clever mind.

MEDEA

What did it say? Enlighten me if I'm allowed to hear.

AEGEUS

It told me not to tap the wineskin's jutting spout ...

MEDEA

680 Before what action, or before you reach what land?

AEGEUS

Before I reach my native hearth.

MEDEA

What motive then has made you sail to this land here?

AEGEUS

There is a man called Pittheus—ruler of Troezen.

MEDEA

The son of Pelops; and most reverend, they say.

AEGEUS

685 I wish to talk with him about the prophecy.

MEDEA

That's good: the man is wise,  
and has experience of matters such as this.

AEGEUS

Of all my allies he's the one I hold most dear.

MEDEA

Then fare you well.  
And may you get all that your heart desires.

AEGEUS

But what is this? Why are your cheeks all streaked with tears?

MEDEA

690 Aegeus, my husband has turned out the lowest of the low.

AEGEUS

What? Tell me clearly all your discontent.

MEDEA

Jason has done me wrong, although I've given him no cause.

AEGEUS

What is it that he's done? Inform me more precisely.

MEDEA

He's made another woman  
mistress of his bed instead of me.

AEGEUS

695 I can't believe he's acted so despicably as that.

MEDEA

It's true. I was his dear, but now I'm disregarded.

AEGEUS

So is he seized by new desire, or does he now detest your bed?

MEDEA

Desire—so great he's not stayed loyal to his family.

AEGEUS

To hell with him, then, if he is as rotten as you say.

MEDEA

700 This strong desire has led to his alliance with a king.

AEGEUS

So who has made this match with him? Come, tell me all.

MEDEA

It's Creon, ruler of this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

I see: then, woman, I can understand just why you feel so hurt.

MEDEA

It is disaster for me;  
and, what is more, I'm being sent in exile.

AEGEUS

705 Who by? That's yet another blow you tell me of.

MEDEA

It's Creon who is driving me to banishment from Corinth.

AEGEUS

And Jason goes along with this?  
I disapprove of that as well.

MEDEA

He claims he is against ... but still he's ready to put up with it.  
710 But I implore you by this beard and by your knees—  
I am your suppliant: take pity on me  
in my misfortune, take pity.  
Don't watch me turned into a refugee:  
grant me asylum in your land and in your house.  
And then may your desire for children meet success,  
715 thanks to the gods, and may you end your days content.  
You may not realize what a find you've found in me:  
for I shall end your barrenness,  
and I shall make you potent to seed progeny.  
Such are the potions that I know.

AEGEUS

There is a host of reasons, woman,  
720 why I am inclined to grant this favor to you.  
First, piety to the gods; and then for the fertility  
that you assure me of—I'm at my wits' end over that.  
This, then, is what I offer you:  
if you can once arrive safe in my country,  
then I'll do my best to act as your protector there,  
as would be only right.  
725 And yet I forewarn you, woman, of this much:°  
I am not willing to convey you from this land;  
but if you can all by yourself get to my home,  
then you may claim asylum.  
I shall not surrender you to anyone.  
But you must get yourself away  
out of this country by yourself;  
730 I wish to stay above reproach with my allies as well.

MEDEA

Yes, I agree. All would be well for me,  
if only I could have from you some surety of this.

AEGEUS

Can you distrust me? What is disconcerting you?

MEDEA

I trust you; but the house of Pelias  
remains my enemy,  
735 and so is Creon. If you are tied by oath,  
you would not let them take me from  
your land,  
but if you were agreed with only words,  
without an oath sworn by  
the gods,  
you might become on friendly terms  
with them,  
and then comply with their demands for  
extradition.  
For I have no power,  
740 while they are rich, and members of a  
royal house.

AEGEUS

The things you say show ample foresight.  
So if you think it best, I'll not refuse to do this thing,  
since for me it's safer if I demonstrate  
to your opponents that I have good reasons,  
745 while for you your interests gain more security.  
Tell me the gods to be sworn by.

MEDEA

Then swear by Earth and by the Sun,  
my father's father, and the whole pantheon together.

AEGEUS

What to do, what not to do? Go on.

MEDEA

That you will never cast me from your land;  
750 and never, if one of my enemies attempts to take me,  
never, while you live, abandon me of your free will.

AEGEUS

I swear by Earth and by the pure light of Sun  
and all the gods: I shall stay true to all you say.

MEDEA

Enough. But if you fail to keep your oath,  
what then should be your fate?

AEGEUS

755 Those things that are inflicted on the impious.

MEDEA

Then go, and fare you well. For everything's in place.  
And as for me, I'll reach your land as quickly as I can,  
once I have carried through my plans,  
and gained the things I want.

