

EURIPIDES, *MEDEA* 1–45, 371–85¹

Much has been written about the problematic passage towards the end of the *Medea* prologue-speech, in which the Nurse expresses fear concerning the intention(s) of her mistress;² problematic both in itself, especially as to the interpretation of lines 40–2, and in relation to lines 379–80, which are almost the same as 40–1; a most suspicious circumstance.³

Recent opinion, still strongly influenced by Page's commentary,⁴ has hardened in favour of the excision of lines 38–43, first proposed by Dindorf.⁵ The removal of six lines, including some prima facie blameless ones, has naturally encountered some opposition. But for some years it has come almost exclusively from defenders of the entire text as transmitted in the MSS. (and as printed, without obeli or square brackets, by Murray); arguing, it would seem, either from a predisposition to defend any paradosis, however odd, that is not actually unintelligible, or in the belief that any concession to Page's premisses must lead inexorably to his unwelcome conclusion.⁶ Page himself contemplated an alternative (with which he should have associated the names of Giessing and Kayser): 'omit 40–1, emend 42'; and he wrote: 'Certainty is quite unattainable, and neither of the proposed alternatives is more than a guess'.

This article will re-examine Page's arguments from a position less committed to defence; and it will advocate a different, overlooked, remedy that excises only two lines in these two passages.

¹ I am very grateful to Dr J. Diggle, Mrs P. E. Easterling, Professor M. D. Reeve and Dr M. Davies for helpful criticism and suggestions.

² The more recent discussions include: N. T. Pratt, 'The Euripidean *Medea* 38–43', *CPh* 38 (1943), 33–8; O. Regenbogen, 'Randbemerkungen zur *Medea* des Euripides', *Eranos* 48 (1950), 21–56; G. Müller, 'Interpolation in der *Medea* des Euripides', *SIFC* 25 (1951), 65–82; R. G. Ussher, 'Notes on Euripides *Medea*', *Eranos* 59 (1961), 1–7; E. Christmann, *Bemerkungen zum Text der Medea* (Diss. Heidelberg/Köln, 1962), 32–7; R. Masullo, *AFLN* 17 (1974–5), 49–56; O. Casto, *AFLN* 8–10 (1977–80), 55–65; P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Cornell, 1980), 36, 230f.; H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie* (1984), 107–10.

³ Especially in a play with other suspect repetitions: see P. Corssen, 'De versibus in Euripidis *Medea* falso iteratis', *Hermes* 40 (1912), 476–80, and D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1934), 61–3. The first excisions were made by Musgrave (41) and Valckenaer (42 and 379–80); the former was followed, among others, by Fix, Brunck, Elmsley and Porson, the latter by Pierson (except as to 379). Hermann (1841) extended the excision to 41–3, Nauck (1859) to 40–3, and Dindorf (1863) to 38–43. Other proposals involving excision are those of Kayser ([40–1], then μή τὴν τύραννον...) and Schenkl ([40–2], then μή ἐπειτα...).

⁴ *Euripides, Medea* (Oxford, 1938, 1952), 68–9.

⁵ W. Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Euripidis tragoedias* iv (Oxford, 1863), 266, soon followed by F. Heimsoeth, *De interpolationibus commentatio* iv (Bonn, 1872–3), 7. Subsequent adherents include (a) before Page: Arnim, Headlam, T. Frank, Wecklein; (b) since Page: Regenbogen, Müller, Christmann, Reeve (*GRBS* 13 (1972), 262), Pucci (with a qualification), B. Manuwald (*WSI* 17 (1983), 30 n. 13), and now Diggle in the new Oxford Text (*Euripidis Fabulae* i, 1984). Nauck (del. 40–3) has been followed, among others, by Weil, Diehl, Verrall, Heberden, Pohlenz, Méridier and Flacelière; but there has been no recent advocacy of any weight for that deletion, and none at all for any of the earlier, smaller excisions.

⁶ Earlier defenders were Paley and Klotz. Against Page, the paradosis has been defended by Pratt, Ussher, Masullo, Casto and Erbse, but without unanimity as to its interpretation; cf. also W. Kiefner, *Die Versparung* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 92. Others, e.g. B. W. M. Knox, *Word and Action* (Baltimore and London, 1979), 298 (= *YCIS* 25 (1977), 198), have evidently regarded lines 38–43 as authentic at least in part, but without commitment as to the central crux.

For Page, the spuriousness of 40–1 was a ‘certainty’, mainly because ‘the repetition of lines which are neither a commonplace nor dramatically effective in their repetition is almost certainly due to interpolation’ (a premiss which I accept, though it has been challenged);⁷ and ‘the position of the lines at 379–80 is fairly secure’. Two questions immediately suggest themselves: (a) are the lines so indissolubly paired that they stand or fall together? (b) how secure is ‘fairly secure’? As to a, Page needed to argue, against Musgrave, Elmsley, Porson and others, that deletion of 41 is insufficient (leaving only the close similarity, not identity, of 40 and 379). As to b, if there is any doubt at all, the case for rejecting 40 and/or 41 is by that much less ‘certain’.⁸

