

# Euripides *Medea*

Translation by E.P. Coleridge, revised by Roger Ceragioli, further revised by Gregory Nagy  
Newly revised by the Hour 25 [Kosmos Society] Medea Heroization Team (Jessica Eichelburg,  
Hélène Emeriaud, Claudia Filos, Janet M. Oszolak, Sarah Scott, Jack Vaughan)

*In front of Medea's house in Corinth. The Nurse comes on stage from the house.*

## **Nurse**

If only the Argo had never sped its course to the Colchian land through the misty blue Symplegades [Clashing Rocks]; nor in the glens of Mt. Pelion the pine had ever been felled, to furnish oars |5 for the hands of most noble [aristoi] men, who went to fetch the golden fleece for King Pelias. For then my own mistress, Medea, never would have sailed to the towers of Iolkos, smitten in her heart [thūmos] with love for Jason; nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias to slay |10 their father, and so come to live here in the land of Corinth with her husband and children, where she found favor with those to whose land she had come, and was with Jason himself compliant in all things. This is the greatest safety [sōtēriā], |15 when wife does not stand apart from husband.

But now everything has become enmity [ekhthra], and things most *phila* are ill. For Jason has betrayed his own children and my mistress, taking to his bed a royal bride: he has wedded the daughter of Creon, master of this land; |20 while Medea, his unfortunate wife, without honor [tīmē], appeals to the oaths he swore, recalls the strong pledge his right hand gave, and bids the gods to witness what recompense she gains from Jason.

She lies fasting, yielding her body to grief, |25 wasting away in tears ever since she learned that she was treated without honor [tīmē] by her husband, never lifting her eye nor raising her face from off the ground. She lends as deaf an ear to the warnings of her *philoī* as if she were a rock or ocean surf; |30 except that sometimes she turns her snow-white neck aside and softly to herself bemoans her *philos* father, her country and her home, which she betrayed to come here with the man who now holds her without *tīmē*. She, poor woman, has by sad experience learned |35 how good a thing it is never to abandon one's native land.

Now that she hates her children and feels no joy at seeing them, I fear that she may contrive some novel scheme; for her *phrenes* are dangerous and she will not

stand being treated [*paskhein*] badly [*kakōs*]. I know her well, and I am much afraid |40 that she will plunge the sharpened sword through their heart, stealing without a word into the chamber where the marriage-bed is made, or else that she will slay the *turannos* and bridegroom too, and so get herself some calamity still greater than the present. For she is terrible [*deinē*]; anyone who is her enemy [*ekhthra*] |45 will have no easy time raising the song of triumph over her. But here come her sons from their play. How little do they think of their mother's troubles [*kaka*], for the thought of the young is unaccustomed to sorrow.

*An Attendant leads in Medea's children.*

**Attendant**

Why do you, ancient fixture of the household [pl of *oikos*] of my mistress, |50 stand there at the gate alone, loudly lamenting to yourself her troubles [*kaka*]? How is it that Medea wishes to be left alone by you?

**Nurse**

Aged attendant of the sons of Jason, our masters' fortunes |55 when they go badly [*kakōs*] make good slaves grieve, and touch their hearts [*phrenes*]. I have come to such a point of grief that a yearning stole upon me to come forth here and proclaim to heaven and earth my mistress's hard fate.

**Attendant**

What, has the poor lady not yet ceased from her lamentation?

**Nurse**

|60 You I envy! The pain is just beginning; it has not yet reached its midpoint.

**Attendant**

Fool—if I may call my mistress such a name—how little she knows of evils [*kaka*] yet more recent!

**Nurse**

What do you mean, old man? Do not begrudge me and refuse to tell.

**Attendant**

It's nothing. I regret even the words I have spoken.

**Nurse**

|65 By your beard, I implore you! Do not hide it from a fellow-slave. I will be silent, if need be, on these matters.

**Attendant**

I heard a man say, pretending not to listen as I approached the place where our old men sit playing dice near Peirene's august spring, |70 that Creon, the ruler of this land, intends to drive these children with their mother from the land of Corinth. But I don't know whether the story [*mūthos*] is reliable; I could wish that it were not.

**Nurse**

What! Will Jason stand such treatment [*paskhein*] of his sons, |75 even if he is at variance with their mother?

**Attendant**

Old ties give way to new; he no longer considers this family as *philos*.

**Nurse**

Then we are ruined, if we add new trouble [*kakon*] to old, before we have bailed out the latter.

**Attendant**

|80 Hold your tongue, say not a word of this; it's not the time for our mistress to learn this.

**Nurse**

Children, do you hear how your father feels towards you? May he perish! No, he is my master still. Yet he is proved *kakos* to his most *philoī*.

**Attendant**

|85 And who of mortals is not? Is it just now you learn that every single man considers himself more *philos* than his neighbors—some with *dikē* [*diakaiōs*], others for the sake [*kharis*] of gain [*kerdos*]*—*now that you see that because of his passion their father does not love these children?

**Nurse**

Go, children, into the house; all will be well. |90 But you, keep them as far away as may be, and don't bring them near their mother in her disturbed *thūmos*. For already I have seen her eyeing them savagely, as if with evil intent. She will not cease from her fury, I see it clearly, till she has pounced on some victim. |95 Yet I pray that she may turn her hand against her enemies [*ekhthroī*], and not against her *philoī*.

*Within the house.*

### Medea

Oh! Wretched that I am, miserable from my pains [*ponoi*]! Ah me, ah me, would that I were dead!

### Nurse

This is what I meant, *philo*i children: your mother rends her heart, and wild fury goads her on. |100 Into the house without delay! Stay far from her gaze; do not approach her; beware her savage mood, the horrid nature of her willful *phrenes*. |105 Go then, as fast as you can. For it's plain that she will soon redouble her *thūmos*; that cry is just the herald of the gathering storm-cloud whose lightning soon will flash. What will her proud, obstinate *psūkhē*, |110 stung by its troubles [*kaka*], be guilty of?

*The Attendant takes the children into the house.*

### Medea

Oh, the agony I have suffered [*paskhein*], suffered [*paskhein*] deep enough to call for these laments! Damn you and your father too, you cursed children, sons of a hateful mother! Ruin seize the whole family!

### Nurse

|115 Ah me! Ah me! Poor wretch! How, I ask, do your children share their father's crime? Why do you consider them as enemies [*ekhthroi*]? Alas, poor children, how I grieve for you lest you suffer [*paskhein*] some outrage! Terrible / wonderful [*deina*] are the tempers of *turanno*i; |120 maybe because they seldom have to obey, and mostly lord it over others, they change their moods with difficulty. It is better then to have been trained to live in equality. May it be mine to reach old age, not in proud pomp, but in security! |125 Moderation wins the day first as a better word for mortals to speak, and likewise it is far the best course for them to pursue. Extreme greatness brings no balance to mortal men, and pays a penalty of greater disaster [*atē*] |130 whenever a superhuman force [*daimōn*] is angry with a household [*oikos*].

*The Chorus of Corinthian women enters.*

### Chorus

I heard the voice, uplifted loud, of our poor Colchian lady; not yet is she composed [*ēpios*]. Speak, old woman! |135 As I stood by the house with its double gates, I heard a voice of weeping from within, and I do grieve, woman, for the sorrows of this house, for I am joined to it in friendship [*philia*].

### **Nurse**

There's a house no more; all that has passed away long since. |140 The royal [turanoi] bridal-bed keeps Jason at its side, while our mistress pines away in her marriage-chamber, finding no comfort for her heart [phrenes] in anything her philoi can say in words [mūthoi].

*Within the house.*

### **Medea**

How I wish that heaven's fiery bolt would split this head in two! |145 What profit [kerdos] is there for me in still living? May I die and win release, quitting this horrid existence!

### **Chorus**

Did you hear, Zeus and Earth and Light, the note of woe that |150 that poor wife is uttering? What is your passion for that terrible resting-place, poor reckless one? Do you hasten the end that death will bring? Cease to pray for that! |155 And if your husband reverences a fresh love, do not be angry with him for that; Zeus will be your advocate in this. Don't waste yourself away too much in mourning for the partner of your bed.

*Within the house.*

### **Medea**

|160 Great Themis, and Lady Artemis, behold what I am suffering [paskhein] now, though I did bind that cursed husband by strong oaths to me! May I see him and his bride some day brought to utter destruction, them and their house with them, |165 since they dare to wrong [a-dikein] me, unprovoked! My father, my polis, that I have shamefully left, after slaying my own brother!

