

Scene selection 1: 259-344 Creon and Medea

CREON Medea, scowling there with fury at your husband!
I have given orders that you should leave the country:
Take your two sons and go, into exile. No delay!
This is my word, I am the judge.
I shall not go back into the palace
Until I've cast you out, beyond our boundaries.

MEDEA Aiai. Wretched me! I am utterly destroyed.
My enemies are in full sail; there is
No easy escape from this disaster.
But, despite my ill-treatment, I'll speak out:
For what offence, Creon, do you banish me?

CREON You frighten me – no point in cloaking what I mean.
I fear you'll do something irreparable harm
To my daughter. I am afraid for many reasons.
You are clever, skilled in many evil arts.
You resent being deprived of Jason's bed.
I hear reports that you are threatening
Violence on me and on the bridegroom and his bride.
I'll make sure that doesn't happen.
Better make you my enemy now, madam,
Than weaken and regret it.

MEDEA Oh dear! This is not the first time, my reputation
Has often hurt me, Creon, done me so much harm.
No sensible man should have his children
Taught to be too clever.
They are called idlers, and excite
Resentful envy in their fellow citizens.
Present some clever, new idea to fools –
They'll think it's you who are useless and a fool.

As for those who think they have a subtle intellect,
If you are thought superior in the state, they take it hard.
That has been my fate. Because I'm clever,
Some are jealous, to others I'm objectionable.
But I'm not really so clever.
You say you are afraid – that I'll do something unpleasant?
I'm in no position – have no fear of me, Creon, –
To go against those who rule.
What wrong have you done me?
You simply gave your daughter to the man of your choice.
It is my husband that I hate. What do you did, I think,
Was prudent. I do not grudge you your success.
Let them marry, and good luck to you! But allow me
To live in Corinth. I have been wronged, but I will say
No more. You are the stronger, I am beaten.

CREON You sound harmless, but in your heart
I'm terrified you're plotting evil.
I trust you now even less than before.
A passionate woman – or a man, for that matter –
Is easier to guard against, than one who's clever,
And holds her tongue.
You must leave, quickly! No more talk!
It's decided. No skill of yours will help
You, now you are my enemy, to stay in Corinth

MEDEA Please! I touch your knees, I beseech you
By your daughter, the new bride.

CREON You are wasting words. You'll never win me over.

MEDEA Will you banish me, and not respect my prayers?

CREON I'll not put you before my family.

MEDEA Oh, my fatherland! How well I now remember you!

CREON After my children, my country is my dearest love.

MEDEA Oh, what a great evil love can be for us.

CREON That depends, I'd say, on circumstances.

MEDEA Zeus, mark who caused these troubles.

CREON Go, foolish woman, and free me of this burden.

MEDEA It is we who have the burdens; we need no more.

CREON My men will forcibly eject you.

MEDEA No, not that! I beg you, Creon,...

CREON It seems, madam, that you'll make it difficult.

MEDEA I'll go. I am not begging to stay.

CREON Then why struggle? Let go my hand!

MEDEA Just one day! Let me stay to make plans for our exile,
A proper start for my boys, since their father
No longer chooses to provide for them.
Have pity on them. You too are a father,
And should be sympathetic. I do not care about myself
In exile, but I weep for their plight.

CREON It's not my nature to be a tyrant.
My concern for others has often cost me dearly.
Now too, madam, I see I'm making a mistake,
But, still, I grant you your request. But I warn you,

If tomorrow's light of day sees you and your children
Within the borders of this land,
You die. That is my solemn, final word.
Now, if you must stay, stay one more day.
That's not long enough for you
To do the damage that I fear.

Scene selection 2: 399-424 Chorus

CHORUS

Sacred rivers flow uphill:
Justice and all things are reversed.
It's men who are the traitors now.
There's no more faith in oaths sworn to the gods,
Our reputation will be turned to good,
We women shall have honour,
And ugly slander hold us down no more.

No more we'll hear the age-old songs
Celebrating women's faithlessness.
Till now Apollo, lord of song, has not bestowed
The gift of inspired lyric song
On women's minds; or we'd have echoed back a hymn
Against the race of men. The length of time
Has many tales to tell of men as well as women.

You sailed from your ancestral home
Crazed by love, past Pontus' twin rocks.
Now in a strange land you live
Husbandless, no partner in your bed;
And from this land you are driven out,
An exile without rights.