The later passage, with sufficient context, runs as follows:⁹

ὁ δ' ἐς τοσοῦτον μωρίας ἀφίκετο
 ὥστ', ἐξόν αὐτῶι τὰμ' ἐλεῖν βουλευόμενα
 γῆς ἐκβαλόντι, τήνδ' ἐφήκεν ἡμέραν
 μείναι μ', ἐν ἧι τρεῖς τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν νεκροῦς
 θήσω, πατέρα τε καὶ κόρην πόσιν τ' ἐμόν·
 375
 πολλὰς δ' ἔχουσα θανασίμους αὐτοῖς ὁδοῦς,
 οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποιαί πρῶτον ἐγχειρῶ, φίλαι·
 πότερον ὑφάψω δῶμα νυμφικὸν πυρί,
 ἢ θηκτὸν ὥσω φάσγανον δι' ἡπατος,
 380
 κυγῇ δόμους ἐσβάς· ἵν' ἐστρωται λέχος;
 ἀλλ' ἐν τί μοι πρόσαντες· εἰ ληφθήσομαι
 δόμους ὑπερβαίνουσα καὶ τεχνωμένη,
 θανοῦσα θήσω τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἐχθροῖς γέλων·
 κράτιστα τήν εὐθείαν, ἧι πεφύκαμεν
 385
 σοφοὶ μάλιστα, φαρμάκοις αὐτοῦς ἐλεῖν·

Medea has been ‘foolishly’ allowed a day’s grace by Creon, ‘in which I may/shall make three of my enemies corpses – the father, the daughter, and my husband’.¹⁰ But ‘having many ways of death for them’, she has yet to decide ‘to what kind of ὁδός I should first put my hand’. The phrasing of 376–7, with ‘first’ implying ‘*potissimum*’, is very similar to *Hel.* 630–1 πολλοὺς...λόγους ἔχων, | οὐκ οἶδ' ὁποίου πρῶτον ἀρξώμαι τὰ νῦν.

The vulgarate punctuation then continues incorrectly with an indirect question ‘...whether to...or to...’. When Medea says ὅποιαί πρῶτον, following πολλὰς...ὁδοῦς, she does not mean ὁποτέραι πάρος (*utri prius/potius*). In the revised punctuation above, the stop after φίλαι corresponds with a pause for thought,¹¹ and is followed by a *direct* deliberative question.

The change, though seemingly slight, makes a big difference. We can now see that, when Page wrote ‘*πότερον* 378 necessitates at least 379’, he was misdirecting himself, since *πότερον*...; questions are often posed with the implied alternative ‘or not?’

⁷ The unpersuasive defence of repeated lines in Euripides by P. W. Harsh in *Hermes* 72 (1937), 435–49, was referred to briefly by Page. More recent defence by J. Baumert (*ENIOI AΘETOYΣIN*, Diss. Tübingen, 1968) has been countered by Reeve (art. cit.).

⁸ The arguments that made a ‘certainty’ out of what would otherwise have been at best a probability are dealt with below. Of these, Page himself wrote: ‘But this is only subsidiary evidence to the main charge...’.

⁹ Text as Diggle (except as to punctuation), with the corrections ἐφήκεν (Nauck) for ἀφήκεν in 373 and σοφοί (Tate or Dalzel) for σοφαί in 385.

¹⁰ τρεῖς...νεκροῦς θήσω. Medea appears to be making a definite prediction which is not in the event fulfilled (as to Jason). But such future tenses can be modal (equivalent to a Latin subjunctive), cf. Kühner–Gerth ii.422. It is proper therefore to speak of *suggestio falsi* (on the part of the dramatist), rather than ‘false prediction’. Euripides habitually plays fair, avoiding definite misstatements as to the future; cf. my commentary (Oxford, 1986) on *Or.* 1536.

¹¹ Cf. also standard rhetorical ‘hesitations’ like *El.* 907–8.

(LSJ s.v. *πότερος* II. 3). We can also see that his very error declares a compelling motive for the interpolation of an ‘alternative’ (a familiar phenomenon elsewhere in tragic texts),¹² if Euripides here wrote *πότερον*...; without a following *ἤ*...;

379–80 were deleted by Valckenaer. I propose to delete only the single line *ἡθηκτὸν ὦσω φάσγανον δι’ ἡπατος*,^{12a} leaving

<i>πότερον ὑφάψω δῶμα νυμφικὸν πυρί,</i>	378
<i>κυγῇ δόμους ἐσβάς ἔν’ ἔστρωται λέχος;</i>	380
<i>ἀλλ’ ἐν τί μοι πρόσαντες...</i>	381

380 fits perfectly here. There are plenty of parallels for the collocation *δῶμα* ... *δόμους*,¹³ and *ἐν’ ἔστρωται λέχος* is a rhetorically appropriate amplification of *νυμφικόν*. The envisaged victims of the arson, in the light of 375–6, are naturally understood as Jason and his bride, together on their conjugal bed;¹⁴ an attractive scheme (two birds with one stone), well meriting ‘primary’ consideration, but with a fatal flaw as a plan of action (381ff.). For the sequence *πότερον*...; *ἀλλά*..., cf. S. *El.* 535–6.

It is not hard to find supporting arguments against 379.

(a) Page wrote ‘In 379 it is clear to whose heart *ἡπατος* refers’, but it is *not* clear. Jason’s? Glauce’s? If both are targets, is Medea contemplating one or two thrusts with her *φάσγανον*? The obscurity is unendurable; the more so, since many parallels (cited below in the discussion of line 40) establish that, in a sentence not mentioning any other person, such phrasing should in tragic diction refer to *suicide*.

(b) The ‘sword’ alternative obscures the sense in which Medea regards poison as ‘the *direct* way’ (384 *τὴν εὐθείαν*). Poison acts directly on the target; arson acts on the target *via* the *δῶμα*. With 379 out of the way, we no longer have to look for artificial explanations of why poisoning is regarded as more ‘direct’ or ‘straightforward’ than sword-thrusting.¹⁵

(c) Both arson and poisoning involve *τέχνη*, the latter being Medea’s special *κοφία* (385). The unsubtle ‘sword’ alternative may require some cleverness of planning and execution, but it is less consistent with *τεχνωμένη* 382.