### **Nurse**

Do you hear her words, how loudly she calls on Themis, invoked in prayer, and Zeus, |170 whom men regard as keeper of their oaths? Surely in no trifling thing will our mistress quell her rage.

### **Chorus**

I wish that she would come forth for us to see, |175 and listen to the words [mūthoi] of counsel we might give, in case perhaps she might lay aside the fierce fury of her thūmos and the temper of her phrenes. May my own zealous attention never be denied to my philoi! |180 But go and bring her to us outside the house

and tell her our friendly [*phila*] thoughts. Make haste, before she harms those inside the house; for this grief [*penthos*] of hers moves to something great.

### Nurse

I will do this; but I doubt whether I shall persuade |185 my mistress. Still, willingly I will grant you the favor [*kharis*] of this effort. Yet she glares upon her servants like a lioness with cubs, whenever anyone draws near to speak a word [*mūthos*] to her. |190 If you were to call the mortals of olden times not the least bit *sophoi*, you would not err, seeing that they devised their hymns for festive occasions, for banquets, and to grace the feast—they're a pleasure to the ear in life. |195 But no one among mortals has found a way to put an end to horrid grief by music and many-toned songs. It is from this that murders and terrible [*deinai*] blows of fate overthrow houses. Yet it would be a gain [*kerdos*] to heal the wounds of mortals by music's spell. |200 Why do they in vain lift high their song where rich banquets are spread? By itself the rich banquet set before them gives delight to mortals.

### Chorus

|205 I heard a bitter cry of lamentation! She cries out shrill painful laments<sup>1</sup> [*akhos pl*] over the traitor of her marriage-bed, her wicked spouse. Suffering [*paskhein*] from grievous wrongs without *dikē*, she invokes Themis, bride of Zeus, witness of oaths, |210 who brought her to Hellas, the land that fronts the shore of Asia, over the sea by night through boundless Pontos' briny gate.

*Medea enters from the house.*

### Medea

From the house I have come forth, Corinthian women, |215 for fear that you should blame me. I know well that among mortals many prove arrogant, both those who shun men's gaze and those who move in public; but others from their serene [*hēsukhos*] mode of life win a bad name for idleness. There is no *dikē* in the eyes of men; |220 before they ever clearly learn their neighbor's heart, they loathe him from a glance, though never treated without *dikē* by him. And a stranger [*xenos*] must indeed adopt the ways of the *polis*. Even citizens I cannot commend who prove stubborn and behave unpleasantly toward fellow citizens through ignorance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Short – metrical

|225 But it's on me that this unexpected disaster has fallen and sapped my *psūkhē*. I am ruined, and having lost the pleasure [*kharis*] of life I long to die, *philai*. For the man on whom I was utterly dependant, as I well recognize, has turned out to be the most *kakos* of men, my own husband. |230 Of all things that have *psūkhē* and intelligence, we women are the most wretched creatures: first we must buy a husband at too high a price, and then acquire a master of our bodies—an evil thing [*kakon*] yet more evil [*kakon*]. |235 But in this lies the most important ordeal [*agōn*], whether our choice is good or bad [*kakon*]. For divorce is not a thing of good *kleos* to women, nor can we refuse our husbands. Next the wife, having reached her new house with its unfamiliar ways and customs [*nomoi*], must be a seer [*mantis*—if she has not learned the lesson in the *oikos*—|240 to divine what kind of bedmate she will have.

If we perform these tasks with thoroughness and tact, and if the husband lives with us, bearing the yoke without violence [*biā*], our life is a happy one. If not, it's best to die. The man, when he is vexed with what he finds indoors, |245 goes forth and rids his soul of its disgust, turning to some *philos* or fellow of like age, while we must of necessity look to his *psūkhē* alone. They say we live secure in our households [*oikoi*], while they are off at war— |250 how worthlessly [*kakōs*] they think! How gladly would I three times over take my stand behind a shield rather than once give birth!

But enough, this speech does not suit you as it does me; you have a *polis* here, a father's house, some joy in life, and the company of *philoī*. |255 But I am destitute, without a *polis*, and so treated with *hubris* by my husband. I have been brought a captive from a foreign shore, and have no mother, brother, or relation in whom to find a new haven of refuge from this calamity. Therefore, this one thing and this alone I wish to get from you: your silence, |260 in case some way or means may be uncovered for me to get *dikē* for these wrongs [*kaka*] from my husband, and from the one who gave him his daughter [=Creon], and from the one who is his wife [=Glauke]. Though woman is timorous in all else, and in courage worthless [*kakē*] at the mere sight of steel, |265 yet in the moment that she finds her marriage-bed treated without *dikē*, no *phrēn* is more bloody than hers.

### **Chorus**

This I will do; for you will be taking a just vengeance on your husband, Medea. That you feel sorrow [*penthos*] for your misfortunes is not a source of wonder [*thauma*] to me. But look! I see Creon, lord of this land, coming here |270 to announce some new decision.

*Creon enters with his attendants.*

### Creon

You there, Medea, I order you to take those sullen looks and angry *thūmos* against your husband forth with you from this land into exile, and take both your children. Do it without delay, for I myself am executor of this decree, |275 and I will not return to my house till I cast you beyond the borders of the land.

### Medea

Ah me! Now utter destruction has fallen on my head, unhappy that I am! For my enemies [*ekhthroī*] are bearing down on me in full sail, and I have no landing place to come to in my disaster [*atē*]. |280 Despite suffering badly [*kakōs*] I will ask you, Creon, why do you drive me from the land?

### Creon

I fear you—there is no need to cloak my speech—that you may commit against my child some evil without remedy. Much evidence contributes to this fear of mine: |285 you are *sophē* by nature, expert in countless evils, and you are galled by the loss of your husband's bed. I hear too, so they tell me, that you threaten the father of the bride, her husband, and herself with some mischief; therefore I will take these precautions before suffering [*paskhein*] anything. |290 It's better for me to make you my enemy [*ekhthros*] now, woman, than to soften my heart and lament it hereafter.

### Medea

Alas! This is not now the first time, Creon, but often before my reputation has injured me and caused great troubles [*kaka*]. Never should he who is of ready wit by nature |295 have his children taught to be too *sophoi*: besides the reputation they get for idleness, they purchase bitter odium from their fellow citizens. If you should bring in unfamiliar skills [*sopha*] to the benighted, you will gain a reputation as useless and not as *sophos*; |300 while if your fame in the *polis* exceeds that of those reputed to have some cleverness, you will win their dislike.

I myself also share in this ill-luck. Since I am *sophē*, some hate me, others say I am too serene [*hēsukhos*], some the very reverse, |305 and others find me irksome. But I am not so very *sophē*. You, however, fear me, thinking that you may suffer [*paskhein*] something unpleasant. Don't be afraid, Creon. My position scarcely allows that I should seek to quarrel with *turannoi*. How have you treated me without *dikē*? You have married your daughter to the man your *thūmos* desired. |310 No, it is my husband that I hate. I don't doubt that you acted in a moderate way [*sōphrōn*] in doing this. And as things stand I don't grudge your prosperity: give your daughter in marriage and good luck to you. Only let me remain [*oikeîn*]



in this land; for though I have been treated without *dikē*, I will keep quiet,  
|315 and yield to my superiors.

**Creon**

Your words are mild to hear, but I dread in my *phrenes* that you are devising some evil [*kakon*]. Less than ever do I trust you now! For a woman with a sharp *thūmos*, and likewise a man, |320 is easier to guard against than a *sophē* one who is silent. Leave at once! Don't continue chattering! For this is decreed, and you have no trickery by which you can remain among us, since you hate me.

**Medea**

No! By your knees and by your daughter newly-wed, I implore you!

**Creon**

|325 You waste your words; you will never persuade me.

**Medea**

What, will you banish me, and yield no respect [*aidōs*] to my prayers?

**Creon**

I will, for I do not consider you more *philos* than my own family.

**Medea**

My country! How much I think of you in this hour!

**Creon**

To me also it is most *philon* of all, except for my children.

**Medea**

|330 Ah me! Ah me! To mortals how great an evil [*kakon*] is love!

**Creon**

That, I suppose, is according to the turn our fortunes take.

**Medea**

Zeus! Don't let the man responsible [*aitios*] for these evils [*kaka*] escape your notice.

**Creon**

Be gone, silly woman, and free me from my pains [*ponoi*].

**Medea**

Is it you alone, or don't I also have *ponoi*?

**Creon**

|335 Soon you will be thrust out by force [*biā*] by the hand of servants.

**Medea**

Not that, not that, I beg you, Creon!

**Creon**

You will cause annoyance then, it seems, woman.

**Medea**

I will leave for exile; I do not supplicate you to obtain this.

