

He struggled to raise up his knee, she tugged him down.
If he used force, he tore the old flesh off his bones.
At length the King gave up his pitiful attempts;
Weakened with pain, he yielded, and gasped out his life.
Now, joined in death, daughter and father - such a sight
As tears were made for - they lie there.

To you, Medea,

I have no more to say. You will yourself know best
How to evade reprisal. As for human life,
It is a shadow, as I have long believed, And this
I say without hesitation: those whom most would call
Intelligent, the propounders of wise theories--
Their folly is of all men's the most culpable.
Happiness is a thing no man possesses. Fortune
May come now to one man, now to another, as
Prosperity increases; happiness never.

(exit MESSENGER)

CHORUS; Today we see the will of Heaven, blow after blow,
Bring down on Jason justice and calamity.

excerpt from *Medea and Other Plays*, translated by Philip Vellacott (London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1963)

And give up feeling angry. Those your husband loves
You must love too. Now take these gifts,' he said, 'and ask
Your father to revoke their exile for my sake.'
So, when she saw those lovely things, she was won over,
And agreed to all that Jason asked. At once, before
He and your sons were well out of the house, she took
The embroidered gown and put it round her. Then she placed
Over her curls the golden coronet, and began
To arrange her hair in a bright mirror, smiling at
Her lifeless form reflected there. Then she stood up,
And to and fro stepped daintily about the room
On white bare feet, and many times she would twist back
To see how the dress fell in clear folds to the heel.
Then suddenly we saw a frightening thing. She changed
Colour; she staggered sideways, shook in every limb.
She was just able to collapse on to a chair,
Or she would have fallen flat. Then one of her attendants,
An old woman, thinking that perhaps the anger of Pan
Or some other god had struck her, chanted the cry of worship.
But then she saw, oozing from the girl's lips, white froth;
The pupils of her eyes were twisted out of sight;
The blood was drained from all her skin. The old woman knew
Her mistake, and changed her chant to a despairing howl.
One maid ran off quickly to fetch the King, another
To look for Jason and tell him what was happening
To his young bride; the whole palace was filled with a clatter
Of people running here and there. All this took place
In a few moments, perhaps while a fast runner might run
A hundred yards; and she lay speechless, with eyes closed.
Then she came to, poor girl, and gave a frightful scream,
As two torments made war on her together: first
The golden coronet round her head discharged a stream
Of unnatural devouring fire: while the fine dress
Your children gave her - poor miserable girl I - the stuff
Was eating her clear flesh. She leapt up from her chair,
On fire, and ran, shaking her head and her long hair
This way and that, trying to shake off the coronet.
The ring of gold was fitted close and would not move;
The more she shook her head the fiercer the flame burned.
At last, exhausted by agony, she fell to the ground;
Save to her father, she was unrecognizable.
Her eyes, her face, were one grotesque disfigurement;
Down from her head dripped blood mingled with flame; her flesh,
Attacked by the invisible fangs of poison, melted
From the bare bone, like gum-drops from a pine-tree's bark
A ghastly sight. Not one among us dared to touch
Her body. What we'd seen was lesson enough for us.
But suddenly her father came into the room.
He did not understand, poor man, what kind of death
Had struck his child. He threw himself down at her side,
And sobbed aloud, and kissed her, and took her in his arms,
And cried, 'Poor darling child, what god destroyed your life
So cruelly? Who robs me of my only child,
Old as I am, and near my grave? Oh, let me die
With you, my daughter ! ' Soon he ceased his tears and cries,
And tried to lift his aged body upright; and then,
As ivy sticks to laurel-branches, so he stuck
Fast to the dress. A ghastly wrestling then began;

Excerpt from *Medea* by Euripedes, written 431 BC

Background and Plot synopsis: This most ambiguous and horrifying of Euripedes' tragedies is based on the Greek myths about Jason. Medea, a barbarian princess and sorceress, had sacrificed her father, her brother and her home to help her lover, Jason, who was on a quest to steal the Golden Fleece which Medea's father, the King of Colchis, possessed, in order that Jason could regain his rightful throne in Iolcus, then occupied by his traitorous uncle, Pelias. Although he brought back the Fleece they are living in exile in Corinth because Medea had caused the horrific death of Pelias at the hands of his own daughters. Medea has been his wife for some years and has borne him two sons, but at the opening of the play Jason has betrayed her by arranging to set her aside and marry Glauce, the beautiful young daughter of King Creon, so that he can become king of Corinth eventually. Fearing that Medea will take revenge, Creon exiles her and she takes her vengeance on Jason and Creon by sending her children with poisoned gifts to Jason's bride. The gifts kill both the princess and her father slowly and painfully. Medea plans to completely destroy Jason by killing their children; their dying cries are heard off stage and, when Jason arrives, Medea appears in a dragon-drawn chariot with their bodies, refusing to let Jason bury the children, flaunting the full horror of her deed. While Jason's cynical moral blindness alienates the audience, Medea's brutal revenge may alienate them even more.

MEDEA: Friends, I have long been waiting for a message from the palace.
What is happening next? I see a slave of Jason's
Coming, gasping for breath. He must bring fearful news.

(enter a MESSENGER)

MESSENGER: Medea! Get away, escape! Oh, what a thing to do!
What an unholy, horrible thing! Take ship, or chariot,
Any means you can but escape!

MEDEA: Why should I escape?

MESSENGER: She's dead - the princess, and her father Creon too,
They're both dead, by your poisons.

MEDEA: Your news is excellent.
I count you from today my friend and benefactor.

MESSENGER: What? Are you sane, or raving mad? When you've committed
This hideous crime against the royal house, you're glad
At hearing of it? Do you not tremble at such things?

MEDEA: I could make suitable reply to that, my friend.
But take your time now; tell me, how did they die? You'll give
Me double pleasure if their death was horrible.

MESSENGER: When your two little boys came hand in hand, and entered
The palace with their father, where the wedding was,
We servants were delighted. We had all felt sorry
To hear how you'd been treated; and now the word went round
From one to another, that you and Jason had made it up.
So we were glad to see the boys; one kissed their hand,
Another their fair hair. Myself, I was so pleased,
I followed with them to the princess's room. Our mistress--
The one we now call mistress in your place - before
She saw your pair of boys coming, had eyes only
For Jason; but seeing them she dropped her eyes, and turned
Her lovely cheek away, upset that they should come
Into her room. Your husband then began to soothe
Her sulkiness, her girlish temper. 'You must not,'
He said, 'be unfriendly to our friends. Turn your head round,