(d) We know from Σ^B that the commentary of Didymus referred to histrionic interference hereabouts, and that there were different opinions as to whether 378–79–80 or 378–80–79 was the correct line-order. Whether or not Didymus came to the right conclusion here (probably not), these facts are consistent with the present hypothesis. We cannot know which line-order was preferred by the original interpolator; but that is an issue which need not trouble us.¹⁶

¹² Cf. Wilamowitz, *Analecta Euripidea* 205–7, G. Jachmann, *Binneninterpolation i (NGG 1936, 123 = Textgeschichtliche Studien, 528)*, Page, *Actors’ Interpolations*, 51, W. Biehl, *Textprobleme in Euripides Orestes* (Diss. Göttingen, 1955), 11–13 on *Or.* 51.

^{12a} R. Seaford partly anticipates me in *JHS* 107 (1987), 122–3, proposing the same excision here (without mentioning Valckenaer), while defending both 40 and 41. For the *πότερον*...; deliberation without *ἤ*...; he compares *I.T.* 884ff. Against his defence of 41, see p. 321 n. 30a.

¹³ See Diggle on *Phaethon* 54. *δόμους* following *δῶμα* ‘house’ naturally and appropriately has the force ‘private rooms’.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Arrighi, ‘Amore sotto il manto e iniziazione nuziale’, *CUCC* 15 (1983), 7ff., esp. 11f.

¹⁵ *εὐθείαν* has attracted suspicion on that score (*ὀθνεῖον* Herwerden, <μῆ> *εὐθείαν* anon. in the margin of a second-hand Oxford Text). The word should not mean ‘straightforward’ in the sense ‘easy’. Its antonym in the context of a *ὁδός*-metaphor should be ‘devious’.

¹⁶ Σ^B (on 379 according to Dindorf, on 380 according to Schwartz): *ὥδε καλῶς κείται· Δίδυμος σημειοῦται ὅτι κακῶς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ τάσσουσιν (·) ἐπὶ τῶν δύο τὸ κυγῇ δόμους εἰσβάς· καὶ ὡς ἡ σφάξω αὐτοῦς* (Dindorf gives no punctuation after *τάσσουσιν*, Schwartz writes ‘: –’).

If we have confidence in our conclusions so far, we shall approach the prologue with premisses very different from Page's. We shall be predisposed to defend line 40 (μή θηκτὸν ὥσφι φάσσανον δι' ἡπατος) as the probable source from which the interpolator took 379 (it will scarcely be suggested that the same interpolator added both 40 and 379 to the text); and we shall be the more happy to reject line 41 (κυγῆι δόμους ἐεβάσ' ἔν' ἔστρωται λέχος) as a false anticipation of 380, knowing that the same line was also interpolated in Didymus' text at 356a.¹⁷ If we decide to reject 41 only, we shall be in good company, following Elmsley, Porson and others.

First, however, we must get the prologue-speech as a whole into focus. With the famous opening lines

*Εἴθ' ὦφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι κκάφος
Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας...*

the Nurse embarks upon an immensely long and elaborate period: 'If only the Argo had not...; for then my mistress Medea would not have...come to Corinth...; but now as things are...; and I am afraid...'. The whole of this long train of thought serves at once as an exposition and as a preparation for the approach-announcement in 46–8: 'But here come the children...'.¹⁸

The exposition in 1–45 is broadly tripartite (past – present – future). It does not, however, fall straightforwardly into three 'paragraphs'; and we shall do well to begin by simplifying the usual punctuation, using only commas and colons, at least until we are sure of our ground.¹⁸

A special feature of the speech is its inclusion of gnomic observations at 14–15 (ἡπερ μεγίστη γίγνεται σωτηρία, | ὅταν γυνή πρὸς ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατῇ) and 34–5 (ἔγνωκε δ' ἡ τάλαινα κυμοφορὰς ὑπο | οἶον πατρώιας μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι χθονός). These γνώμαι have the rhetorical effect of articulating the monologue, since sententious distichs commonly conclude a ῥήσις or λόγος;¹⁹ and their placing corresponds with the tripartite pattern mentioned above. At the same time, however, it is important to

There are various possible interpretations, the uncertainty being aggravated by the absence of a lemma; but there is little to be said for Zuntz's view that Didymus on his own authority foolishly transferred 380 to a new position after 356 (see next n.), or for Verrall's emendation of τῶν δύο. The most natural interpretations of the scholion are *either* that Didymus, like Paley, favoured 378–80–79 against the vulgate (and actors') 378–79–80 *or* that he contributed towards establishing the vulgate 378–79–80 against the actors' 378–80–79. I incline to prefer the latter (against Dobree): the false alternative will then have been originally interpolated after, not in the middle of, the πότερον-question.

¹⁷ Σ^B (on 356): οὐ γάρ τι δράσεις: Δίδυμος μετὰ τοῦτο φέρει τὸ κυγῆι δόμους εἰεβάς', ἔν' ἔστρωται λέχος καὶ μέμφεται τοῖς ὑποκριταῖς ὡς ἀκαίρως αὐτὸν τάσσουσιν. That simply means, *pace* Zuntz (*An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge, 1965), 254 n.†), that the text on which Didymus was commenting 'carried' the line κυγῆι...δόμους after 356 (cf. the standard use of (οὐ) φέρεται), and that he correctly diagnosed histrionic 'bad τάξις'. He should have athetized 355–6 as well (del. Nauck), but it is unlikely that he did; and it may well be due to Didymus that our MSS. include 355–6, but not 356a. The point is of some importance, since Zuntz builds further inferences as to Didymus' editorial behaviour on his interpretation of these scholia.

¹⁸ It is arguable that *all* Greek dramatic texts (and Greek poetry in general) benefit from such simplified punctuation. We are accustomed to the double use of (·) as equivalent to either colon (;) or semi-colon (;) and one soon gets used to the more flexible interpretation required if (·) may be equivalent also to bracket, dash or full-stop. The editor is spared many awkward decisions (the more so if he strives for consistency); and the result of his efforts, however well-intentioned, can be misleading. Sir Peter Hall interestingly observed on television that for Shakespearean productions he always begins by preparing a typescript with no punctuation at all.