**Creon**

Why then this violence? Why do you not depart?

**Medea**

|340 Allow me to remain this single day and complete some plan as to the location of my exile, and means of living for my sons, since their father takes no care to devise this for his children. Pity them: you too are the father of children; |345 you naturally have a kind heart for them. For myself I have no concern if I live in exile; but for those children I weep, since they are involved in disaster.

**Creon**

My nature is least of all that of a *turannos*; often by showing regard [*aidōs*] I have come off the worse. |350 Now although I see my error, yet you will gain this request, woman. But I warn you now, if tomorrow's rising sun finds you and your children within the borders of this land, you will die. My speech [*mūthos*] is over, and it is not false. |355 So now, if you must remain, stay this one day only; for you will not do anything terrible [*deinon*] of which I am afraid.

*Creon and his attendants exit.*

**Chorus**

Ah! Poor woman! Wretched from your griefs [*akhos pl*]! Wherever will you turn? To what *xeniā*, |360 to what home or country as your savior [*sōtēr*] from your troubles [*kaka*]? Medea, what a hopeless sea of troubles [*kaka*] a god has plunged you into!

## Medea

On all sides sorrow pens me in. Who will deny this? |365 But all is not yet lost! Don't imagine so. There are ordeals [*agōnes*] still in store for the couple newly-wed, and no small labors [*ponoi*] for their relations. Do you think that I would ever have fawned on that man, unless to gain some profit or to form some scheme? |370 No, I would not even have spoken to him or touched him with my hand. But he has progressed so far in folly that, though he might have checked my plot by removing me from the land, he has allowed me to stay this day, in which I will lay low in death three of my enemies [*ekhthroī*]: |375 a father, his daughter, and my husband too.

Now, though I have many ways to gain their deaths, I am not sure which I should try first, *philai*. Shall I set fire to the bridal mansion, or plunge the sharpened sword through their hearts, |380 quietly stealing into the chamber where their bed is spread? But one thing stands in my way: if I am caught making my way into their chamber intent on my design, I shall be put to death and cause my enemies [*ekhthroī*] to laugh. It is best to take the straightest way, the way in which we are<sup>2[2]</sup> most *sophai*: to destroy them by drugs [*pharmaka* <sup>3[3]</sup>]!

|385 Well then, suppose them dead. What *polis* will receive me? What *xenos* will give me a shelter in his land, a secure home, and save my body? There is no one. So I will wait a little while longer, |390 in case some tower of defense appears for me; then I will proceed to this murder in crafty silence. But if some hopeless [*amēkhanos*] mischance drives me from my course, I will seize the sword with my own hand, even if I die for it, and kill them. I shall go forth on my bold path of daring.

|395 By that mistress whom I revere before all others and have chosen to share my task, Hekate who dwells within my innermost chamber, not one of them will pain my heart and get away for free. Bitter and mournful I will make their marriage; |400 bitter will be their alliance, bitter my exile from the land. Up then, Medea, don't spare the secrets of your art in plotting and devising. On to the terrible [*deinon*] deed! Now comes the *agōn* needing courage. Don't you see what you are suffering [*paskhein*]? You must not become a laughing-stock |405 by this Jason's marriage to the race of Sisyphus. You are sprung from a noble [*esthlos*] father, and from the Sun. You have the knowledge. And more than this, we are women, naturally most helpless [*amēkhanai*], when it comes to noble deeds [*esthla*], but for all evils [*kaka*] we are most skilled [*sophai*] contrivers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Medea shifts from speaking in the singular to the plural

<sup>3</sup> *Pharmaka* are drugs that can be medicinal or harmful.

## Chorus

*strophe 1*

|410 Back to their sources, the sacred [*hieroi*] rivers flow upstream. *Dikē* and the world are being reversed. It is men whose counsels are deceitful, whose oath in the name of the gods is no longer sure. |415 But over my life what people say will cause a change, bringing it into good *kleos*. *Tīmē* is coming to the race [*genos*] of women; |420 no more will foul-mouthed talk encompass us.

*antistrophe 1*

The songs of the ancient singers will cease to make our treachery their theme. Phoebus, the leader of song, |425 has not implanted in our minds the gift of divine song; otherwise I would have sung an answering strain to the race of men. The aeons past have |430 as much to say of our fate [*moira*] as of men's.

*strophe 2*

But as for you, you sailed from your father's house [*oikoi*] with manic heart, and set apart the twin rocks of the sea [*pontos*]. |435 Now you dwell in a foreign [*xena*] land, your bed left husbandless, poor woman; and you are driven without *tīmē* into exile from the land.

*antistrophe 2*

Gone is the reciprocity [*kharis*] that oaths once had. |440 Through all the breadth of Hellas reverence [*aidōs*] is found no more; it has sped away to heaven. And for you, no father's house is open, to be a haven from a storm of woe; while over your home stands another queen, |445 the bride that is preferred to you.

*Jason enters.*

## Jason

This is not the first time, but often before I have observed how a harsh temper is a hopeless [*amēkhanon*] evil [*kakon*]. In your case it was possible, had you endured the will of your superiors with light heart, to remain here in this land and house; |450 but now for your vain words you will be banished. To me your words mean nothing; don't ever cease to call Jason the most *kakos* of men! But as for what you have spoken against our *turannoi*, count it all profit [*kerdos*] that exile is your only punishment.

|455 I always tried to check the angry outbursts of the king, and I desired that you should stay. But you would not forgo the folly of continually abusing our *turannoi*. For this reason you will be banished. Yet still, even after all this I have not deserted my *philoï*; |460 I have come, woman, making provision that you not be destitute or needy for anything, when with your children you are expelled. For many are the evils that exile brings. Even though you hate me, never could I think badly of you.

### Medea

|465 Most *kakos* in all ways! That is the worst insult my tongue can find for your unmanliness. Do you come to me? You have become most hateful [*ekhthros*] to the gods, to me, and to all the human race [*genos*]! This is no display of courage or daring, |470 to confront your *philoï* after injuring them, but the worst of all human diseases: being without shame [*aidōs*]. Yet you've done well in coming, for it will ease my *psūkhē* to abuse you, and you will be vexed to hear it.

|475 I will begin at the very beginning. I saved [*sōzein*] your life, as every Hellene knows who sailed with you aboard the Argo, when you were sent to tame and yoke the fire-breathing bulls, and to sow the deadly field. |480 And I slew the dragon that was keeping safe [*sōzein*] the golden fleece, keeping a sleepless watch over it with its many twisted coils; I raised up for you the light of your salvation [*sōtēriā*]. My father and my home I left of my own volition, coming with you to Iolkos, beneath the hills of Mount Pelion. |485 My eagerness was greater than my *sophiā*. Next I killed King Pelias by a death most grievous, at the hands of his own children. All these things you experienced [*paskhein*] from us, and you, who are the most *kakos* in the world, betrayed us by acquiring a new wife, |490 though I have borne you sons. If you still had none, I might have forgiven your passion for this new marriage.

As for oaths, the trust I put in those is gone. Nor can I understand whether you believe that the gods you swore by then no longer rule, or that new institutions of law now hold sway among mankind. |495 Your conscience must tell you of your perjury. Ah, my poor right hand! You often grasped it as you grasped these knees in supplication. All in vain, I allowed a *kakos* to touch me! How far from my hopes I have strayed! But come, I will ask your advice as if you were my *philos*. |500 Yet what kindness can I expect from you? Still I will do it, because my questioning will show you up as even more disgraceful. Where should I turn now? To my father's household [*oikos*], to my country, which I betrayed to you when I came here? Or to the sorry daughters of King Pelias? |505 A warm welcome, indeed, I would receive from them in their house [*oikos*], when I

destroyed their father. This is my situation: to my *philoī* at home I have made myself an enemy [*ekhthra*]; while those whom I had no need to injure I have made my enemies to bring favor [*kharis*] to you.

In return for this you have made me blessed in the eyes of many Hellenic women, |510 and in you I have a wonderful, trusty husband. Wretched that I am! I shall be cast forth into exile from the land, deprived of *philoī*, one lone woman with only her children. It is a fine reproach, indeed, to the young husband, |515 that his children and the wife who saved [*sōzein*] his life are homeless beggars! Why, Zeus? Why did you give to men clear ways of knowing the counterfeited gold, while on men's body no brand [*kharaktēr*] is stamped by which to know the *kakos*?

### Chorus

|520 It is a *deinē* anger and past all cure, whenever *philoī* fall to strife [*eris*] with *philoī*.

