

Euripides' Medea

Longman Anthology of
World Literature

Still I have a favour to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing,—then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, both I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.

≡ END OF PERSPECTIVES: TYRANNY AND DEMOCRACY ≡

Euripides

c. 480–405 B.C.E.

The Greeks found Euripides peculiar. His tragedies featured talking slaves, extravagantly demonstrative women, and rhetorical excesses previously unheard in the works of his predecessors. He was said to be the son of a lettuce monger, to compose his tragedies in isolation in a cave, and even to own a library full of books, a great oddity in a world of limited literacy. In the drama contests organized by the city to honor the god Dionysos, in which Euripides' plays were performed, he often lost. Yet we have more of his tragedies than of any other Greek playwright, nineteen of the ninety he wrote.

In his tragedies, Euripides represents a complex mixture of the ordinary, the everyday, and the radically deviant, calling attention to the deep strangeness of tragedy, a genre that crosses the world of heroic legend with the daily life of the citizen audience. Maidservants scheme calmly about adultery. The deposed queen of Troy, Hecuba, who after the city's fall is a slave, murders her enemy's children; it is predicted in the tragedy named for her that she will end her life changed to a dog, "a bitch with blazing eyes."

Euripides' gods exhibit cruelty and petty selfishness and torment human beings for their own amusement. The goddesses Artemis and Aphrodite fight over the sexual fate of the chaste misogynist Hippolytus, entangled in the desire of his stepmother, Phaedra; accused of seduction, he dies a battered wreck in the arms of his father. The god Dionysos, in the *Bacchae*, seduces Thebes' king, Pentheus, into dressing as a woman so that he can spy on the maenads, the maddened women worshipers of the god. Dionysos provokes his devotees, including Pentheus's own mother, into a frenzy in which the king is torn to pieces, his head brought home as a trophy by his mother; in a devastating recognition scene, she slowly realizes what she carries.

Euripides takes seriously the human status of women, children, slaves, barbarians, foreigners, and prisoners of war and gives them voices in his tragedies, decentering the focus on the free Greek male citizen typical of the ancient city. He demonstrates a special fascination for women, their psychology, their motivations, and their fates. Several of his tragedies focus on idealistic young women who choose to sacrifice themselves for their idealism and are exploited by older characters of great cynicism; Iphigeneia, for example, dies at the hands of her father, Agamemnon, who sacrifices her so that the Greek fleet can sail to Troy from Aulis, where the fleet has been stalled for an offense committed against the goddess Artemis. In *Alcestis*, a husband allows his wife to die in his place and then, immediately after promising never to replace

vulnerable, as the canary in the mine, liable to break down in situations of extremity and, victims themselves, to turn toward acts of passionate despair and hatred that bring down the world.

PRONUNCIATIONS:

Aegeus: ay-GEE-us

Euripides: you-RIP-id-eez

Medea: meh-DEE-ah

The Medea¹

Characters

MEDEA, *princess of Colchis and wife of Jason*

JASON, *son of Aeson, king of Iolcus*

TWO CHILDREN OF MEDEA AND JASON

CREON, *king of Corinth*

AEGEUS, *king of Athens*

NURSE TO MEDEA

TUTOR TO MEDEA'S CHILDREN

MESSENGER

CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN

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,³ skimming through the blue Symplegades,⁴

Nor ever had fallen in the glades of Pelion

The smitten fir-tree to furnish oars for the hands

Of heroes who in Pelias' name attempted

The Golden Fleece! For then my mistress Medea

Would not have sailed for the towers of the land of Iolcus,⁵

Her heart on fire with passionate love for Jason;

Nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias

To kill their father, and now be living here

In Corinth with her husband and children. She gave

Pleasure to the people of her land of exile,

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, Creon.

And poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the

Yows 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' 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' 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

1. Translated by Rex Warner.

2. Ship of Jason and the Argonauts.

4. The "Clashing Rocks" at the entrance to the Black Sea.

5. In northern Greece.

70 Where the old draught-players sit, by the holy fountain,
That Creon, 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.