¹⁹ Cf. *Or.* 314–15, 454–5, 805–6 (with comm.).

observe that both γινώμαι are *parenthetic* in their immediate context, thus contributing as much to the characterization of the speaker as to the structure of her speech. The Nurse is a person given to sententious observations; and her *façon de parler* includes a willingness to digress, *en passant*, in the course of long and somewhat tangled sentences.

The sequence of thought in 9–16 merits particular attention:²⁰

οὐδ' ἂν κτανεῖν πείσασα Πελοπιάδας κόρας
πατέρα κατώικει τήνδε γῆν Κορινθίαν 10
ξὺν ἀνδρὶ καὶ τέκνοισιν, ἀνδάνουσα μὲν
φυγὰς πολίταις ὧν ἀφίκετο χθόνα,
αὐτῷ τε πάντα ξυμφέρους Ἰάσωνι·
ἧπερ μεγίστη γίγνεται σωτηρία,
ὅταν γυνὴ πρὸς ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατῇ· 15
νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα·

12 φυγὰς Pierson (cf. S. J. Harrison, *CQ* 36 (1986), 260): φυγῇ codd. πολίταις (Barnes)
V³: πολιτῶν codd. 13 αὐτῷ Sakorraphos: αὐτῇ codd.

One function of νῦν δέ... ('but as it is') in 16 is to look back to the opening εἴθ' ὦφελ' Ἀργοῦς μή... οὐ γὰρ ἂν δέσποιν' ἐμή..., thus introducing the central description of Medea's present πάθος as antithetic to what 'might have been', if only she had remained in Colchis. But the Nurse has also, more recently, embarked at ἀνδάνουσα μὲν... on a different antithesis, describing features of Medea's situation in Corinth that ought to be σωτήρια for her, but are not; so that νῦν δέ in 16 does double duty.²¹ We do not therefore want the modern typographical device of paragraph-indentation here, obscuring the link between 11ff. and 16 across the parenthetic γνώμη; at the same time little would be gained by an attempt to clarify the sequence of thought with such other modern devices as dashes or round brackets.

Having arrived thus deviously (or rather, by convergent routes) at line 16, the Nurse proceeds to explain at some length her cardinally important statement that 'everything is now ἐχθρά (for Medea)' and that τὰ φίλτατα νοσεῖ. Again I punctuate only with commas and colons:

νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα·
προδοῦς γὰρ αὐτοῦ τέκνα δεσπότην τ' ἐμήν,
γάμοις Ἰάσων βασιλικοῖς εὐνάζεται,
γῆμας Κρέοντος παῖδ', ὃς αἰετμνάι χθονός·
Μήδεια δ' ἡ δύστηνος ἡτιμασμένη 20
βοᾷ μὲν ὄρκους, ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιὰς
πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοὺς μαρτύρεται
οἷας ἀμοιβῆς ἐξ Ἰάσονος κυρεῖ·
κεῖται δ' ἄσιτος, σῶμ' ὑφείκει ἀλγηδόσιν,
τὸν πάντα συντήκουσα δακρύοις χρόνον 25
ἐπεὶ πρὸς ἄνδρὸς ἦιχθετ' ἡδικημένη,

²⁰ For the emendations πολίταις and αὐτῷ, see Diggle, *CQ* 32 (1982), 50–1. As to φυγῇ he then wrote 'The truth, I think, is still to seek'; but he tells me that he now accepts φυγὰς. U. Hübner (*Philologus* 128 (1984), 21ff.) excises 11–15; but these lines indispensably establish both that Jason and Medea have been married long enough to have children (in preparation for 17), and that Medea as a good wife and mother has earned the good will of the Corinthian citizens, despite her dubious past (thus preparing us for the sympathetic attitude of the Corinthian chorus).

²¹ According to Page 'ἀνδάνουσα μὲν and αὐτῷ τε are opposed to the understood sentiment μισουμένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρός. νῦν δέ in v. 16 is opposed to vv. 14–15'; but his citation of S. O. C. 271 (after Wecklein) does not support either statement. There too νῦν δέ ('but as it is') is antithetic to a preceding 'would not'. As to 11–12, we cannot be expected to 'understand' anything adverse about Jason before we have heard 16ff.

οὐτ' ὄμμ' ἐπαίρους' οὐτ' ἀπαλλάσσουσα γῆς
 πρόσωπον, ὥς δὲ πέτρος ἢ θαλάσσιος
 κλύδων ἀκούει νουθετουμένη φίλων·
 ἦν μὴ ποτε στρέψασα πάλλευκον δέρην 30
 αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτὴν πατέρ' ἀποιμώξῃ φίλον
 καὶ γαίαν οἴκους θ', οὐς προδοῦς' ἀφίκετο
 μετ' ἀνδρὸς ὅς σφε νῦν ἀτιμάσας ἔχει·
 ἔγνωκε δ' ἡ τάλαινα κυμφοράς ὕπο 35
 οἶον πατρώιας μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι χθονός·
 στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας, οὐδ' ὀρώς' εὐφραίνεται·

16. ἐχθρά: i.e. in the 'hate' category (opp. *φίλα*). In Greek, unlike English, the dichotomies 'love/hate' and 'friend/foe' are inseparably linked by language and traditional sentiment. **καὶ νοσεῖ...**: a favourite metaphor in tragedy for all kinds of aberration, malfunction and 'bad *κυμφορά*' (34, 43, see below), whether in respect of individuals or of the body politic;²² for the use with an abstract neuter plural subject, cf. *Ion* 536 (πάντα τὰ κείνου), fr. 497 (τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν). The νόσος-theme, partly literal, though mainly metaphorical, is particularly appropriate on the lips of a nurse. **τὰ φίλτατα:** i.e. 'all that has hitherto been dearest to her' (πάντα is naturally understood ἀπὸ κοινοῦ).²³ The φίλτατα that νοσεῖ evidently include (a) Medea's erstwhile *φιλία*-relationship with her father, οἶκος and πατρίς (cf. 31–5); (b) her previous love for and harmony with Jason (8, 13–15); (c) her natural feelings as a mother (36, see below); (d) her very existence (for 'life' or one's own *ψυχή* as τὰ φίλτατα, cf. *Alc.* 340–1, *Or.* 645).