### Jason

It seems I must not be a bad [*kakon*] speaker, and like a careful helmsman of a ship with his sails furled, |525 weather that wearying storm-tongue of yours, woman.

Since you build to towering heights the gratitude [*kharis*] I owe you, I believe that it is Aphrodite alone among gods or humans that was the savior [*sōtēr*] of my voyage. You have a subtle mind, |530 yet it would be an odious thing for me to explain that Love compelled you by his inescapable arrows to save my life. I will not set this out in too much detail: all the ways you helped me were good. Yet for the price of my salvation [*sōtēriā*], |535 you have received more than you ever gave, as I will show.

First, you live in Hellas instead of a barbarian land. You have learned what *dikē* means and how to live by law [*nomoi*], not the give-and-take [*kharis*] of force. All Hellas perceives that you are *sophē*, |540 and you have gained fame; if you had gone on living at the edges of the earth, no tongue would mention you. Give me no gold within my house, nor skill to sing a fairer strain than Orpheus, unless my fate should prove illustrious [*epi-sēmos*]!

|545 This alone is what I have to say to you about my own labors [*ponoi*], for it was you that challenged me to this reply. As for the insults you heap upon my royal marriage, here I will show that first I have proven *sophos*, then moderate [*sōphrōn*], and last a powerful *philos* to you and to my sons. |550 Only keep yourself serene [*hēsukhos*]!

Since I have withdrawn from Iolkos here with many troubles that cannot be helped [*amēkhanoi*] at my back, what more fortunate device could I contrive in my exile than this, to marry the daughter of the king? |555 It is not that I hate your marriage-bed—this pricks you so!—inflamed with passion for a new bride, nor that I think it important to strive after many sons—those already here are quite enough, and I do not find fault. No, it's rather so that we—and this is most important—may live well, |560 instead of suffering want, for I know well that every man avoids a *philos* when he is poor, and so that I may rear my sons as befits my house. Further, by begetting brothers for the children you have borne and placing these on an equal footing, we may unite the family [*genos*] in one and live in happiness [*eudaimoniā*].

|565 What need for sons do you have? But for me it's a profit to help my present sons by those which are to be. Surely I have not planned badly? Not even you would say so, if the marriage-bed did not vex you. No, but you women have gone so far as to think that you have everything, |570 so long as your marriage-bed does not founder. But if some mischance befall it, all that is most valuable and fine you reckon as your bitterest enemy. Would that mortal men begot their children from some other source, and that no female race [*genos*] existed! |575 Thus no evil [*kakon*] would exist for humankind.

### Chorus

Jason, you have ordered your words well. Yet I think—if I may speak my mind—that you have not acted justly [*dikaiā*] in betraying your wife.

### Medea

Truly I differ from the mass of mortals in many points. |580 To my mind, whoever is naturally *sophos* in speaking but has no *dikē* deserves the heaviest punishment. Such a man boasts that he can cast a decent veil of words over his unjust deeds, and boldly proceeds to wickedness. Yet he is not so very *sophos* after all. This is just how you are, so don't put forth your specious pleas and *deinos* speech to me; |585 one word [*epos*] of mine will lay you low. You had a duty—were you not *kakos*—to gain my consent, and then make this match, instead of arranging it in secrecy from your *philo*i.

### Jason

To be sure, you would be doing good service to this proposal, had I declared to you the marriage, |590 seeing that even now you cannot bear to put away your heart's hot fury.

**Medea**

It was not this that restrained you. A barbarian marriage was turning into ill-repute for you as you got older.

**Jason**

Know this well: it was not because of the woman that I made the royal marriage I now have. |595 But, as I have already said, I wanted to keep you safe [*sōzein*] and to be the father of royal [*turannoi*] sons bound in blood to my own children—a bulwark to our house.

**Medea**

May I not have that painful happy [*eudaimōn*] life, nor such prosperity [*olbos*] as would ever sting my *phrēn*!

**Jason**

| 600 Change that prayer, and you will seem more *sophē*. Never let what is useful seem a painful thing, nor, when you have good fortune, think that it is ill!

**Medea**

Act with *hubris*, since you have a place of refuge, while I shall go abandoned and desolate into exile from this land.

**Jason**

|605 You chose that yourself. Blame no one else.

**Medea**

What did I do? Surely not marry, and then betray you?

**Jason**

Against the *turannoi* you invoked an impious curse.

**Medea**

On your house too I am a curse.

**Jason**

I will not dispute these points with you any further. |610 If by chance you wish to obtain the aid of my wealth for the children or yourself, tell me; I am ready to grant it with an ungrudging hand, and to send tokens to my *xenoi*. They will treat you well. Moreover, if you refuse this offer, then you're a fool, woman. |615 But if you cease from your anger, your profit will be the greater.



### Medea

Neither would I make use of your *xenoi*, nor would I accept anything from you; cease to offer it. Gifts from a *kakos* man bring no benefit.

### Jason

I call the *daimones* to witness, |620 that I am ready in all things to be of service to you and to the children. But you scorn my favors and obstinately thrust your *philoï* away. Therefore your lot will be more painful still.

### Medea

Leave! You are seized with a desire [*pothos*] for your young bride, and linger too long outside her chamber. |625 Go to your marriage! Perhaps—and with a god's help it shall be so said—you make such a marriage that you will sing its dirge.

*Jason exits.*

### Chorus

*strophe 1*

When loves come excessive and past all limit, they bring neither good repute nor high ideals [*aretē*] to men; but if Aphrodite approaches in moderate strength, |630 no goddess is so full of charm as she. Never, mistress, discharge at me from your golden bow a shaft inescapable, |635 in passion's venom dipped.

*antistrophe 1*

May I find favor with moderation [*sōphrosunē*], heaven's fairest gift. And may *deina* Aphrodite never fasten on me a disputatious temper, or insatiable [without *koros*] quarrels, |640 smiting my *thūmos* with a mad desire for unlawful loves. May she reverence peaceful unions, and sagaciously decide the marriages of women.

*strophe 2*

|645 My country, my home! May I never be an outcast from my *polis*, leading a life full of helplessness and hard to traverse, the most pitiful grief [*akhos*]. |650 May death, yes, death, first tame me, when I have finished this day! There is no misery to surpass the loss of one's homeland.

*antistrophe 2*

I have seen with my own eyes, |655 and not heard a story [*mūthos*] from the lips of others, to reflect upon: no *polis*, not one *philos*, pities you suffering [*pathein*] the most terrible [*deinos*] of sufferings [*pathos* pl.]. May he perish without grace [*kharis*], |660 whoever could treat his *philoī* without *timē*, not opening the key of his *phrenes*. Never will he be *philos* to me.

*Aegeus enters.*

**Aegeus**

I wish you *kharis*, Medea! No one knows a finer beginning than this to address *philoī*.

**Medea**

|665 *Kharis* to you too, Aegeus, son of *sophos* Pandion. Where is it that you come from in visiting this land?

**Aegeus**

From Phoebus' ancient oracle.

**Medea**

What took you on your travel to the prophetic Navel of the Earth?

**Aegeus**

The wish to ask how I might get the seed of sons for myself.

**Medea**

|670 By the gods, have you stretched out your life till now perpetually childless?

**Aegeus**

I have no son owing to some *daimōn*.

**Medea**

Do you have a wife, or have you never known the marriage-bed?

**Aegeus**

I have a wife joined to me in the bond of marriage.

**Medea**

What did Phoebus say to you concerning sons?

**Aegeus**

|675 Utterances [*epea*] too *sopha* for a man to understand.

**Medea**

Is it *themis* for me to know the oracle of the god?

**Aegeus**

Assuredly, for there is need precisely for *sophai phrenes*.

**Medea**

What was the god's response? Speak, if it is *themis* for me to hear.

**Aegeus**

That I not loosen the wineskin's hanging neck..

**Medea**

|680 Till when? What must you do first, what country must you visit?

**Aegeus**

Till I return to my ancestral hearth.

**Medea**

What is your object in sailing to this land?

**Aegeus**

There is a man, Pittheus, lord of Trozen.

**Medea**

The son, they say, of Pelops, a most pious man.

**Aegeus**

| 685 It is with him that I wish to share the oracle of the god.

**Medea**

Yes, he is a *sophos* man, and expert in such things as these.

**Aegeus**

And to me the most *philos* of all my spear-*xenoi*.

**Medea**

Well, good luck to you. May you get what you desire!

**Aegeus**

But why this downcast eye and wasted cheek?

**Medea**

|690 Aegeus, I have the most *kakos* husband in the world.

**Aegeus**

What do you mean? Explain to me clearly the cause of your despair.

