

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-01566-1 - Euripides' Medea: A New Translation  
Translated and Edited by Diane J. Rayor  
Excerpt  
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# *Medea*

by Euripides

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### SCENE ONE:

*Nurse enters from skenē.*

#### NURSE

If only the hull of the *Argo* had not flown through  
 the dark Clashing Rocks to the land of Kolchis.  
 If the pine in Mt. Pelion's forests  
 had never been cut and supplied oars  
 for the Argonauts in quest of the Golden Fleece 5  
 for Pelias. Then my mistress Medea  
 would not have sailed to the towers of Iolkos,  
 her heart dazed with love for Jason,  
 nor persuaded the daughters of Pelias to kill  
 their father. Then she would not be living 10  
 here in Korinth with her husband and children.  
 Pleasing the people in her land of exile,  
 she helped Jason himself in every way.  
 When a woman does not oppose her man,  
 the greatest security is hers. 15

Now hate infects all the closest bonds of love.  
 Betraying his own sons and my mistress,  
 Jason beds down in a royal marriage,  
 having wed the daughter of Kreon, the king.  
 Wretched Medea, finding herself dishonored, 20  
 cries out his oaths to her, their joined right hands,  
 the greatest pledge of all. She invokes the gods  
 to witness exactly how Jason repays her.  
 She lies there without eating, surrendering to pain,  
 dissolving in tears time and time again, 25

knowing her husband has wronged her.  
 Without raising her eyes or lifting her face  
 from the ground, she listens like a rock  
 or sea wave to her friends' advice.  
 Sometimes she turns her pale face away 30  
 to mourn for her own dear father, her country  
 and family, since she betrayed all of them  
 to follow a husband who has dishonored her.  
 That woman, so miserable, knows through misfortune  
 what it means to abandon her homeland. 35  
 Filled with hate, she finds no joy in the sight of her sons.  
 I'm afraid she's planning something:  
 Her hard mind won't stand for mistreatment.  
 I know her. I fear she may silently  
 enter the house where the marriage bed is laid 40  
 and stab her heart with a sharp sword,  
 or kill the king and the bridegroom,  
 provoking a greater disaster.  
 She is a strange one. No one battling her  
 as an enemy will easily claim sweet victory. 45

*Enter Tutor and two boys from City Path.*

Ah, here come the boys, done with their games.  
 They're not thinking of their mother's troubles.  
 Young hearts are not fond of sorrow.

**TUTOR**

Old household slave of my mistress,  
 why are you standing alone outside the gates? 50  
 Crying to yourself about your troubles?  
 Does Medea wish to be left alone?

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<b>NURSE</b> Ancient companion of Jason's children, when the dice of our masters' fortune roll badly, it touches the heart of good slaves. I felt such an overwhelming grief that I longed to come out here and tell Earth and Sky about my mistress's bad luck.	55
<b>TUTOR</b> Isn't that poor wretch done moaning yet?	
<b>NURSE</b> I envy your ignorance. Her pain isn't halfway gone.	60
<b>TUTOR</b> The fool – if one may call masters that. She knows nothing of the latest troubles.	
<b>NURSE</b> What is it, old man? Don't hold back.	
<b>TUTOR</b> Nothing. I regret what I've already said.	
<b>NURSE</b> By your beard, don't hide this from a fellow slave! I'll keep quiet about it, if I must.	65
<b>TUTOR</b> I heard some talk, while pretending not to listen, by the gaming tables where the old men sit near the holy spring of Pirene. They say Kreon, Lord of Korinth, intends to banish these boys	70

with their mother. I do not know  
 whether this tale is true. I hope not.

**NURSE**

Even if Jason has a quarrel with their mother,  
 will he allow his own sons to suffer exile? 75

**TUTOR**

Old marriage ties are abandoned for new  
 and he is no friend of this house.

**NURSE**

We're sunk if new troubles wash over  
 before we bail out the old!

**TUTOR**

You keep quiet. It's not the right time  
 for your mistress to learn this. Keep the news secret. 80

**NURSE**

Oh children, do you hear what a father you have?  
 May he be cursed – no, he is my master –  
 but he is caught in cruelty to his family.

**TUTOR**

What man is not? Did you just learn  
 that everyone loves himself best of all? 85  
 Because of his new bedmate,  
 their father does not love these boys.