CHORUS LEADER [*chanting*]

*May Hermes, the patron of travelers,*  
760 *usher you safely home;*



*and may you achieve those things  
which you so strongly desire,  
because you appear to us, Aegeus,  
as a man of true nobility.*

*(Exit Aegeus to the side.)*

MEDEA

O Zeus and Justice, child of Zeus, and radiance of the Sun—  
765 now, friends, I'll win the victory against my enemies.  
I have set out upon the road; and now I have good hope  
that they shall pay the price in full.  
For in the very place I was most laboring,  
this man has now appeared as a safe haven for my plans.  
770 I'll fix the mooring cable to my prow from him,  
once I have reached Athena's citadel.  
And now I'll tell you all my plans:  
attend my words, although they are not pleasant words to hear.  
I'll send one of my servants asking Jason  
775 to come and meet me face to face.  
And when he's here, I'll reassure him with smooth words  
and tell him I agree: that he is marrying well  
the royal match he has contracted by betraying us<sup>o</sup>  
and that this brings advantages, and is well planned.  
780 And I'll request my children may stay here—  
not that I wish to leave them in a hostile land  
for enemies to foully treat my children<sup>o</sup>  
no, but so that I can kill the princess by deception.  
I'll send them carrying presents for her in their hands,  
785 to take them to the bride so as not to have to leave this land:<sup>o</sup>  
a finespun dress and plaited wreath of beaten gold.

If she accepts and puts the finery next to her skin,  
she will die horribly, and so will anyone  
who even comes in contact with the girl—  
such are the poisons that I'll smear upon the gifts.  
790 But now I'll leave that part of the story.  
I grieve for the deed that I must do then:  
that I must kill my sons—  
there is no one can spirit them away.  
And after I have utterly wrecked Jason's house,  
795 I'll depart this land, escaping from the slaughter  
of my beloved children, once I've steeled myself  
to do this most abominable of deeds.  
Because, my friends, to be derided  
by one's enemies is not to be endured.  
So let it be. What profit have I from my life?°  
I have no fatherland, no home, no way to turn from my misfortunes.  
800 My first mistake was when I deserted my ancestral home,  
seduced by sweet talk from a man, a Greek—  
with a god's help he will pay me dearly.  
Nevermore shall he behold his sons from me alive;  
805 nor shall he have a child with his new-wedded bride,  
since she must die a horrid death by my strong poisons.  
No one should think of me as slight and weak,  
or as compliant—quite the contrary:  
I'm deadly to my enemies, supportive to my friends.  
810 It's people of this sort whose lives are crowned with glory.

CHORUS LEADER

Since you have shared this plan with us,  
and since we'd like to help you, and promote the human law,  
we tell you: do not do this thing.

MEDEA

There's no alternative.  
It's understandable you talk like this  
815 when you have not been made to suffer wrong like me.

CHORUS LEADER

But, woman, can you steel yourself to kill your body's fruit?

MEDEA

Yes, that's the way my husband can be deepest pierced.

CHORUS LEADER

You would become the wretchedest of women.

MEDEA

Then let it be. Meanwhile all words are mere excess.

*(To a maid.)*

820 You, go and summon Jason here  
—you are the one I use for all my tasks of closest trust.  
And tell him nothing of the things I have decided,  
not if you are true to your mistress,  
and if you are a woman born.

*(Exit maid to the side; Medea stays on stage.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Through their forefather Erechtheus,  
825 derived from gods by birth,  
long have Athenians prospered,*

*bred from unconquered earth.  
There they nourish their spirits  
with arts famous and fine,  
830 ever pacing with light steps  
the luminous air's shine;  
and the Muses, as they report,  
the Pierian nine,  
at one time gathered there to fill  
fair Harmony with breath.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*835 And legend says that Aphrodite  
scoops water with her hand  
from the pure river Cephisus,  
as all about the land  
she blows breezes of sweet breath.  
840 And ever plaiting round  
a rose garland for her hair,  
a sweetly scented crown,  
she sends the pleasures of Desire  
845 to sit beside wise Thought—  
who work together to create  
the best of every sort.*

STROPHE B

*This city of pure waters,  
this land of friendly guidance,  
how could it give asylum  
to you, the children-killer?  
850 hold you, impure, inside it?  
Just think about the stabbing,*

*think of the actual murder.*  
*Do not—they are your children—*  
*we utterly implore you,*  
855 *do not kill your own children.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*Where can you find the will-power,<sup>o</sup>*  
*where find the heart and vigor*  
*to drive this gruesome daring?*  
*Once you see your own darlings,*  
860 *how can you then stay tearless,*  
*as you stare at their slaughter?*  
*No, you'll not have the power to,*  
*not when they fall and beg you,*  
*no, not to drench all gory*  
865 *your hands, with heart remorseless.*

*(Enter Jason from the side.)*

JASON

Well, here I am at your command.  
Although you are so ill disposed, you should not be  
deprived of this: I shall pay due attention. Woman,  
what new is there that you might want from me?