**Medea**

Jason treats me unjustly [without *dikē*], having experienced [*paskhein*] nothing unjust from me.

**Aegeus**

What has he done? Tell me more clearly.

**Medea**

He is taking another wife to succeed me as mistress of his house.

**Aegeus**

|695 Surely he didn't dare so shameful a deed as this?

**Medea**

Be well assured he did. We who were *philoī* before are without *timē* now.

**Aegeus**

Because he found a new love? Or did he come to consider your bed hateful [*ekhthros*]?

**Medea**

His passion is great; to his *philoī* he has proved untrustworthy.

**Aegeus**

So be it, if indeed he is *kakos* as you say.

**Medea**

|700 He is in love with becoming related to royalty [*turannoī*].

**Aegeus**

Who is it that gives his daughter to him? Please finish the tale.

**Medea**

Creon, who rules this land of Corinth.

**Aegeus**

Woman, I can well pardon your grief.

**Medea**

I am ruined. And I am being driven from the land.

**Aegeus**

|705 By whom? Here again you broach a new trouble [*kakon*].

**Medea**

Creon drives me forth into exile from Corinth.

**Aegeus**

Does Jason allow it? I cannot approve of this, either.

**Medea**

Not in name, but he will not stand up against it. I implore you by your beard and by your knee! |710 I am your suppliant: have pity, have pity for me in my misfortune. Do not let me be cast forth in desolation, but welcome me into your country and grant me a seat within your home. Then may your desire for sons find *telos* from the gods, |715 and may you die blessed [*olbios*]! You do not know what a thing you have found here: I will end your childlessness and cause you to beget a progeny of sons. Such are the drugs [*pharmaka*] I know.

**Aegeus**

Woman, on many grounds I am eager to grant this favor [*kharis*]: |720 first for the gods' sake; next for the sons whom you promise I shall beget, since for that I am completely helpless.

I view the matter thus: if you reach my land, I will try to be your patron [*proxenos*], since I am just [*dikaios*]. |725 But I will signal you in advance [*pro-sēmainein*], woman: I will not convey you from this land. Yet if on your own you reach my house, there you will remain in safety and I will never abandon you to any man. But from this land escape on your own, |730 for I also wish to be blameless to my *xenoi*.

**Medea**

So it shall be. But if I should have a sworn pledge to this effect, I would be content in all ways regarding you.

**Aegeus**

Surely you trust me? Or is there something that troubles you?

**Medea**

I do trust you; but the house of King Pelias is my enemy [*ekhthros*], and so is

Creon. |735 If you are bound by an oath, you would not abandon me to them when they come to drag me from the land. But if you make an agreement in words without swearing an oath to the gods, you would become my *philos* and still possibly obey their demands. My side is weak, |740 while they have wealth and a tyrannical house

**Aegeus**

Your words show much foresight. If this seems best to you, I do not refuse. This situation is safer for me if I have some pretext to offer to your enemies [*ekhthroi*], and your cause also stands firmer. |745 Now list the gods.

**Medea**

Swear by the level Earth, and by the Sun, my father's father, and add to this all the race [*genos*] of the gods.

**Aegeus**

What shall I swear to do, and from what refrain? Tell me that.

**Medea**

Swear that you yourself will never expel me from the land, |750 nor that any one of my enemies [*ekhthroi*], if he desires to drag me away, will be willingly permitted, so long as you live.

**Aegeus**

By Earth I swear, and by the Sun's bright light, and by all the gods in heaven, that I will abide by the terms I hear you make.

**Medea**

This is sufficient. But what would you experience [*paskhein*] if you should break this oath?

**Aegeus**

|755 Whatever befalls the impious.

**Medea**

Fare well on your journey, for all is well. I will reach your *polis* as soon as may be, when I have done my purpose and obtained my wish.

*Aegeus exits.*

**Chorus**

May the Lord Conductor, Maia's son, escort you on your way and bring you

home. |760 And may you achieve what your soul eagerly purposes; for to my mind you seem a noble man, Aegeus.

### Medea

Zeus, and *Dikē*, daughter of Zeus, and the Sun's light! |765 Now, *philai*, I will triumph over my enemies [*ekhthroī*], and I have started on the path. Now I have good hope that my enemies [*ekhthroī*] will pay the price of [*kakos*]. Where in my plans I had most distress, this man has shown forth to be a haven. |770 To him I will make fast the cables of my ship when I go to the city and *polis* of Athena.

Now I shall explain to you my plan in full, but do not expect to hear a pleasant speech. I will send a servant of mine to Jason 775 and beg him to come; when he does, I will address him in soft words, saying that it pleases me, and that the royal [*turannoī*] marriage, by which he betrayed me, is good. And I shall add that it profits us both and was well thought out. |780 Then I will beg that my children may remain, not that I intend to leave them in a hostile land for my enemies [*ekhthroī*] to treat with *hubris*, but because through guile I intend to kill the king's daughter. I will send them with gifts in their hands |785 to the bride, begging that they may not be banished from this land: a gown of finest weave and a crown of beaten gold. And if she takes this adornment [*kosmos*] and puts it on, wretchedly [*kakōs*] she will die, and likewise everyone who touches the girl; such are the *pharmaka* that I will smear on the gifts.

|790 But here I quit this theme. I grieve at the deed I must do next; for I will slay my own children. No one will take them from me! And when I have utterly overthrown Jason's house, |795 I will leave the land and escape punishment for my most *phila* children's murder, having dared a most unholy deed. *Philai*, I cannot endure the taunts of enemies [*ekhthroī*]. So be it! What profit [*kerdos*] is life to me? I have no country, home [*oikos*], or refuge left from evils [*kaka*]. |800 I did wrong, the day I left my father's home, persuaded by the words of a man of Hellas! Now he shall pay the price of *dikē*, if a god will help. And as for the children that I bore him, never again will he see them alive. |805 Nor from his new bride will he father more, since the *kakē* woman must die an evil [*kakōs*] death, slain by my *pharmaka*. Let no one consider me trifling and weak, as one who lives in serenity [*hēsukhiā*], but of another mold: dangerous to enemies [*ekhthroī*], and well-disposed to *philoī*. |810 They win the fairest *kleos* who live their life like me.

### Chorus

Since you have shared your plan with me, I tell you not to do this; for I wish to help you and uphold the laws [*nomoi*] men make.

**Medea**

There is no other way. But I forgive your words, |815 since you do not suffer [paskhein] badly [kakōs] as I do.

**Chorus**

Woman, will you steel yourself to slay your children?

**Medea**

I will. For that will stab my husband to the heart.

**Chorus**

It may, but you will be the wretchedest woman alive.

**Medea**

So be it! Every word that comes between now and then is wasted. You there!

*The Nurse enters.*

|820 Well then, go call Jason here. On every mission of trust, it's you that I employ. But say not a word about my purposes, if indeed you are loyal to your mistress, and if you are a woman.

*The Nurse exits.*

**Chorus**

*strophe 1*

Sons of Erekhtheus, blessed [olbioi] from ancient time, |825 children of the blessed [makaroi] gods, fed on the glorious food of wisdom [sophiā] in a sacred [hieros] land never pillaged; you who move with luxuriant [habros] step through climate ever bright and clear, |830 where legend tells that the nine Muses of Pieria were born of Harmonia with the golden hair;

*antistrophe 1*

|835 And poets sing how Aphrodite drawing water from the streams of fair-flowing Kephissos breathes over the land a gentle breeze of balmy winds; |840 and ever as she crowns her tresses with a garland of sweet-scented rose, she sends forth the Loves to sit by the side of *Sophiā*, |845 to be a help in every *aretē*.

*strophe 2*



How then will the *polis* of sacred [*hieros*] streams, the land that welcomes its *philoî*, receive you, the murderer of your sons, |850 whose presence in the land is impious? Think of their stabbing, consider the murder you are taking on yourself. Don't do it! By your knees we implore you in every way: |855 do not murder your children!

*antistrophe 2*

Where will you find the courage in *phrenes* or hand and heart in wreaking such a terrible [*deina*] deed upon your sons? |860 How will you look upon them, and without a tear experience their murder? You will not be able, when they fall at your feet for mercy, |865 to steel your *thūmos* and wet your hand in their blood.

*Jason enters.*

### **Jason**

I have come at your command. Even if you should hate me, you would not fail to obtain this; I will listen. What new request do you wish to make of me, woman?

### **Medea**

Jason, I beg your forgiveness for the words I spoke; |870 it is reasonable for you to bear my angry outburst, since I have rendered many *phila* services.

