

7.2. Euripides / from *Medea*

Medea was first produced in 431 BCE. Medea is an outsider in Corinth whose betrayal by her husband (the famous Jason, who's left Medea to marry the Corinthian princess)—and her fury in response—jeopardize her acceptance by the Greeks. This scene takes place after Medea has sent her children bearing a poisoned robe and crown to the princess, supposedly as a gift to elicit mercy toward her children.

Eur. *Med.* 1175–1275. Source: Euripides. *Medea*. Trans. Ian Johnston. Arlington: Richer Resources, 2008.

[Enter the Tutor with the children]

TUTOR

My lady, your children won't be exiled.
The royal bride was happy to accept,
with own hands, the gifts you sent her.
Now the boys have made their peace with her.

[Medea starts to weep]

What's wrong? Why do you stand there in distress?
Things have worked out well. Why turn away again?
Aren't you happy to hear my splendid news?

MEDEA

Alas . . .

TUTOR

An odd response to the news I bring.

MEDEA

All I can say is I'm so sad . . .

TUTOR

Have I mistakenly said something bad?
Am I wrong to think my news is good?

MEDEA

You've reported what you had to tell me.
I'm not blaming you.

TUTOR

Then why avert your eyes?
Why are you crying?

MEDEA

Old man, I have my reasons.
The gods and I, with my worst intentions,
have brought about this situation.

TUTOR

Be happy. Your children will one day
bring you back home again.

MEDEA

But before that,
I shall bring others to their homes—alas,
how miserable I feel.

TUTOR

You're not the only mother whose children

have been separated from her. We mortals
must bear our bad times patiently.

MEDEA

I'll do so.

But now go in the house. And carry on.
Give the children their usual routine.

[Tutor exits into the house. The children remain]

Oh children, my children, you still have
a city and a home, where you can live,
once you've left me in wretched suffering.
You can live on here without your mother.
But I'll go to some other country,
an exile, before I've had my joy in you,
before I've seen you happy, or helped
to decorate your marriage beds, your brides,
your bridal chambers, or lifted high
your wedding torches. How miserable
my self-will has made me. I raised you—
and all for nothing. The work I did for you,
the cruel hardships, pains of childbirth—
all for nothing. Once, in my foolishness,
I had many hopes in you—it's true—
that you'd look after me in my old age,
that you'd prepare my corpse with your own hands,
in the proper way, as all people wish.
But now my tender dreams have been destroyed.
For I'll live my life without you both,
in sorrow. And those loving eyes of yours
will never see your mother any more.
Your life is changing. Oh, my children,
why are you looking at me in that way?
Why smile at me—that last smile of yours?
Alas, what shall I do? You women here,
my heart gives way when I see those eyes,
my children's smiling eyes. I cannot do it.
Good bye to those previous plans of mine.
I'll take my children from this country.
Why harm them as a way to hurt their father
and have to suffer twice his pain myself?
No, I won't do that. And so farewell
to what I planned before. But what's going on?
What's wrong with me? Do I really want
my enemies escaping punishment,
while I become someone they ridicule?
I will go through with this. What a coward
I am even to let my heart admit
such sentimental reasons. Children,
you must go into the house.

[The children move toward the house but remain at the door, looking at Medea]

Anyone forbidden

to attend my sacrifice, let such a man
concern himself about these children.

My hand will never lack the strength for this.
And yet . . . My heart, don't do this murder.
You're made of stone, but leave the boys alone.
Spare my children. If they remain alive,
with me in Athens, they'll make you happy.
No! By those avengers in lower Hell,
I'll never deliver up my children,
hand them over to their enemies,
to be humiliated. They must die—
that's unavoidable, no matter what.
Since that must happen, then their mother,
the one who gave them life, will kill them.
At all events it's settled. There's no way out.
On her head the royal bride already wears
the poisoned crown. That dress is killing her.
But I'm treading an agonizing path,
and send my children on one even worse.
What I want to do now is say farewell.

*[Medea moves to the children near the door, kneels down
and hugs them]*

Give me your right hands, children. Come on.
Let your mother kiss them. Oh, these hands—
how I love them—and how I love these mouths,
faces—the bearing of such noble boys.
I wish you happiness—but somewhere else.
Where you live now your father takes away.
Oh this soft embrace! Their skin's so tender.
My boys' breathing smells so sweet to me.
But you must go inside. Go. I can't stand
to look at you any more like this.
The evil done to me has won the day.
I understand too well the dreadful act
I'm going to commit, but my judgment
can't check my anger, and that incites
the greatest evils human beings do.