MEDEA

Jason, I ask you to forgive the things I said.  
870 It's only fair for you to tolerate  
my angry moods, since there has been  
much friendship between us in the past.  
I came to words within myself, and scolded in these terms:  
"Stubborn, why am I raging and resenting

those who show good foresight?  
875 Why pit myself in conflict with the royal powers  
of the land, and my own husband?  
He's only taking the most advantageous course,  
by marrying the princess, and producing siblings for my sons.  
So should I not relent from anger?  
—what is wrong with me?—  
the gods are taking helpful care of me.  
880 I must confront the truth: that I have children,  
and that we are exiles, much in need of friends.”  
And thinking through these things,  
I recognized that I have been extremely stupid,  
and mistakenly felt outraged.  
885 So now I give approval; I believe you've shown good sense  
in forging this new kinship tie on our behalf—  
it's I have been the fool.  
I should have been there sharing in your plans,  
advancing them: I should be waiting on your bed,  
and gladly taking care of your new bride.  
We ... I do not say we're evil,  
890 but we are just what we are ... we women.  
So you should not yourself  
behave like us, and bandy trivial disputes.  
I'm sorry, I admit I had it wrong back then;  
but now I've thought things through more sensibly.  
Children, my children, leave the house,  
come here outside.

*(The two boys and the Tutor come out from the house.)*

895 Embrace your father, talk to him along with me,

and with your mother now be reconciled from enmity  
against those who should be near and dear.

We have made peace, and all our anger is dissolved.

Take his right hand.

900 Ah me! That makes me think of hidden wrongs.

Will you live many years, my children,  
to reach out your loving arms like this?

Poor fool, how close to tears I am, how racked by fear.

Here am I making up my quarrel with your father at long last,  
905 and yet my tender sight's all blurring full of tears.

CHORUS LEADER

A glistening tear has brimmed out from my eyes as well.

I hope this present wrong may not advance yet further.

JASON

I like this thinking, and I don't  
blame those things,

because it's only natural for  
females to be jealous,

910 if some alien partner<sup>o</sup> gets  
imported to her bed.

But now your feelings have been  
altered for the better,

and you've recognized,  
eventually, the winning  
plan.

These are the actions of a woman  
who is sensible.

For you, my boys, your father has,  
with careful forethought,  
915 arranged, thanks to the gods,

complete security.  
It's my belief that you, with your  
new brothers,  
shall enjoy the foremost standing  
in this land of Corinth.  
Your simple task is to grow up; the  
rest your father manages;  
and with some favorable god, I  
hope to see you thrive,  
920 and come to full maturity, superior  
to my enemies.

*(To Medea.)*

But you ... why are your eyes engulfed with glistening tears?  
Why turn your pallid cheek away?  
Why not be glad to hear these words from me?

MEDEA

925 It's nothing. I was only thinking of the children ...

JASON

Don't worry. I'll ensure that all goes well for them.

MEDEA

I shall do as you say, and take your good advice.  
But woman is a tender creature and inclined to tears. °

JASON

But why on earth such grieving for the children here?

MEDEA

I gave them birth. And when you prayed



930 for life for them, a pang came over me  
in fear for whether this would come to be.  
But of the things you came to talk with me about:  
some we have discussed, and there are others I have yet to mention.  
Since the ruler has decided he will banish me,  
I shall depart this land, an exile—  
935 this is best for me, I know full well, and not to stay  
and live where I might trouble you and the royal family,  
since I'm considered hostile to this house.  
But for the boys: if they're to be brought up by you,  
940 you must beg Creon not to make them leave this land.

JASON

I'm not so sure I can persuade him, but I have to try.

MEDEA

At least then get your wife to beg her father  
not to make the children leave this land in exile.

JASON

A good idea. And I believe I can persuade her—  
945 if she is a woman like the rest of them.

MEDEA

I shall myself take part in this attempt as well:  
I'll send her gifts, by far the most exquisite  
known to humans of our times—  
a finespun robe, and plaited wreath of beaten gold.°  
And I'll have the children carry them.  
950 One of you servants, bring the finery  
out here as quickly as you can.

*(She sends a maid into the house.)*

She'll win good fortune in innumerable ways,  
not only one: she'll get in you the best of husbands  
955 as her bedmate, and acquire the finery  
that Helios, my father's father,  
handed down to his descendants.

*(The maid enters from the house, bringing out to  
Medea gifts which she hands to the two boys.)*

Here, boys, take hold of these fine wedding gifts;  
go and present them to the blessed royal bride.  
She'll have no reason to complain at these.