I took account in my heart and rebuked myself, saying, “Hard heart! |875 Why do I rave, why do I hate those who take good counsel? Why have I made myself an enemy [*ekhthra*] to the rulers of the land, and to my husband, who does the best for me he can by marrying royalty [*turannos*] and fathering brothers for my children? Shall I not get rid of my passionate anger [*thūmos*]? Why am I suffering [*paskhein*], when the gods make good provision? |880 Do I not have sons? Do I not know that we are exiles from the land and in need of *philoî*?”

When I thought this all over, I saw how thoughtless I had been and how senselessly enraged. So now I commend you, and think that you are balanced [*sōphrōn*] in taking up this connection for us; |885 but I was senseless, I who should have shared in these plans, and forwarded them, and been delighted to wait upon your bride. But we women—I won't say we are an evil [*kakon*]*—*we are as we are.

|890 Therefore you must not be like *kakoi* and meet my inept disconnection [*nēpia*] with disconnection [*nēpia*]. I ask your forgiveness, and I do confess that my thoughts were bad [*kakōs*] then, but now I have made these better decisions.

Come, my children, come! Leave the house. |895 Greet your father and speak to him along with me; and at the same time be reconciled from all former enmity [ekhthra] to your *philo*i, just as your mother now is. For we have made a truce and anger is no more.

*The Attendant comes out of the house with the children.*

Take his right hand. |900 Alas for my troubles when I contemplate any of the troubles [kaka] that have been hidden. Children, will you stretch forth your *philē* hand like this, when you have lived a long life? Wretched that I am! How near to tears, how full of fright! Now that I have at last ended my quarrel with your father, |905 I have filled your tender cheeks with tears.

### **Chorus**

From my eyes too pale tears roll forth. May no greater evil [kakon] than the present one ever befall!

### **Jason**

Woman, I praise this conduct, nor do I find fault with what is past. It is natural for the female *genos* to become angry with a husband |910 when he traffics in other marriages. But your heart has changed for the better and you recognize the superior counsel, though late; these are the actions of a balanced [sōphrōn] woman.

As for you, my sons, your father |915 has taken thought to provide much safety [sōtēriā], with the help of the gods. I think that in the future with your brothers you will be first in the land of Corinth. Only grow up! All the rest your father, and whoever of the gods bears us goodwill, is bringing to pass. |920 May I see you reach the fulfillment [telos] of manhood thriving, high above my enemies [ekhthro*i*].

But you, why do you wet your eyes with pale tears and turn your pale cheek away, and not receive this news from me in gladness?

### **Medea**

|925 It is nothing. I was thinking of the children.

### **Jason**

Take heart, for I myself will see that things are well for them.

**Medea**

I will do as you say, since I don't doubt your words. But a women by nature is weak and given to tears.

**Jason**

Why then do you grieve so much for these children?

**Medea**

|930 I bore them. When you prayed that they might live, pity came into my heart as I wondered whether these things would be. As for the reasons why you came to hear me, some are told, and the rest I will remember [*memnēmai*]. Since it seems best to the *turanoi* of this land to banish me, |935 and I know well that it is best for me not to dwell here where I am in your way, and in the way of the rulers of the land—since I am reputed to be an enemy to their house—I will leave this land in exile. But that the children may grow up under your care, |940 beg Creon not to banish them from this land.

**Jason**

I don't know if I can persuade him, but I must try.

**Medea**

You yourself bid your wife to beg her father not to exile these children.

**Jason**

Certainly. I do think that I will succeed in persuading her, |945 since she is a woman like the rest.

**Medea**

I too will help you in this labor [*ponos*]. I will send her gifts which I know well are surpassingly beautiful, a delicate gown and a crown of beaten gold; |950 the children will carry them. Let one of my attendants bring these adornments [*kosmos*] here with all speed. She will be happy [*eudaimōn*] not once, but countless times, since she wins the best [*aristos*] of husbands to share her bed and she will have these adornments [*kosmos*], which my father's father, the Sun, |955 once gave to his descendants. Take these wedding gifts, children, and bearing them in your hands give them to the blessed [*makar*] royal [*turannos*] bride. The gifts she will receive cannot be scorned.

**Jason**

But why rob yourself of these things so rashly? |960 Do you think a royal palace

lacks for gowns and gold? Save [sōzein] these things! Don't give them away! I am sure that if my lady holds me in esteem she will set me above possessions.

### Medea

Do not tell me so! It is said that gifts persuade even the gods. |965 Gold is more powerful for mortals than countless words. The *daimōn* is with her, and a god now increases her power; she is young and royal. I would exchange my *psūkhē*, not gold alone, for the exile of my children.

Now children, when you enter the rich palace |970 pray to your father's new wife, my mistress; beg her not to exile you from this land, while offering these adornments [*kosmos*]. It is most necessary that she receive the gifts in her own hands. Go quickly! When you have done these things well, |975 bring the good news back to your mother.

*Jason exits with the children.*

### Chorus

*strophe 1*

Now there is no longer any hope, no longer is there hope for the lives of the children, for they are going to their murder already. The bride will receive the crown of gold; poor woman, she will receive her disaster [*atē*]. |980 With her own hand she will place the adornment [*kosmos*] of Hādēs around her golden hair.

*antistrophe 1*

Its grace [*kharis*] and immortal glow will persuade her to don the gown and gold-wrought crown, |985 and so she will adorn herself to be a bride among the dead. Such is the trap into which she, poor woman, will fall and such is the fate [*moira*] of her death. She will not escape *atē*.

*strophe 2*

|990 And you, wretch, *kakos* bridegroom, with your royal [*turannos*] relations, how little you perceive the destruction you are bringing to your children's lives, and the cruel death to your bride. |995 Unhappy man, how far you have strayed from your fate [*moira*].

*antistrophe 2*

I lament your sorrow next, poor mother of children. These you will kill for the sake of your bridal-bed, |1000 which your husband has lawlessly [*a-nomōs*] deserted to live with another wife.

*An attendant enters.*

**Attendant**

Mistress, your children here are freed from exile and the royal bride gladly received your gifts in her hands, and so the children are at peace with her.

|1005 What's this? Why do you stand there so confused when you have now succeeded? Why do you turn your cheek away and not receive this news from me in gladness?

**Medea**

Ah me!

**Attendant**

Your groans ill-agree with the news I have reported.

**Medea**

Ah me! Ah me!

**Attendant**

Am I unaware that I am reporting some disaster? |1010 Was I mistaken in thinking this news was good?

Surely not.

**Medea**

The news is as it is. I do not blame you.

**Attendant**

Why then are your eyes downcast? Why do you shed these tears?

**Medea**

Old man, my need to weep is strong, for the gods and I with evil [*kakōs*] heart planned these schemes.

**Attendant**

|1015 Be brave! You too will come home hereafter, through your sons' aid.

## Medea

Ah wretched me! First I will bring others to their home.

## Attendant

You are not the only mother separated from her children; you must bear misfortunes lightly, being mortal.

## Medea

I will do this. But now go into the house |1020 and prepare for the children what they need for the day. My children, my children, there is indeed a *polis* and a home for you. There, when you have left me in my wretchedness, you will live [*oikein*] always, bereft of your mother. I will go into exile to some other land, |1025 before I take joy in you and see you happy [*eudaimōn*], before I adorn your wedding bath and bride and nuptial-bed, and before I hold high your wedding torch. Alas for my willfulness! It was in vain, my children, that I raised you up, |1030 in vain that I labored and struggled with ordeals [*ponoi*] and bore the wrenching pains of childbirth.

Truly, wretched me, I once had high hopes that you would care for me in old age, and in death that you would bury me with your own hands, |1035 and I would be envied among mankind. But now this sweet thought is shattered. Bereft of you two, I must lead a life of bitter sorrow. You yourselves never again will lay your *phila* eyes upon your mother, when you have changed your mode of living.

|1040 Alas! Alas! Why do you look at me with those eyes, my children? Why smile at me this final smile? What shall I do? Courage leaves me, friends, when I look at the bright faces of my children. I could not! Goodbye to my former plans. |1045 I will take the children away from this land. In wounding their father with these evils [*kaka*], why should I myself get twice as many evils [*kaka*]? I will not! Goodbye, my plans.

Why am I suffering [*paskhein*]? Do I want to incur their mockery |1050 by letting my enemies [*ekhthroi*] go free from punishment? I must endure this; I was *kakē* even to let these soft words approach my *phrenes*. Go into the house, children. For whomever it is not *themis* to be present at this sacrifice of mine, let him take care! |1055 I will not spoil my handiwork.