Gone is the sanctity of oaths, all sense of shame
Has left Great Hellas and flown away.
You do not have your father's home
To offer anchorage in distress.
Another princess rules your husband's bed,
The mistress of the house.

Scene selection 3: 556 - 608 Medea and Jason

MEDEA I differ from many people in many ways.
To me, an unjust man who is also clever with words
Deserves the greatest penalty.
Confident that he can dress up his wrongdoing
With specious words, he is brazen in his wickedness.
And yet he is not so clever after all.
So don't you try your plausible and clever arguments on me!
One point will floor you: if you'd been honourable,
You should have won me over before you married,
Not kept it from your loved ones!

JASON I'm sure that if I had announced my wedding plans,
You would have been most helpful!
Even now you can't bring yourself to give up
The great bitterness you feel.

MEDEA That is not what stopped you. You thought,
As you grew older, it didn't look quite right
To have a foreign wife.

JASON Get this straight: it is not for any woman
That I made this royal marriage. I've already said
I did it to safeguard you, to father royal sons,
Brothers to my children, security for my house.

MEDEA I want none of your hurtful 'prosperity'
Or wealth to rankle in my mind.

JASON You'd better change your attitude. You'll be wiser
To accept what's best for you is not 'hurtful'.
You're fortunate. Don't think you're not.

MEDEA That's right, insult me! You have a way out.
I am alone, condemned to exile.

JASON It was your own choice. Blame no one else.

MEDEA What have I done? Did I make you my wife
And then betray you?

JASON You called down unholy curses on the royal family.

MEDEA I am that curse, to your house too.

JASON I won't debate this further. If you need
Money for the children or yourself,
To support you in exile, let me know.
I am happy to give, generously – and to send
Letters of introduction to my guest-friends,
Who will treat you well. You will be foolish, my dear,
To refuse. It will pay you to give up your anger.

MEDEA I would not take advantage of your friends
Or accept a thing. Don't try to give me anything!
There can be no profit in a traitor's gift.

JASON Then I call the Gods to witness that I am willing
To do any service for you and for the boys.
But you do not want kindness:
In your stubborn pride you reject your dear ones
And make your suffering worse.

MEDEA Go! You're lusting for your new-won bride,
Lingering here, away from the house!
Go to her bed!
Perhaps – with a god help, it will be said – this marriage
Will be celebrated with a funeral dirge!

Scene Selection 4: 892-944 Medea and Jason (& children and tutor)

JASON What's this? Eyes wet with fresh tears?
Pale cheeks? Why do you turn away?
Aren't you pleased with what I say?

MEDEA It's nothing. I was thinking of these children.

JASON Don't worry. I will arrange well for them.

MEDEA All right. I will trust what you say.
Woman is the weaker sex, and born to tears.

JASON Why so much moaning for the boys?

MEDEA I gave them birth. When you prayed for their lives,
Pity overwhelmed me, wondering about their future.
What you have come to hear from me
Has been in part said; the rest I'll tell you now.
The king has resolved to banish me from here –
It's best for me, I recognise, not to be
In your way or the royal family's. They think
I bear some grudge against the family.
And so I leave for exile.
But the boys – beg Creon to spare them banishment,
So you can bring them up.

JASON I don't know if I can persuade him: I will try.

MEDEA Then tell your wife to ask her father
To spare the boys from banishment.

JASON Yes, I think that she could do that – if she's a woman.

MEDEA And I will help you in the task.
I'll send her gifts, the finest in the world:
A finely woven dress and crown of beaten gold.
The boys will take them. Quickly,
Tell a maid to fetch the adornments.
Not once, but countless ways she will be blest:
Winning so fine a man as you to share her bed,
And gaining the adornments which the Sun God,
My father's father, bequeathed to his descendants.
Take these bridal gifts, boys, in your hands.
Carry them and give them to the happy royal bride.
It is no contemptible gift she will receive.

JASON Foolish woman, why part with these?
Do you think the palace is short of dresses?
Or money, do you think? Keep them! Don't give them away.
If my wife thinks me of any worth,
She'll put me before valuables, I am sure

MEDEA Don't say that. 'Gifts win over even the Gods.'
And, with mortals, gold has more power
Than ten thousand words. Luck's with her,
God's on her side. She is the new mistress.
To buy my sons from exile,
I'd pay not only gold, but with my life.
Boys, go to the rich palace,
Kneel before your father's new wife, my new mistress.
And beg her to spare you from banishment,
Give her the pretty things: this is most important,
Give these presents into her own hands.
Go quickly. Bring back good news to your mother,
That her wishes are fulfilled.