JASON

You're being foolish: why deplete your own resources?  
Do you believe the royal house is short  
960 of dresses—short of gold, do you think?  
Preserve these things; don't hand them out.  
For if my wife holds me of any value, she'll estimate  
my wish above material possessions, I am sure of that.

MEDEA

No, not your way. They say that gifts persuade the gods, even;  
965 and gold means more to humans than a million words.  
She has the divine touch; for now  
the gods are raising her; she is the young empress.  
And I would trade my life, not merely gold,  
to get my boys reprieved from exile.  
Now, boys, proceed inside the splendid palace,  
970 and implore your father's newfound wife, my mistress;

beg her not to make you leave this land—  
and give this finery to her. This is what matters most:  
she must receive these gifts with her own hands.  
Now quickly, off you go.  
May you succeed and bring your mother  
975 good reports about the things she longs to get.

*(Exit the two boys to the side, with Jason and the Tutor.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*Now I've no hope for them, no longer,  
the children cannot live, no longer;  
they are already gone to slaughter.  
The bride, unhappy girl, will take it,  
the golden diadem, will take it;  
980 and she shall set the crown of Hades  
around her head—her hand will place it.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*The charm and the unearthly glitter  
will lure her to enfold around her  
the robe and gold-entwined tiara.  
985 She's dressing up to hold her wedding  
down with the dead. Now she is heading  
for such a trap, a fate so lethal,  
she can't escape from disaster.*

STROPHE B

*As for you, sad man, you've tied  
990 a fatal knot with kings,*

*not knowing that it brings  
the end of your boys' life,  
and cruel death for your bride.  
You were, unfortunate,*  
995 *so wrong about your fate.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*And I feel pain with you,  
sad mother of the two,  
you'll strike your children dead,  
all for the marriage bed*  
1000 *your husband has betrayed—  
now he holds in your stead  
another as his wife.*

*(The Tutor and the two boys enter again from the side.)*

TUTOR

Mistress, here are your sons, reprieved from banishment.  
Also the princess has received the wedding gifts  
delightedly with her own hands.  
So all's plain sailing for your boys in that direction.  
What's this?  
1005 why rooted there confounded when you've done so well?  
Why turn your pallid cheek away?°  
Why not be glad to hear these words from me?

MEDEA

Ah me!

TUTOR

This tune is not in harmony with my report.

MEDEA

Ah me, again!

TUTOR

Can I be bringing news  
of some misfortune I don't know about,  
1010 mistaken in believing my report is good?

MEDEA

The news you've given is the news that you have given.  
I don't hold that against you.

TUTOR

Then why cast down your eyes and shed these tears?

MEDEA

There's no avoiding it, old man:  
the gods and I, with my bad thoughts,  
have engineered this outcome.

TUTOR

1015 Take comfort. You shall yet come back,  
thanks to your children's influence.

MEDEA

I shall myself fetch others back before that day,  
to my own pain.

TUTOR

You're not the only woman to be sundered from her children.  
You are a mortal, and must endure misfortunes.

MEDEA

Agreed. But go inside and make provision  
1020 for the children's daily needs.

*(Exit the Tutor into the house; the two boys stay on stage.)*

O children, O my children,  
you two have a city and a home,  
and you shall leave me in my misery  
to live for always there, cut off from your mother.  
Meanwhile I'm heading for another country as an exile—  
1025 too soon to have enjoyed you, to have seen  
you happily grown up, too soon to decorate  
your wedding bath, your wife, your marriage bed,  
and raise up high the ceremonial torch—  
unhappy in my willfulness.  
For nothing, children, have I nurtured you,  
1030 for nothing gone through labor, and been raked with pain,  
enduring the sharp agonies of giving birth.  
I used, poor fool, to pin all sorts of hopes on you:  
that you would care for me when I was old,  
and lay me out with your own hands when I was dead—  
1035 that's something people value highly.  
But now ... this lovely kind of thought is finished now.  
Deprived of you I shall drag through my bitter, painful days.  
And you shall never see your mother more  
with those dear eyes of yours, once you're transported  
to another kind of life.  
Ah, ah  
1040 why look at me like that, my little ones?  
why smile what is to be your latest smile of all?

Ah, ah,  
what shall I do? My passion has all melted, women,  
now that I see my children's shining looks.  
I cannot, no.  
Good-bye to all my former resolutions:  
1045 I shall convey my children from this land.  
Why should I use what's bad for them  
to pierce their father's heart,  
and so inflict upon myself double the pain as well?  
No, I shall not. So good-bye, my resolutions.  
But stop, what's wrong with me?  
Do I want to be a laughing-stock,  
1050 and let my enemies get off scot-free?  
I must endure. It is mere cowardice  
to even let such feeble words into my mind.  
So, children, go inside.