**NURSE**

Go inside the house, children; it will be all right.

*To Tutor:*

You must keep them out of the way as much as possible – 90

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do not let them near their ill-tempered mother.  
 I have seen her eye them like a bull,  
 as if she has something in mind. Her rage  
 won't end, I know well, until it blasts someone.  
 May it strike enemies and not friends.

95

*Medea wails from offstage inside skenē.*

**MEDEA**

Oh! Misery, I'm miserable in my troubles.  
*Oimo!* I wish I were dead.

**NURSE**

Here she goes. Dear boys, your mother  
 stirs her heart, stirs her rage.  
 Hurry faster into the house.  
 Don't let her see you;  
 stay away from her.

100

*To Tutor:*

Guard against her fierce temper and  
 the hateful nature of her willful mind.  
 Now go. Go in as quickly as possible.

105

*Tutor and children exit skenē as Nurse continues.*

Clearly that cloud of woe,  
 rising from its source, will soon flash  
 with still greater passion. What  
 will her enraged and untamed spirit  
 do when bitten by such evil?

110

**MEDEA**

*Oh!* I've suffered miserably, misery  
 worthy of great woe. O cursèd sons

of a hateful mother, may you die  
 with your father! May his entire line vanish.

**NURSE**

*Oimoi!* Miserable indeed! What share  
 do your sons have in their father's crime? 115  
 Why hate them? Dear children,  
 I'm worried, afraid that you might suffer.  
 The tempers of tyrants are strange.  
 They have so much power and so little guidance 120  
 that their moods change violently.  
 To face life on equal terms is better.  
 For me at least, may I grow old  
 without greatness, secure.  
 To speak the word moderation, 125  
 then to act on it, is best for men  
 by far. There's no right time for excess  
 in human life, but when a god  
 becomes angry with a household,  
 even greater ruin follows. 130

*Entrance Song: Chorus enters from City Path.*

**CHORUS** (*sings*)

We hear her voice,  
 we hear the cry  
 of the unhappy woman of Kolchis.  
 Is she not yet calm? Old woman, tell us.  
 We hear her cry within the gated hall. 135  
 Woman, since we are her friends,  
 we do not rejoice  
 at the grief of this house.



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**NURSE**

What house? It's already gone.  
 The bed of a royal family claims him, 140  
 while my mistress wastes her life away  
 in her room. No words from friends  
 or family comfort her in any way.

**MEDEA**

May lightning from heaven strike my head.  
 What do I gain by living any longer? 145  
 Oh, in death may I take my rest,  
 abandoning this hateful life.

**CHORUS** (*sings*)

Zeus, Earth, and light,  
 do you hear the miserable bride  
 sing such a dirge? 150

Foolish woman, why do you  
 desire that cold, cruel rest?  
 Why hurry death's end?  
 Don't pray for this.  
 If your husband 155  
 worships at a new bed,  
 do not be sharp with him.  
 Zeus will take your case. Do not waste away  
 weeping too much for your bed partner.

**MEDEA**

Great Themis and Lady Artemis, 160  
 do you see what I suffer, despite binding  
 my accursed husband with sacred oaths?  
 May I gaze upon him and his bride

gouged out, scraped away, house and all.  
 They dared to wrong me first. 165  
 O father! Homeland I abandoned,  
 shamefully killing my brother!

**NURSE**

You hear what she says? She shouts  
 an invocation to Themis and to Zeus,  
 whom mortals honor as overseer of the oath. 170  
 The rage of my mistress will not  
 end with some trivial deed.

**CHORUS** (*sings*)

We wish she would let us see her, come out  
 and hear our voice,  
 listen to our words, 175  
 dismiss her mind's temper  
 and angry passion.  
 Let our willing support  
 not abandon our friends.

Step in, bring her out of the house, 180  
 and tell her we, too, are friends.  
 Hurry in before she harms someone.  
 This sorrow rushes on and grows.

**NURSE**

I'll do it. But I fear  
 I won't persuade my mistress. 185  
 I'll do you this favor of my labor –  
 although she glares like a bull,  
 like a lioness with newborn cubs,  
 whenever a slave approaches to have a word.  
 If you said that men of old were foolish 190