17ff. The Nurse proceeds to define the νόσος, or *κυμφορά* as she terms it in 34 (a word which combines the idea of 'calamity' with medical overtones),²⁴ and to describe its symptoms. The πάθος is evidently such as to endanger her beloved mistress's life, since she is refusing food (*ἄσιτος* 24). Betrayed, dishonoured and far from her πατρίς, she has lost *all* the φίλα that make life worth living. In that connection it is not without significance that the children mentioned in 11 and 17 are not mentioned again until 36, after another digression.

30–5. ἦν μὴ ποτε . . .: the Nurse might have proceeded directly from 29 to 36, in order to complete without delay the explanation of line 16 (νῦν δ' ἐχθρὰ πάντα...) with the necessary information that Medea now 'hates', and derives no pleasure from the sight of, her (formerly) φίλτατα τέκνα. But we should then have lost the suspenseful effect of *deferred climax*. We should also have lost some delicate characterization of the speaker. When she refers to the deafness of Medea to the νουθετήματα of φίλοι, she is clearly alluding to *her own* 'admonishments'. We can well imagine that the Nurse has not simply been urging her mistress to take food, but has also, less helpfully, been reminding Medea of her lost πατρίς in terms similar to those we have heard in 1ff. ('If only you had taken my advice and not run off with Jason', etc.). The very unusual '*nisi forte*...' with ἦν μὴ + subjunc. rather than εἰ μὴ + indic. must imply that the Nurse is here *speculating* about Medea's reaction (αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτήν) to the νουθετήματα. Then ἔγνωκε δ' ἡ τάλαινα...sententiously states the 'fact' which justifies the speculation, with a blend of 'how right I was!' and sympathetic grief.

36–45. We are now in a position to reconsider the vexed concluding lines of the monologue (before the lines announcing the approach of the children):

²² Cf. W. D. Smith, 'Disease in Euripides' *Orestes*, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 291ff., and further in my comm. on *Or.* (pp. xliif., 78ff., etc.).

²³ Not 'my dearest' (Pucci).

²⁴ Cf. my comm. on *Or.* 2 (etc.).

στρυγεί δὲ παῖδας, οὐδ' ὁρώς· εὐφραίνεται·
 δέδοικα δ' αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλευέσῃ νέον·
 βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν, οὐδ' ἀνέξεται κακῶς
 πάσχους· ἐγὼ δὲ τήνδ' εἰμαίνω δέ νιν
 μὴ θηκτὸν ὥς τι φάσγανον δι' ἥπατος,
 [σιγῇ δόμους ἐσβᾶς· ἴν' ἔστρωται λέχος]
 ἢ καὶ τυράννους τὸν τε γήμαντα κτάνῃ
 κᾶπειτα μείζω κυμφορὰν λάβῃ τινα·
 δεινὴ γάρ· οὗτοι βαιδίως γε συμβαλὼν
 ἔχθραν τις αὐτῇ καλλίνικος αἰσεται.

40

39 δέ LP: γε E, τε rell. 41 (= 380) del. Musgrave 42 τυράννους olim Hermann:
 τύραννον codd. 45 καλλίνικος post Fuldner (καλλίνικος οἴχεται) scripsi: καλλίνικον
 codd. αἰσεται Muretus: οἴσεται codd.

36. Another cardinally important line, deployed like 16 after a sententious digression. The effect of the 'deferred climax' (of 17ff.) is to associate the sentence about 'hating the children' with the following expressions of anxiety. But here too the simpler punctuation with colons (both before and after 36) runs the least risk of giving the wrong effect. We do not want the connection of thought between 36 and 37ff. to be overemphasized (the inevitable effect of punctuating with a full-stop after 35 and only a colon after 36; or, a fortiori, of indenting 36 as the opening of a new 'paragraph'). Note that there are *two* self-contained trimeters at this point, both with a 'cardinal' function. In a different sense it is 37, not 36, that begins the third ('future') section of the exposition, followed by exegesis with γάρ like 16ff. νῦν δ'... | προδοὺς γάρ... The sequence and pattern of the lines are exactly calculated to arouse anxiety without being too explicit; and, as we shall see, there is an important element of *misdirection* in 37ff.

37. **δέδοικα δ' αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλευέσῃ νέον**: hitherto Medea's reactions to the *κυμφορά* have been emotional, with no revealed 'plan'. Henceforth *βουλεύειν* and *βουλεύματα* will be recurrent theme-words. **νέον**: perhaps simply 'untoward' (cf. S. *Phil.* 1229 μὴν τι βουλεύῃ νέον); but in this euphemistic idiom there is commonly an idea of aggravation ('some *new* trouble'); and so, naturally, here: 'such as to aggravate the (already bad) *πάθος/κυμφορά*'. As things are, Medea will die if she cannot be persuaded to take food; but it is the nature of nurses to hope for a change of heart in such matters, and to regard only the actual death of their patient as the ultimate calamity. So long as Medea is alive (and alive with healthy children) things could be worse. Since the speaker is Medea's own elderly nurse who has come with her from Colchis, and whose primary concern at all times is for her mistress's well-being, it follows that she fears some purposive action that will make matters worse *for Medea*, whether directly (as self-injury) or less directly. But we must beware of reading too much between the lines. If indeed it is central to the Nurse's position that she is afraid that her mistress 'may incur some greater *κυμφορά*', it is proper that she should say so. She *will* say so (at 43), if we do not jump straight to 44.