*(The two boys stay on stage.)*

Let anyone who thinks it wrong to stay  
1055 near to my sacrifice look after matters  
for themselves;  
I'll not unnerve my hand.  
No, no, my heart, do not enact these  
things, I beg of you;  
just let them be, show mercy for the  
children.  
They can live there with us, and bring  
you gladness.  
No, by the avenging demons of the  
world below,  
1060 I swear, there is no way that I shall

leave  
my boys among my enemies so they  
can treat them with atrocity.  
Now they are bound to die in any case,  
and since they must,  
it will be me, the one who gave them  
birth,  
who'll be the one to deal them death.  
In any case these things are fixed and  
inescapable.

1065

She has the garland on her  
head already;

the princess-bride is in her death throes  
in the gown, I'm sure of it.  
But now, because I am about to tread  
the most unhappy of all roads,  
and I am sending these two down a  
track more wretched yet,  
I want to say some parting words to  
them.

1070

Come here, my children, reach out  
your arms and hold your mother tight.  
O dearest arms, and dearest mouth,  
and shapeliness, and children's noble  
looks!

May you fare well, but over there:  
your father has despoiled what there is  
here.

1075

Your lovely touch, your silken skin,  
and such sweet children's breath!  
Away, go, go. I can no longer bear to  
look at you,



I'm overwhelmed by pain.  
I realize what evil things I am about to  
do,  
but it's my anger dominates my  
resolution—anger,  
1080 the cause of all the greatest troubles for  
humanity.

*(Exit the two boys into the house; Medea stays on stage.)*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

*Repeatedly I have explored  
ideas of intricacy  
and entered on deeper disputes  
than usually womankind does.*  
1085 *We have inspiration as well  
that prompts dialogue leading truly  
to wisdom (not everyone,  
you'll only discover a few,  
one woman among many more,  
with true inspirational thought).*  
1090 *My conclusion is this:  
that people who've never had children,  
and have no experience of them,  
are certainly happier far  
than those under parenthood's yoke.*  
*With no opportunity to  
experience children as joy,*  
1095 *nor as causes of pain—  
they steer clear of many ordeals.*

*And those with that sweetness of growth,  
with children as plants in their house—  
I notice how all of the time*  
1100 *they are worn down to shadows with cares.  
Struggling with how to nurture good health,  
then how they can leave them well off ...  
and, after that, it's still unsure  
just whether this labor is spent  
to raise them as bad or as good.*

1105 *And lastly I have to include  
one final disaster of all  
for humans. Supposing all's well—  
they've put aside plentiful means,  
their children have grown to the full,  
their character makeup is good—*  
1110 *still, if destiny has it this way,  
then Death takes their bodies below,  
abducting your child's lovely life.  
Yet how can it profit the gods  
to pile upon humans this worst*  
1115 *and most agonizing of blows—  
a fine for the bearing of children.*

MEDEA

I have been waiting for some time, my friends,  
to see how things develop over there.  
At last I see this man of Jason's coming;  
1120 his labored breathing shows he brings grave news.

*(Enter Servant from the side.)*

SERVANT

Oh, you have done a terrible, atrocious crime,  
Medea. Run, run fast away—by sea-borne craft  
or earth-borne chariot—take what you can.

MEDEA

And what has happened that demands escape like this?

SERVANT

They're dead—your poisons  
1125 have just destroyed the princess and her father Creon.

MEDEA

That's excellent news—  
I'll always number you among my friends and benefactors.

SERVANT

What's that? Can you be sane? Or are you mad?  
1130 To devastate the royal house, and then be pleased,  
and not afraid to hear of things like this?

MEDEA

I too have things I could reply.  
But take your time, my friend, and tell me all:  
how did they die? You'll give me twice  
1135 the pleasure if they met their end most horribly.

SERVANT

When your two children and their father had arrived  
inside the palace of the bride, we servants  
who were anxious for your troubles were well pleased—  
a lively rumor had just reached our ears

1140 that you and your spouse had laid your former strife to rest.  
One of us kissed your children's hands, another kissed  
their shining hair, and I myself accompanied  
the youngsters to the women's chambers with a joyful heart.  
The mistress we now wait upon instead of you,  
1145 before she saw your pair of boys,  
was glancing with excited looks toward Jason.  
But then she covered up her eyes and turned away  
her pallid cheek to show how much she loathed  
the children's access there.  
Your husband then set out to mollify  
1150 the woman's angry mood by saying this:  
"You should not be unfriendly to your own;  
give up this anger and turn back your face.  
Consider as your own, your dear ones, those your husband does.  
Why not accept these presents, and entreat  
1155 your father to release the children from their banishment?—  
please, for my sake."  
Once she had looked close at the finery, she was unable to resist;  
she went along with everything her husband wanted.  
And before he and your boys had gone  
far from the palace, she unwrapped  
the ornamented gown, and draped it round herself;  
1160 and placed the golden wreath about her curls;  
holding a burnished mirror to arrange her hair,  
she smiled to see the lifeless image of her body there.  
Then rising from her throne, she moved around the room,  
stepping lightly on her snow-white feet.  
1165 She was enraptured by the gifts, and kept on looking down  
to check the dress was straight against her ankle.  
But then there came a horrifying sight to see:

her color altered, and, with limbs convulsing,  
she lunged sideways, collapsing on her throne,  
1170 and only just avoided falling on the floor.  
And some old serving woman, thinking that the fit  
must be inspired by Pan, or through some god,  
raised up the ritual glory cry—  
until, that is, she saw white flecks of foam  
discharging from her mouth,  
her eyes contorting in their sockets,  
1175 her skin all drained of blood.  
Then she let out a piercing scream,  
in answering discord to her earlier cry.  
Immediately one maid set off toward  
her father's chambers, and another to report  
the bride's collapse to her new husband.  
1180 The building echoed through with hectic footsteps.  
After about the time that it would take a sprinting runner  
to arrive at the finish of a two-hundred-meter racing track,  
the wretched girl awakened from her silenced voice  
and tight-shut eyes, and moaned a dreadful cry of pain.  
1185 Two pincer torments were invading her:  
first the golden band around her head spat  
an astounding fountain of incendiary fire;  
and then the clinging fabric, given by your boys,  
began to eat into the poor girl's milky flesh.  
1190 Engulfed in flames she rose up from her throne,  
and bolted, shaking hair and head this way and that,  
attempting to throw off the wreath.  
But still the gold clung tightly by its fastenings;  
and when she shook her hair,

instead the blazing doubled in intensity.  
Then, overcome by agony,  
1195 she crumpled to the ground, unrecognizable  
to anyone except her parents' view.  
The position of her eyes was not distinct,  
nor any feature of her pretty face;  
and blood was trickling from her crown, mixed sputtering with fire.  
1200 Her flesh was dripping from her bones like tears of resin,  
melted by the hidden action of your poison's jaws.  
It was a fearsome sight, and all of us  
were scared to touch her corpse—  
forewarned by what had happened.  
Her father, ignorant, poor man, of the disaster,  
1205 ran into the room and came upon her body.  
He cried aloud and flung his arms about her,  
kissing her, and said: "O my poor child,  
which of the gods has cut you down  
so undeservedly like this? Which has bereaved me  
of your life, an old man at death's door?  
1210 If only I could die with you, my child."  
When he had finished his lament,  
and tried to stand his aged body back upright,  
he found that, as with ivy gripping laurel branches,  
he was held tightly by the finespun robe.  
The struggle then was terrible.  
1215 While he did all he could to straighten up his limbs,  
she tugged him down again.  
And if he tried to pull by force,  
she wrenched the old man's flesh from off his bones.  
And in the end he was exhausted and gave up the ghost,  
poor man, no longer strong enough to fight the dreadful end.

1220 And so they lie there corpses, daughter and old father, dead,<sup>o</sup>  
beside each other, a disaster that cries out for tears.  
For me, your fate must lie beyond my scope;  
you will discover for yourself  
the payback of your punishment.  
But as for human life, I think of it—  
not for the first time—as a flitting shade.

1225 I'm not afraid to say that those who seem to be so clever  
and who take such trouble over making speeches, those are  
the very people who are guilty of the worst stupidity.  
No human is a truly happy man:  
it might be some are luckier than others

1230 when prosperity flows with the tide ...  
but truly happy—no.

*(Exit Servant to the side.)*

CHORUS LEADER

It would appear that on this day the god  
is rightly loading many evils onto Jason's back.  
O wretched daughter born of Creon, how much we pity you<sup>o</sup>  
for your misfortunes. You've had to go away

1235 to Hades' house, thanks to your union with Jason.

MEDEA

My deed has been decided, friends—  
as quickly as I can I'll end the children's lives,  
and move on from this land.  
I must make no delay, and give no time  
for someone else's crueler hand to slaughter them.

1240 Now they are bound to die in any case;

and since they must, it will be me, who gave them birth,  
who'll be the one to deal them death.  
Come, come, my heart, it's time to put your armor on.  
What use postponing now the evil deed,  
inevitable acts that must be done?  
Advance, my wretched hand, and grip the sword,  
1245 grip hard, and make toward life's painful finish line.  
No cowardice, and no remembering your children,  
how they were your dears, or how you gave them birth.  
Instead for this one fleeting day forget that they are yours,  
and afterward take time to grieve.  
Although it's you who's killing them,  
they were your lovely babes.  
1250 And I'm a woman made of sorrow.