Do not, my *thūmos*, do not do this deed! Let them go, unhappy woman, spare your children! If they live, they will cheer you in your exile there. By the avenging underworld spirits in Hades, |1060 never, never shall I hand over my children for their enemies to treat with *hubris*. They absolutely must die. Since they must, I

who bore them will give the fatal blow. Their fate is fixed; there is no escape. |1065 Already the crown is on her head, and in her gown the royal [*turannos*] bride dies; this I know full well. But now, since I have a pitiful path to tread, and yet more pitiful is the path I send my children down, I wish to say farewell to them.

*The children come out.*

Give me, give me |1070 your right hand that your mother may kiss it! Most *philē* hand, *philon* lips, and noble form and features of my children! May you be happy [*eudaimōn*], but in that other place. Your father has robbed you of your life here. Sweet embrace, |1075 the soft young cheek, the fragrant breath of my children! Go, go! Leave me! No longer can I bear to look upon you; my troubles [*kaka*] defeat me. At last I understand the evils [*kaka*] that I will perform; but my *thūmos*, |1080 responsible [*aitios*] for the greatest troubles [*kaka*] for mortals, is stronger than my sober thoughts.

*She goes into the house with the children.*

### **Chorus**

Often before now I have pursued subtler arguments [*mūthoi*] and have faced graver challenges than the family of women should seek to probe. |1085 Even we have a Muse, which consorts with us on account of our *sophiā*. But not with us all, for small is the race [*genos*] of women—one perhaps among many you could find—that has inspiration.

|1090 I do declare that those among mortals who are wholly without experience of children's birth far surpass in happiness those who are parents. The childless, because they have never experienced |1095 whether their children grow up to be a blessing or curse to mortals, are removed from many troubles. While those who have in their households [*oikoi*] the sweet bloom of children, are worn away, as I perceive, |1100 throughout their whole life: first with the thought of how they may train them up in virtue, next how they shall leave their sons the means to live. And after all this, it is far from clear whether on good or bad children they bestow their toil.

|1105 I will now declare the one last evil [*kakon*] of all for every mortal. Suppose that they have found sufficient means to live, and have seen their children grow to maturity and walk down virtue's path; still, if a *daimōn* so befall, |1110 Death comes and bears the children's bodies off to Hādēs. How can it profit a man that

besides our other woes the gods heap upon mortals this most grievous pain,  
|1115 all for the love of children?

*Medea comes out of the house.*

**Medea**

*Philai*, long have I anxiously waited to know how things at the palace will proceed. And look! I see one of Jason's servants coming here. His excited breath |1120 proclaims that he will announce some new evil [*kakon*].

*A Messenger rushes in.*

**Messenger**

You who have done a terrible [*deinon*] deed, transgressing all law, flee, Medea, flee! Do not leave untried the sea-borne ship or chariot that treads the plain!

**Medea**

What has befallen, to call for such a flight of mine?

**Messenger**

|1125 The royal [*turannos*] girl has just died, and Creon her parent, by your poisons [*pharmaka*].

**Medea**

What excellent news [*mūthos*] you have spoken! Henceforth you will be ranked among my *philo*i and benefactors.

**Messenger**

What! Are your *phrenes* aright? Are you not mad, woman, |1130 when, having destroyed the royal [*turanno*i] house, you take joy in hearing such things as these and are not afraid?

**Medea**

I too have something to say, in answer to your words. Don't be so hasty, *philos*, but tell me how they died. |1135 You would give me double joy, if they perished in the greatest wretchedness.

**Messenger**

When the two children whom you bore came with their father and entered the palace of his bride, we slaves who shared your troubles [*kaka*] were glad. Instantly from ear to ear the news spread that |1140 you and your husband had made up your former quarrel. One person kissed your children's hands, another



their golden hair, while I myself from joy went with them to the women's chambers. The mistress whom now we revere instead of you, kept eager eyes on Jason, |1145 until she saw your two children; but then she veiled her eyes and turned her fair cheek away in disgust at their coming. Your husband |1150 tried to check the young woman's angry temper with these words: "Surely you will not be hostile to your *philoī*? Cease from your *thūmos* and once more turn your face this way. Count as *philoī* those whom your husband does, and accept these gifts. For my sake [*kharis*], beg your father |1155 to forgo the exile of these children."

As soon as she saw the adornments [*kosmos*], she did not hold back, but yielded to her husband in all. Before the father and your sons were far from the palace, she snatched the embroidered gown and put it on, |1160 and set the golden crown around her tresses, arranging her hair in a bright mirror, with smiles at the *psūkhē*-less image of her body. Springing from her seat she passed across the chamber, stepping luxuriantly [*habros*] on her fair white foot, |1165 exulting in the gift, with many, many glances back at her straightened ankle.

What happened then was a scene *deinon* to behold. In a moment she turned pale, reeled backwards, trembling in every limb, and sank upon a seat |1170 with barely time to save herself from falling on the ground. An aged servant, thinking that it was a fit sent from Pan or some god, raised a joyful cry, till she saw that from her mouth foam oozed forth, her eyeballs |1175 rolled in their sockets, and all the blood had gone from her face. Then she raised a wail far different from her former cry. Immediately one handmaid rushed to her father's house, another to her new bridegroom to tell of his bride's sad fate; the whole |1180 house thundered with their running back and forth.

In the time a quick runner would have gone a hundred yards and be reaching the goal, groaning terribly [*deinon*] she awoke, poor woman, from her speechless trance and opened her closed eyes; |1185 a double agony made war against her. The crown of gold about her head discharged an amazing stream of all-devouring fire, while the delicate gown, your children's gift, was feasting on the unfortunate [=with bad *daimōn*] woman's fair white flesh. |1190 She sprang from her seat burning alive and sought to fly, shaking her hair and head this way and that, trying to cast off the crown; but the gold held firm to its fastenings, and the flame, as she shook her locks, blazed forth instead with double fury.

|1195 Then she fell to the ground, overcome by her misfortune, and could not be recognized now except to her father's gaze. The ordinary appearance of her eyes could not be seen, nor the natural beauty of her face, but from the top of her head blood mixed with fire dripped down; |1200 and from her bones the flesh

kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those hidden poisons [*pharmaka*], just as when the pine tree weeps its tears of pitch. It was a terrible [*deinon*] sight to see.

All were afraid to touch the corpse, for we were warned by her fate. But her sorry father, |1205 unaware of what had occurred to her, came suddenly into the house and flung himself on the corpse. Immediately he cried aloud, and folding his arms about her he kissed her, and addressed her in speech such as this: “My poor, poor child, which of the *daimones* destroyed you so without *timē*, and makes my aged tomb bereft of you? |1210 My child, alas! Would that I could die together with you.”

When he stopped his sad lament and tears, he desired to raise his aged body, but found himself held fast by the delicate gown, like ivy that clings to the branches of the bay tree. Terrible [*deina*] struggles ensued: |1215 he tried to rise, but she held him back; and if ever he pulled violently [*biā*], he ripped the aged flesh from his bones. At last he was extinguished, and breathed forth his *psūkhē*, unfortunate man; he was overcome by the evil [*kakon*].

|1220 So there they lie, daughter and aged father, dead side by side, a disaster rousing tears. But as for you, I leave you out of my consideration. You will discover your own means to ward off punishment. This is not the first time that I find human affairs to be a shadowy, uncertain thing. |1225 Without any hesitation I would say that those among men who have a reputation for being *sophoi*, and who expend deep thought on reasonings, do incur the greatest charge of folly. No man among mortals is happy [*eudaimōn*]. Prosperity [*olbos*] may pour in and |1230 make one luckier than another, but not *eudaimōn*.

*The Messenger exits.*

### **Chorus**

It seems the *daimōn* will justly fasten on Jason many evils [*kaka*] today. Unfortunate woman, daughter of Creon! We pity your sad fate, |1235 gone as you are to Hādēs’ halls because of your marriage with Jason.

### **Medea**

*Philai*, I am resolved upon the deed: I shall slay my children at once, and then leave this land. I will not delay and so surrender them over to some hostile hand for butchering. |1240 They must die in any case, and since they must, I will slay them—I, the mother who bore them. But come, my heart, arm yourself! Why do I hesitate to do the terrible [*deina*] evils [*kaka*] that must be done? Come, take the sword, poor hand of mine! |1245 Take it, and advance to the starting-post, where

your life of sorrow begins! Away with cowardice! Forget your children, forget how most *phila* they are, and how you bore them. For this brief day forget, and after that lament. Though you will slay them, |1250 yet they are your *philo*i still. And I am a woman of sorrows.