38–9. **βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν**: a phrase both vivid and apt (φρήν picking up *βουλεύεσθαι*), implying 'for her thinking mind is heavy with grief and anger' (so Σ'), but also with an overtone *χαλεπή* (LSJ *βαρύς* 1.3); cf. 176 βαρύθυμον ὄργαν, S. *Ant.* 767 νοῦς δ' ἐστὶ τηλικούτος ἀλγήσας βαρύς, *Aj.* 656 μῆνιν βαρεῖαν, *Phil.* 368 ὄργῃ βαρεῖαι. **οὐδ' ἀνέξεται κακῶς πάσχους**: the right ambivalent continuation, consistent with more than one kind of reactive *βούλευμα* (including suicide). To *ἀνέχεσθαι* is 'to hold oneself back', so 'to accept *ἡσυχῶς*'; for the use with a present participle, cf. *Or.* 1599 *κύγα νυν, ἀνέχου δ' ἐνδίκως πράσσων κακῶς. πάσχειν*, rather than *πράσσειν*, is the *mot juste* here. *κακῶς* | *πάσχουσα* (with the participle appropriately emphasized by the

enjambment)²⁵ continues the idea of ‘bad πάθος’, but with overtones now of ‘dishonour’ (cf. ἀτιμάσας 33); at the same time οὐδ’ ἀνέξεται... πάσχουσ’ leads into the idea of counter-action (δρᾶν opp. πάσχειν). ἐγὼ ἴδα τήνδε : I prefer to punctuate this as parenthetical (like οἶδ’ ἐγὼ 948; LSJ *εἶδω B. 8, Ellendt, *Lexicon Sophocleum* 516b), with most, if not all, editors before Elmsley, rather than as the asyndetic opening of a fresh sentence, though it makes little difference. τήνδε : ‘this mistress of mine’; the use of ὅδε in reference to a person not in view, but previously referred to by the speaker, is perfectly normal.²⁶ δειμαίνω δέ νιν | μῆ... : δέ (following οὐδέ as in 37) then seems a more natural connective than τε. Note that νιν is less superfluous after τήνδε, if ἐγὼ ἴδα and δειμαίνω are not closely paired. The phrasing is repetitive here, with the same proleptic idiom as 37 δέδοικα δ’ αὐτὴν μῆ..., but appropriately so in this context of ‘anxiety’. There is an effect of crescendo, in that, whereas δέδοικα μῆ... is sometimes nearly as colourless as Eng. ‘I’m afraid that...’, δειμαίνω is used only of strong fear. The Nurse is truly *terrified* by the thought of Medea’s possible or probable courses of action (knowing her, as she does).

40. μὴ θηκτὸν ὦσσι φάσγανον δι’ ἥπατος : ‘(and I am terrified) that she may thrust a whetted sword through (her) midriff.’ There is neither ambiguity nor obscurity in that, if we approach the matter without hindsight; no more than in *Il.* 18.34 δειδῖε γὰρ μὴ λαιμὸν ἀπαμήσειε κιδήρῳ (v.l. ἀποτμήσειε), where Antilochus fears that Achilles in his passionate grief may do himself an injury.²⁷ For the almost formulaic language of sword-suicide in tragedy, cf. *El.* 688 παίω γὰρ ἥπαρ (Geel: κᾶρα) τοῦμόν... ξίφει.²⁸ *H.F.* 1149 φάσγανον πρὸς ἥπαρ ἐξ ακοντίας (sc. ἐμόν), *Hel.* 982–3 κᾶπειτ’ ἐμόν | πρὸς ἥπαρ ὦαι δίστομον ξίφος τόδε, *Or.* 953 φάσγανον θήγους, 1063 παίσας ὑφ’ ἥπαρ φασγάνῳ (sc. ἐμόν). *S. Tra.* 930–1 φασγάνῳ... ὑφ’ ἥπαρ... πεπληγμένην, *Ant.* 1315 παίσας ὑφ’ ἥπαρ αὐτόχειρ αὐτήν.

It may well be that this line was misunderstood by whoever inserted a modified version of it into the text at 379, even as some subsequent commentators have understood the sword-thrusting here as murderous; but we do not have to go on making the same mistake. It might yet be argued that there is a *theoretical* ambiguity; but there will have been none for the original audience, on the reasonable supposition that the actor used his hands, miming the suicidal action, as well as his voice.

It is to be expected that suicide should feature among the βουλευματα feared by the Nurse, in the light of what she has said (she will at once go on to say that that is not her only fear). It is also appropriate that the fear should be of suicide with the sword, not of ‘hanging’ – the method that might otherwise have been mentioned as an

²⁵ Enjambment with overlapping emphatic word: cf. *Or.* 527–8, Collard on *Su.* 11–16, etc.

²⁶ Too common indeed to merit comment: cf. Diggle, *CR* 29 (1979), 208. Verrall also mistakenly objected to οἶδα + acc. pers. Page could have refuted that more effectively by citing *H.F.* 1, *S. Phil.* 249, *Od.* 4.551, *Pl. Rep.* 365e, etc. (Ellendt *ibid.*, LSJ *εἶδω B. 1).

²⁷ *Il.* 18.34 is cited by Σ as a comparable ‘ambiguity’ (ἀμφιβολία). If that was the intention of whoever first adduced the Homeric parallel, one can only say that he misunderstood both passages.