Scene selection 5: 991 – 1050 Medea

MEDEA Children, children, now you have a city,
A home, where, leaving poor me,
You will live forever parted from your mother.
I shall go to another land, an exile,
Before I can have my joy in you, see you happy,
Before I can honour your brides and adorn
Your marriage beds and hold aloft the marriage torch.
O misery! O my stubborn pride!
All for nothing, boys, I brought you up,
All are nothing tortured myself with toil and care,
And bore the cruel pains when you were born.
Once I placed great hopes in you, that you
Would care for my old age and yourselves
Shroud my corpse. That would make me envied.
Now that sweet thought is no more. Parted from you
I shall lead a grim and painful life.
You will no longer see your mother with your dear eyes.
You will have moved to a different sphere of life.
Oh, oh! Children, why do you keep your eyes on me?
Why do you smile at me, your last smile?
Aiai. What am I to do? Women,
My courage leaves me, when I see their bright expressions.
I can't do it. I give up my former plan.
I'll take my children away from Corinth.
Why should I try to hurt their father by making them suffer,
And suffer twice as much myself?
No, I'll give up my plan.
Oh, what's the matter with me? Do I want
My enemies to laugh at me? Shall I let them off
Unpunished? No, I must go through with it.
What a coward I am, even to allow such weak thoughts.
Go, boys, indoors.

Those for whom it is not right
To be present at my sacrifice, consider your position:
My hand will not fail.
Oh, my heart, don't do it! Leave them,
You wretch, spare the children!
They will live in Athens with me
And make you happy.
No, by all the avenging fiends of Hell,
I cannot leave my children for my enemies
To abuse. In any case,
It's done now, there's no escape.
The crown is on her head, the royal bride
Is dying in her dress. I know it.
I have the saddest road to travel
And these I'll send on one yet more sad.
And so I want to speak to them. Give me your hand,
Children, give it me to grasp.
Dearest hand, dearest mouth! What a noble body
And face you have!
My blessings on you – but in another place!
Your blessings here your father has destroyed.
Your kiss so sweet, so soft your skin;
How lovely a child's breath is!
Go, go! I can no longer look at you.
The horror overwhelms me. I understand
The horror of what I propose to do,
But passion masters my resolve
And passion is the cause of all life's greatest horrors.

Scene selection 6: 1226 – 1271 chorus and children

CHORUS Earth and radiant beam of the Sun,
Look down! Look at this lost woman
Before she lifts her murderous hand to the children,
Shedding her own blood.
For they were born of your golden race
And for the blood of a God to be spilled
By Man is a fearful thing.
Heaven-born light, restrain her, stop her,
Get her out of the house, the murderous
Accursed fiend of vengeance.

Was it for nothing that you laboured for your sons,
For nothing bore your beloved boys,
Medea, who left behind the blue-grey Clashing Rocks,
Entrance to that least hospitable of seas?
Hapless woman, what is this deadly rage,
That falls upon your heart, this baleful murder?
Terrible for mortals is the pollution
Of kindred blood, spilt on the ground:
There follow sorrows, sent by the gods
Upon a murderous house.

(screams off stage)

Do you hear? Do you hear children crying out?
Oh cursed, ill-fated woman.

BOY 1 What shall I do? How can I escape
My mother's hands?

BOY 2 I don't know, dearest brother. We are lost.

CHORUS Shall we go in?
 This is murder.
 I'm sure we should help the boys.

BOY 1 Yes, in the name of the gods, help!
 Help!

BOY 2 The sword snare is closing in.

CHORUS Miserable woman, you must be made
 Of stone or iron, to kill
 The fruit of your womb,
 A self-inflicted fate.

 One woman only in the past, we hear,
 Laid hands on her own loving sons:
 Ino, who was driven mad by the gods,
When Zeus' wife sent her wandering from home.
 She, wretched woman, leapt
 Into the sea, in the unholy murder
 Of her own children: stepping off a cliff
 She perished with the two.
 What could be more terrible?
 Woman's bed, full of suffering,
What troubles you have caused mankind!