*Medea enters the house.*

### **Chorus**

*strophe 1*

O Earth, and Sun whose rays illuminate all, look down, look upon this lost woman, before she strikes her sons with murderous hand in bloodshed! |1255 She is sprung from your own golden race, and I fear that the blood of a god is being shed to the ground by man. Light of Heaven, stay her, stop her, drive forth from the household [*oikoi*] the unfortunate woman |1260 and the bloody avenging Fury [Erinys].

*antistrophe 1*

The toil of raising children is vainly lost; in vain you bore dear offspring [*philon genos*], you who left behind the passage through the blue Symplegades, hostile to *xenoi*. |1265 Wretched woman, why does fierce-hearted anger attack you? Why do violent murders come in turn? The pollution of kinsmen's murders is harsh to mortals, |1270 and grief [*akhos pl.*] falls from the gods upon the houses of the murderers.

*Within the house.*

### **First Son**

Help, help!

### **Chorus**

Do you hear? Do you hear the children's cry? Alas, wretched woman, born to an evil fate!

### **First Son**

Ah me! What can I do? How can I flee my mother's hand?

### **Second Son**

I don't know, most *philos* brother; we are lost.

**Chorus**

|1275 Should I enter the house? I am resolved to defend the children from murder.

**First Son**

Yes! By the gods, help! We need your aid.

*strophe 2*

**Second Son**

Even now the perils of the sword draw near!

**Chorus**

|1280 Poor woman, surely you are made of stone or iron to slay the seed of your own womb with a *moira* by your own hand.

*antistrophe 2*

Of all the women of legend, I know just one who struck against her *phila* children: Ino, maddened by the gods that day |1285 when the wife of Zeus drove her wandering from her home. But she, poor woman, flung herself into the sea because of the impious murder of her children, leaping from the cliff overlooking the sea [*pontos*]; and so she perished, dying with her two sons. |1290 Can there be anything *deinon* left to follow this? Women's marriage-beds, full of troubles, what evils [*kaka*] you have caused for mortals already!

*Jason and his attendants enter.*

**Jason**

You women standing near this house, is the author of these terrible [*deina*] deeds, |1295 Medea, still inside, or has she left in flight? She must hide beneath the earth or soar on wings towards heaven's height, if she wishes to avoid the vengeance of the royal [*turannoi*] house. Is she confident that she herself will escape from this house without paying *dikē*, |1300 when she has murdered the rulers of the land?

Enough of this! I am not concerned with her, but with the children. In her case, those whom she has used badly [*kakōs*] will treat her likewise. I have come to save my children's lives, lest those who are related by family [*genos*] cause me misfortune, |1305 in punishing the impious murder committed by my children's mother.

**Chorus**

Unhappy man, you don't know the full extent of your *kaka*, or you never would have said those words.

**Jason**

What now? Can she want to kill me too?

**Chorus**

Your sons are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

**Jason**

| 1310 Alas! What next will you say? Woman, you have destroyed me!

**Chorus**

You must take thought that your children are no more.

**Jason**

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

**Chorus**

Open the doors and see your children's murder.

**Jason**

Hurry, slaves, loosen the bolts, |1315 undo the fastenings, so that I may see a double *kakon*, my murdered sons; and so that I may make her pay the *dikē*.

*Medea appears above the house, on a chariot drawn by dragons; the children's corpses are beside her.*

**Medea**

Why do you shake those doors and try to loosen their bolts, in search for corpses and me their murderer? Cease from your labor [*ponos*]. If you have need of me, speak, if you like; |1320 but never will you lay your hand on me. Such is the chariot which the Sun, my father's father, has given to me, to preserve me from the hand of my enemies.

**Jason**

Hateful woman, bitterest enemy to the gods, to me, and to all the human race [*genos*]! |1325 You dared to stab the sons you bore; you made me childless and ruined my life. After doing these things, do you still look on the sun and earth, having dared a deed most impious? Curse you! Now I perceive what I missed that day |1330 when I brought you from your household [*oikos*] in a barbarian land to

dwell in Hellas, you, a great evil [*kakon*], a traitor to your father and to the land that nurtured you! The gods have sent against me the avenging spirit that pursued you. You slew your brother at your hearth before you came aboard our |1335 fine-prowed ship, the Argo. Such was the beginning of your life of crime.

Then you married me and bore me sons, and to glut your wrath over your marriage-bed you have now slain them. |1340 Not a single wife in Hellas would ever have dared this deed; yet before them all I chose you for my wife, wedding an enemy [*ekhthros*] to be my destruction. You are no woman, but a lioness fiercer than Tyrrhenian Scylla in your nature. But I cannot wound you with reproaches heaped a thousandfold, |1345 so brazen is your nature. Be damned, you evil doer, you and your hand stained in the blood of your sons! I can only weep for my *daimōn*, since I shall never enjoy my bride newly-wed, nor shall I have the children, whom I sired and reared, alive to speak to me. |1350 I have lost them utterly.

### **Medea**

In answer to this speech I could have spoken at length. But Father Zeus knows well all that I have done for you, and the treatment [*paskhein*] you have given me. You were not destined to treat my marriage without *timē* and lead a pleasant life in mockery of me. |1355 Neither your princess nor Creon who arranged your marriage was destined to thrust me from this land without penalty. So call me lioness if you like, or Scylla who inhabits [*oikein*] the Tyrrhenian land; |1360 I have wrenched your heart in turn, as was needed.

### **Jason**

Your heart is also pained; you share in my *kaka*.

### **Medea**

Be well assured I do; but it relieves my pain to know you cannot mock me.

### **Jason**

My children, how *kakē* is the mother you have found!

### **Medea**

My sons, your father's lust has been your ruin.

### **Jason**

|1365 It was not my right hand that slew them.

**Medea**

No, your *hubris* and your new marriage-bed.

**Jason**

Did you think that that was reason enough to murder them?

**Medea**

Do you think a woman finds that a tiny pain?

**Jason**

A balanced [*sōphrōn*] one, yes. But to you it is the totality of evils [*kaka*].

**Medea**

|1370 Your sons exist no more. That will stab you in the heart.

**Jason**

My sons exist, alas, as avenging spirits to bring retribution on your head.

**Medea**

The gods know who it was that began this grief.

**Jason**

They know that hateful *phrēn* of yours.

**Medea**

Hate me then. But I consider hateful [*ekhthros*] this barking tongue of yours.

**Jason**

|1375 And I hate yours. Riddance of one another will be easy.

**Medea**

How? What should I do? I too yearn to be rid of you.

**Jason**

Give up those dead to me, to bury and lament.

**Medea**

Never! I will bury them myself with this very hand. I will bear them to the sacred precinct of the goddess Hera Akraia [“of the Heights”], |1380 so none of their foes may treat them with *hubris* by pulling down their tombs. And in this land of Sisyphus I will order for the future a solemn feast and rituals [*telos* pl.] to atone for this impious murder. As for me, I am going to the land of Erekhtheus, to dwell with Aegeus, |1385 Pandion’s son. But you, *kakos*, will die a *kakōs* death, as is

appropriate, your head crushed by a shattered fragment of the Argo, having seen the bitter coming to *telos* of my marriage.

**Jason**

May the Fury [Erinys] of our children and bloody *Dikē* |1390 destroy you!

**Medea**

What god or *daimōn* listens to you, oath-breaker and deceiver of *xenoi*?

**Jason**

Alas, alas! You foul murderer of children!

**Medea**

Go to your household [*oikoi*] and bury your wife!

**Jason**

|1395 I go, bereft of both my sons.

**Medea**

Your grief is yet to come; wait till old age comes upon you.

**Jason**

Most *phila* children!

**Medea**

To their mother, not to you.

**Jason**

And still you killed them?

**Medea**

Yes, to vex your heart.

**Jason**

Alas, I wish to press a kiss upon the dear [*philion*] mouth of my sons,  
|1400 wretched me!

**Medea**

Now you speak to them, now you embrace them, but then you rejected them!

**Jason**

By the gods, let me touch the tender skin of my children.



**Medea**

You have flung this word [*epos*] away in vain.

**Jason**

|1405 Zeus, do you hear how I am driven from here and what we have suffered [*paskhein*] from this polluted woman, this child-slayer, this lioness? Yet in so far as I may and can, I will raise for them a dirge, |1410 and call on the *daimones* to witness your murder of my sons, and how you will not let me embrace or bury their dead bodies. I wish I had never begotten them to look upon them slain by you!

*The chariot carries Medea away.*

**Chorus**

|1415 Many are the fates that Zeus dispenses in Olympus, and the gods bring many things to pass unexpectedly. What is expected does not come to *telos*, and a god finds a way for the unexpected. So too has this affair turned out.