*(Exit Medea into the house.)*

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE A

*I call on Earth and you, Sun, full  
illumination,  
look down and see this woman's foul  
abomination,  
before she strikes her deadly blow,  
infanticidal.*  
1255 *Since they're descended from your glow,  
celestial, golden—  
a fearsome thing for divine blood  
in desecration  
to fall to earth by human deed.  
Fire transcendental,*



*great god of light, restrain, detain  
her, exorcising  
out from the house this deadly bane,  
1260 avenging demon.*

ANTISTROPHE A

*In vain your toil for children, void,  
evaporated;  
in vain you bore the pair you loved,  
obliterated,  
you who escaped those narrow crags,  
the most forbidding,  
between the cobalt Clashing Rocks,  
the never yielding.  
1265 Why does such heavy anger load  
you, soul-destroying?  
Why does blood demand more blood?  
For internecine  
kin-murder brings for us humans  
extreme pollution;  
1270 kin-killers bring down on their homes  
concordant anguish.*

*(Inside.)*

ONE BOY

No! help, help!

CHORUS [*singing*]

STROPHE B

*You hear the children? You hear their shout?°*

*O wretched woman, your cursed fate!*

ONE BOY

What can I do to get free from my mother's grip?

*(Inside.)*

THE OTHER BOY

I see no way, dear brother—we are lost.

CHORUS [*singing*]

1275    *So should I enter? Yes, I choose  
to fend off murder from these poor boys.*

*(Inside.)*

ONE BOY

Yes, for god's sake, help—now is our hour of need.

*(Inside.)*

THE OTHER BOY

The net, the sword are closing in on us.

CHORUS [*singing*]

1280    *So you are really made out of iron,  
or out of granite. You will cut down  
the lives you nurtured from your womb's field,  
doom them to slaughter at your own hand.*

ANTISTROPHE B

*I've heard of only one woman past,  
who killed the nurslings of her own nest.*

*And that was Ino, sent mad by the gods,  
1285 when Hera drove her wandering away from home.  
She leapt down into the salty waves,  
wickedly drowning her clutch of babes.  
She pressed her steps from land into the sea,  
and died herself, along with her two sons.  
1290 Can there be any event so foul  
that it remains still impossible?  
The bed of women, love-bed of night—  
how many troubles are caused by your might.*

*(Enter Jason from the side, alone and sword in hand.)*

JASON

You women standing by this building here,  
is the perpetrator of these dreadful things inside—Medea—  
1295 or has she run away in flight?  
She's going to have to hide herself deep underground,  
or lift herself on wings high in the air above,  
if she is to avoid due punishment from this royal dynasty.  
Or does she think that she can kill the rulers,  
1300 and escape from this house here scot-free?  
But it's not her I came about:  
much more my children.  
Those that she has done damage to will do the same to her:  
I've come to save the lives of my two sons,  
and stop the kinsmen from inflicting harm  
on them in retribution for the awful murder  
1305 that their mother has committed.

CHORUS LEADER

O Jason, you unhappy man, you've no idea  
how far you are advanced in troubles,  
or you never would have said those words you did.

JASON

What's this? I don't suppose she wants to murder me as well?

CHORUS LEADER

Your boys are dead, dead by their mother's hand.

JASON

1310 What are you saying, women? You have shattered me.

CHORUS LEADER

Your children live no more—of that be sure.

JASON

Where did she kill them? Indoors, or outside the house?

CHORUS LEADER

Open the doors, and you will see your murdered sons.

*(Jason tries to force open the doors.)*

JASON

Quickly, undo the bars; quick, servants,  
1315 release the bolts, so I may see this double havoc  
both those who are dead, and her—so I may punish her.°

*(Medea appears above, in a flying chariot,  
with the bodies of their two sons.)*

MEDEA

Why rattle at these doors, and try to force them open?  
Searching for the bodies  
and for me the one who did it?  
Then abandon all this effort.  
And if you have some need of me,  
1320 then speak up if you wish.  
But you shall never lay your hands on me—  
you see what kind of vehicle the Sun,  
my father's father, has bestowed upon me,  
as protection from unfriendly hands.

JASON

You thing of hate, woman most loathsome  
to the gods, and me, and all humanity.  
1325 You who could steel yourself to drive your sword  
into the children you yourself had borne;  
and you have ruined me with childlessness.  
Now you have done these things,  
how can you dare to look upon the sun and earth,  
when you've committed this abominable act?  
To hell with you. Now I see straight: back then I was not thinking,  
1330 when I conveyed you from your home  
in a barbarian land to my household in Greece—  
already then a powerful evil,  
traitor to your father and the country that had nurtured you.  
The gods have sprung on me the demon of revenge  
that came with you, because you killed  
your brother at the hearth, and then embarked  
1335 upon the *Argo*'s glorious deck.  
You started out from things like that;  
and then, when you had married me

and borne my children, you murdered them—  
all for the sake of sexual pride, the bed.  
No woman born a Greek would ever have gone through  
1340 with such a crime; yet I saw fit to marry you,  
in preference to one of them—a loathsome  
and destructive union it has proved to be for me.  
A lioness not woman, you,  
more cruel in nature than the Etruscan Scylla.  
But not even with a thousand insults  
1345 could I pierce your skin, so toughened is your callousness;  
so go to hell, foul creature, and defiled with children's blood.  
All I can do is grieve for my own destiny.  
I never shall enjoy my new-laid marriage bed;  
I never shall share words again  
with these two children that I sowed and bred,  
1350 not in this life—no, they are lost to me.