²⁸ Probably in an interpolated passage; but Geel’s correction still merits acceptance: the otherwise competent style of the suspect lines suggests ancient expansion of a shorter text. Diggle accepts Nauck’s excision of *El.* 685–9 with transposition of 693. I prefer Broadhead’s excision of 685–92 (possibly as a complex of interpolations). 694–8 is a sufficient scene-conclusion following 684 *H.A.* πάντ’, οἶδα πρὸς τὰδ’ ἀνδρα γίνεσθαι εἰς χρεή, economically implying that Electra intends suicide with her sword if Orestes perishes in *his* sword-enterprise. For this motivation, cf. *Or.* 1041 οὐδὲν σοὺ ξίφος λελεύσομαι, and *Hel.* 837 ταῦτ’ αὖ ξίφει γὰρ κείσομαι δέ σοὺ πέλας.

alternative (especially in the case of a woman).²⁹ Medea will, in the event, use a sword for child-murder (1244, 1278, 1325), confronting ‘steel’ (*κίδηρος*) with a *φρήν* more *μυαιφόνος* than any man (263–6); and this early indication that she is a woman *capable* of using a sword, and by implication in possession of one, is a feature of the ingeniously misdirecting, but properly ominous, lines culminating in 44 *δεινὴ γάρ...*

[41]. Interpolated here (and at 356a) from 380; see pp. 314–15 above. It is likely that whoever added the line *κυγῆ...λέχος* to the fear *μή...δι’ ἡπατος* was thinking of a murderous attack on Jason’s bride, as in the other passages and in line with the false *τύραννον* in 42 (see below);³⁰ but it is barely possible that he was thinking of Medea stabbing herself on her own marriage-bed, like Deianira (S. *Tra.* 813, 915f.). Recent defenders of the text have understood 40–1 in the latter sense – rightly as to 40, but unconvincingly as to 41.^{30a}

42. *ἦ καί...*: the right continuation for an alternative possibility that does not exclude the one just mentioned, and with an effect of crescendo;³¹ cf. *Or.* 1357–60 *πρὶν ἐτύμως ἰδω...ἦ καὶ λόγον...πυθώμεθα*. Here the alternative possibility is a compound one (*καί...κάπεται...*): a combination of ‘vengeful action’ and ‘subsequent greater *κυμφορά*’, which is to be feared for the reasons given in 38f. and 44–5.

...†*τύραννον*† *τόν τε γήμαντα κτάνη*: Hermann’s *τυράννους* is now surely inevitable.³² The obscurity of *τύραννον* (sc. *τόν* or *τήν*?) has long been a stumbling-block and one of the grounds for denying Euripidean authorship. The imprecise plural is exactly what we want (cf. 607 *ἀρὰς τυράννους ἀνοσίους ἀρωμένη*); and the corruption in conjunction with *τόν γήμαντα* is similar to that in 594 *λέκτρα βασιλέων* (codd. *-έως*).³³ The effect of the plural here is to suggest (with appropriate misdirection, as in 374ff.) the likelihood of a successful attack on Jason and *one or more* of the royal persons to whom he has allied himself by marriage. Either *τύραννον* ‘the king’ or *τύραννον* ‘royal bride’ could have satisfied an ancient actor or scribe, untroubled by the ambiguity; but ‘king also’ will have been the natural interpretation for anyone who thought that the assault on the new bride had already been dealt with in 40–1.³⁴

²⁹ ‘Sword or noose’ is the standard formulation for *envisaged* suicide in Euripides (often developed as a *topos*): *Alc.* 228–30, *Andr.* 811–13, 841–4, *Tro.* 1012–13, *Ion* 1064–5, *Hel.* [229–30] (del. Hartung), 353–6, *Or.* 953–4, 1035–6, *Erechtheus* fr. 362.26; cf. A. G. Katsouris, ‘The Suicide-motif in Ancient Drama’, *Dioniso* 47 (1976), 5–36. In itself the sword method is ‘a horrifyingly masculine way to die’ (J. Gould, *JHS* 100 (1980), 57); and special considerations apply in the relatively few cases in tragedy where a woman actually adopts it (Deianira, Eurydice, Jocasta in *E. Ph.*, (?) Phaedra in the first *Hippolytus*) or more or less explicitly commits herself to it (last n.).

³⁰ The likelihood is obviously greater if the false *ἦ θηκτόν ὥσω...* was already in the text at 379. The temptation to make 40–1 like 379–80 will also have been stronger.

^{30a} *Pace* Seaford (n. 12a above) there is an impossible conflict, if suicide is meant, between *κυγῆ δόμους ἐξβάα...* and the actual situation. Medea is already indoors, loudly lamenting, and recumbent, presumably on her marriage-bed (21–6). As to *ἦν ἐστρωται λέχος*, he refers to the ‘extra pathos that the bed has been prepared to receive a new bride’; but Jason has already consummated his royal marriage and is now domiciled elsewhere (18f., 76f., 378ff., 886ff., 1000f., etc.).

³¹ J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1934, 1954), 306.

³² *Adnotationes ad Medeam ab Elmsleio editam* (cf. Diggle, *CQ* (1982), 50¹). It is regrettable that Hermann later changed his mind.

³³ For the erroneous *-ον* before *τόν*, cf. also Diggle’s parallels for the error *-των* before *ὦν* in 12 (n. 20 above).