75 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.

90 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.
95 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.
100 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.

105 Go now! Run quickly indoors.
It is clear that she soon will put lightning
In that cloud of her cries that is rising
With a passion increasing. O, what will she do,
Proud-hearted and not to be checked on her course,
110 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.
120 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!

125 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

135 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.

140 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

145 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?

150 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.
155 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,⁶ behold
160 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
165 I left you, killing my own brother for it.

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
170 Will appease my mistress' anger.

CHORUS: Will she come into our presence?
Will she listen when we are speaking
To the words we say?
175 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,
180 And speak kindly to her: hurry,
Before she wrongs her own.

NURSE: This passion of hers moves to something great.
I will, but I doubt if I'll manage
To win my mistress over.
185 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
190 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
195 How to put to an end with their singing
Or musical instruments grief,
Bitter grief, from which death and disaster
Cheat the hopes of a house. Yet how good
If music could cure men of this! But why raise
200 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.

6. Goddess of justice, virgins, and the hunt.

205 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
210 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
215 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 foreigner especially must adapt himself.
220 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
225 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.
230 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.
235 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 learned at home,
How best to manage him who shares the bed with her.
And if we work out all this well and carefully,
240 And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke,
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.
245 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.
250 Yet what applies to me does not apply to you.

255 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.

260 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 Creon
 Approaching. He will tell us of some new plan.

[Enter, from the right, Creon, with attendants.]

CREON: You, with that angry look, so set against your husband,
 270 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, Creon, for banishing me?
 285 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 afterward regret it.

MEDEA: This is not the first time, Creon. 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

300 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, Creon,
 305 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. Oh, 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
 310 Live in this land. For even though I have been wronged,
 I will not raise my voice, but submit to my betters.

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.
 315 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.

320 I beg you. By your knees, by your new-wedded girl.
 CREON: Your words are wasted. You will never persuade me.
 MEDEA: Will you drive me out, and give no heed to my prayers?
 CREON: I will, for I love my family more than you.

CREON: O my country! How bitterly now I remember you!
 MEDEA: I love my country too—next after my children.
 CREON: Oh what an evil to men is passionate love!

That would depend on the luck that goes along with it.
 325 MEDEA: O God, do not forget who is the cause of this!
 CREON: 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.
 CREON: Then you'll be removed by force by one of my men.

MEDEA: No, Creon, not that! But do listen, I beg you.
 CREON: Woman, you seem to want to create a disturbance.

MEDEA: I will go into exile. *This* is not what I beg for.
 CREON: Why then this violence and clinging to my hand?

MEDEA: Allow me to remain here just for this one day,
 340 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.
 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.

CREON: There is nothing tyrannical about my nature,
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,
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 Creon with his attendants.]

CHORUS: Oh, unfortunate one! Oh, cruel!
Where will you turn? Who will help you?
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
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?
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
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,
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
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 guaranty of his house and save my own life?
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,⁷ 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 Helius.⁸
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, lord of music,⁹
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.
No father's house for a haven
Is at hand for you now, and another queen

7. Goddess associated with witchcraft.

8. God of the sun.

9. The god Apollo.

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 overconfidence
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 shipmate 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,
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 Iolcus.
And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom,
I killed him, Pelias, with a most dreadful death
At his own daughters' hands,¹ and took away your fear.
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?
It is a strange form of anger, difficult to cure,
When two friends turn upon each other in hatred.
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 Cypris² 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.

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 Cypris² was alone responsible
Of men and gods for the preserving of my life.
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Into the story of how it was love's inescapable
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2. Aphrodite, goddess of sexual desire.

But on this question of saving me, I can prove
 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,
 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
 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:
 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 Iolcus,
 Involved, as I was, in every kind of difficulty,
 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.
 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 worthily
 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?
 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
 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,
 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,

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.
 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.

MEDEA: 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.
 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.

JASON: There is no benefit in the gifts of a bad man.
 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. Obsolutely
 You push away your friends. You are sure to suffer for it.

MEDEA: Go! No doubt you hanker for your virgin 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.