MEDEA

I might have contradicted you at length,  
if it were not that father Zeus knows well  
how you have fared by me,  
and how you have behaved to me.  
You can't have thought that you could spurn my marriage bed  
1355 and then proceed to live a life of pleasure,  
reveling in mockery of me?—  
nor could the princess, nor could Creon who set up  
this match, and wanted to eject me from this land,  
and thought to get away with it.  
So go ahead, and call me lioness  
and Scylla, occupant of the Etruscan cave.<sup>o</sup>  
1360 I do not mind, since now I've fairly clawed into your heart.

JASON

Yet you yourself must also suffer grief,  
and be joint sharer in the sorrow.

MEDEA

Yes, surely, but the anguish is well worth it,  
as long as you can't mock at me.

JASON

O my poor children, what a vicious mother  
yours has proved to be.

MEDEA

O my poor boys, what a sad end you've met,  
thanks to your father's failing.

JASON

1365 It was not by my hand they died.

MEDEA

It was, though, because of your own arrogance  
and your new-saddled marriage.

JASON

And you believe it justified  
to kill them for the sake of sex?

MEDEA

Do you suppose such troubles to be trivial for a woman?

JASON

It is for one who's sensible:

but everything is bad for you.

MEDEA

1370 These children live no more, and that will pierce you through.

JASON

They are still here to bring down vengeance  
on your guilt-stained head.

MEDEA

The gods know which one started this catastrophe.

JASON

For sure they know your mind and its full loathsomeness.

MEDEA

Yes, hate away.  
The very timbre of your voice fills me with loathing.

JASON

And so does yours with me.

1375 Our terms of parting will be easy.

MEDEA

Then tell me—what am I to do?  
I too am keen to bring this to an end.

JASON

Just let me bury and lament for these poor corpses.

MEDEA

Never—because I'll bury them with these my hands.



I'll take them to the shrine of Hera on the Peak  
1380 to make sure no one of my enemies  
can triumph over them by ripping up their graves.  
I shall impose upon this land of Sisyphus  
a solemn cult and festival for all of future time,  
atonement for this heinous murder.  
Then I shall make my way to Athens, country of Erechtheus,  
1385 where I shall cohabit with King Aegeus, son of Pandion.  
And you ... you shall, appropriately enough,  
meet a rotten end,  
cracked on the head by a disintegrating piece  
from off the *Argo*'s hulk,  
and see the bitter outcome of your union with me.°

JASON [*chanting henceforth*]

*I pray that the children's Avenging Spirit*  
1390 *and Justice for murder may hound you to death.*

MEDEA [*chanting henceforth*]

*What god or spirit is going to hear you,*  
*who perjured your oaths, and deceived your hosts?*

JASON

*Child-killer, pollution!*

MEDEA

*Back to your home and bury your wife.*

JASON

1395 *I go, bereft of both my sons.*

MEDEA

*It's early to lament: wait for your old age.*

JASON

*My children, my darlings ...*

MEDEA

*Not your darlings—but their mother's!*

JASON

*And that is why you murdered them?*

MEDEA

*For you, to torture you with pain.*

JASON

*I ache to enfold my sons,  
1400 to touch their dearest lips!*

MEDEA

*Now you address them with love,  
now you desire to embrace,  
but then you pushed them away.*

JASON

*Just allow me a touch  
of the delicate skin of my sons.*

MEDEA

*Unthinkable. Your words are wasted in air.*

*(Medea flies away in the chariot with the bodies of their sons.)*

JASON

1405 *Pay attention to this, great Zeus:  
how I am driven away;  
what I have suffered at the hands  
of this polluted, this children-devouring she-lion.  
With my every morsel of strength  
I cry in my grief, and I call on the gods*  
1410 *to be witnesses,  
how you prevent me from touching  
the children you killed,  
deny me the burial rites for their bodies.  
Would that I'd never begotten them,  
only to see them lie butchered by you.*

CHORUS [*chanting*]

1415 *Zeus stores many things on Olympus;°  
gods do many things that surprise us.  
The endings expected do not come to pass:  
those unexpected—the god finds a way.  
That sort of story has happened today.*

*(Exit all.)*