³⁴ It is hard to understand why Page, after mentioning *τυράννους*, argued as though *μή τήν*

43. 'And then get some greater *συμφορά*': the Nurse is still primarily motivated by anxiety for her mistress's well-being, and she fears the murder of *τύραννοι* and Jason (who will deserve all they get) only because it must inevitably be followed by a worsening of Medea's *πάθος*. The first fear was of 'suicide', and that is still on the cards (preceded by the acts of vengeance); but 43 is not (*pace* Σ and others) simply a euphemistic way of saying 'and then kill herself'. Death by *execution* would be consistent with the Nurse's phrasing. And perhaps Medea's death is not, after all, the only imaginable 'greater *συμφορά*': cf. *Or.* 831–3 *τίς νόκος... μείζων κατὰ γὰν | ἡ ματροκτόνον αἶμα χειρὶ θέσθαι*; Anxiety as to the children has been aroused by the juxtaposition of 36 and 37; and now the phrasing is consistent with fear of *child-murder*. The cryptic excellence of 43, as the culmination of the Nurse's foreboding, has been neglected by commentators, less concerned to find excellences than to elaborate arguments in support of excision.³⁵ The key words, as the argument has shown, are *συμφορὰν* (= *πάθος*, *νόσον*) and the sinisterly indefinite *τινά*.

44–5. The closing distich is not a further expression of fear, but rather a confirmatory conclusion – confirming the likelihood of aggressive violence, without excluding the danger of suicide (as well), in accordance with the preceding speculations. *οὔτοι... γε*: the future is unpredictable, but, since Medea is *δεινὴ* ('formidable'), this much can be said with confidence.³⁶ *ῥαδίως... ἄιεται*: the correction of *οἴεται*, accepted by Diggle, is almost certainly right (for a point like Eng. 'will not *crow*');³⁷ but I feel sure that we need *καλλίνικος* ('not easily ... victorious'), rather than *καλλνίκον* as a dubious noun-object.³⁸ The personal sense is then the same as in 765 *καλλνίκοι... γενησόμεσθα*.

Who would now wish to excise 38–43? The tripartite structure of the prologue is thrown out of balance by such a drastic shortening of its third ('future') section. Moreover, as already pointed out (on 37), 44–5 cannot directly follow 37 without leaving unsaid much that needs to be said.³⁹ The fact that Medea is a formidable *adversary* is insufficient, in itself, to explain the speaker's *fear*; since the Colchian Nurse might well look forward with some relish to seeing her mistress vanquishing her foes. It might be suggested that the transmitted lines have been substituted for authentic ones; but they are much too good (with 41 out of the way and *τύραννον* emended) to make that a plausible supposition. It was surely Euripides, not some

τύραννον was the only available emendation (in conjunction with excision of 40–1). Nor (now) is it a valid objection that, where adjacent interpolation is proved, 'emendation is a suspicious remedy'. Good emendations often enough come in pairs; and compound remedies are the more justifiable if there is a causal connection between the errors.

³⁵ Verrall even included the supposedly weak phrasing of 43 among his arguments for excising 40–3.

³⁶ Denniston did not classify *οὔτοι (μήτοι)... γε*, but it is evidently the negative counterpart of *γέ τοι* (*Tro.* 234, etc.; *Greek Particles* 550–1); cf. 178, *Alc.* 54, 718, *Hcl.* 64, 438, *El.* 363, *Hel.* 579.

³⁷ Cf. T. C. W. Stinton, *JHS* 77 (1977), 140. If there is a suggestion of colloquialism (suitably poeticized, in Euripides' manner), that is appropriate to the *ἥθος* of the prologist (cf. *A. Ag.* 32ff.).

³⁸ To take *καλλνίκον* with *ἐχθραν* (Verrall) cannot be right. The acc. has been taken in two other ways: (a) sc. *ωιδάν* or *ὕμνον* (Weil and others); but *ὁ καλλνίκος* (sc. *ὕμνος*) gives no support for the sense 'victory song' in the absence of a definite article. (b) Stinton: 'he will not sing "καλλνίκος"'; but the parallels for that are true substantives: *Ph.* 1155 *βοᾷ πῦρ καὶ δικέλλας*, *A. Ag.* 48 *κλάζοντες Ἀρη*, *S.c.T.* 386, *P.V.* 355 (*φόβον*).

³⁹ Reeve sees merit in making *δεινὴ γάρ* directly sequential to 36 *δέδοικα δ'... νέον*, comparing *Or.* 102–3. But (a) the text of *Or.* 103 is uncertain; (b) this is not stichomythia; and the connection of thought is otherwise different here, since the Nurse is not afraid *for herself*. We need the intervening passage, if we are not to have an unnatural ellipse of thought.

later reviser, who conceived the idea of twofold dramatic misdirection in the prologue (the fear of suicide, the possibility that Medea may kill Jason), so ingeniously and economically combined with true forecasts (danger to the children, killing of *τύραννοι*).⁴⁰ Note that *all four* of these threats feature in Medea's first utterances (heard from within): 96-7, 111-14, 144-7, 160-7.

It remains to mention one further argument to which Page attached considerable weight. 'Euripides probably did not write *δέδοικα δ' αὐτήν* and *δειμαίνω τέ νιν*, as well as *βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν* and *δεινὴ γάρ*, quite so close together' (his italics). The 'repetitions' are so 'offensive' that he even doubted whether the hypothetical interpolator intended 37-45 to be spoken as a consecutive passage. His inclusion of *βαρεῖα γὰρ φρήν* in the list of 'repetitions' was obviously unreasonable; and, as to the rest, what we have is two different expressions meaning 'I fear that she...' early on in a six-line passage of which 'I fear' is the central theme; then, after three lines without 'fear' words, comes the climactic 'for she is formidable...'. What, objectively, is wrong with that?⁴¹

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⁴⁰ For other instances of misdirection in Euripidean prologues see Barrett on *Hipp.* 42 (who compares *Ion* 71-3) and Dodds on *Ba.* 52; cf. n. 10 above.

⁴¹ Page was elsewhere unreasonable about repetitions, cf. my comm. on *Or.* 136-9, also Easterling, 'Repetition in Sophocles', *Hermes* 101 (1973), 14-34.