

MEDEA'S FIRST EXIT

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Medea's entrance speech to the Chorus of Corinthian women falls into three parts: a preliminary apology, a general account of women's condition, and a report of her own special troubles.¹ The whole constitutes a plea for sympathy, and as it turns out, a successful one. Yet although the function of the speech as a whole in the dramatic economy of the play has seemed fairly clear, the details of the first section have continued to baffle, and sometimes irritate, the philologists, lines 214–18 especially resisting translation:

Κορίνθιαι γυναῖκες, ἐξῆλθον δόμων
μή μοί τι μέμψησθ'· οἶδα γὰρ πολλοὺς βροτῶν
σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας, τοὺς μὲν ὀμμάτων ἄπο,
τοὺς δ' ἐν θυραίοις· οἱ δ' ἀφ' ἡσυχου ποδὸς
δύσκειαν ἐκτήσαντο καὶ ῥαθυμίαν.

¹ Important general interpretations of *Medea* to which I shall refer are the following (cited by author's last name): G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941, repr. 1961) 147–65; L. M. Mead, "A Study in the 'Medea'," *G & R* 12 (1943) 15–20; A. Rivier, *Essai sur le Tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne 1944) 51–63; E. M. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides* (Wellington 1952) 21–35; M. P. Cunningham, "Medea APO MÊCHANÊS," *CP* 49 (1954) 151–60; M. Pohlenz, *Die Griechische Tragödie* (Göttingen 1954) 252–65; T. V. Buttrey, "Accident and Design in Euripides' *Medea*," *AJP* 79 (1958) 1–17; K. von Fritz, "Die Entwicklung der Jason-Medea-Sage und die Medea des Euripides," *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 322–422; E. Schlesinger, "Zu Euripides' *Medea*," *Hermes* 94 (1966) 26–53; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto 1967) 183–98.

On *Medea* 214–18, outside of the commentaries, I have especially used: T. L. Agar, "On Euripides, *MEDEA* 214–18," *CQ* 19 (1925) 14–15; J. E. Harry, "Médée Énigmatique," *RPh* 13 (1939) 5–20; O. Regenbogen, "Randbemerkungen zur Medea des Euripides," *Erano*s 48 (1950) 21–56; P. Mazon, "De Quelques Vers d'Euripide," *RPh* 26 (1952) 119–21; R. G. Ussher, "Euripides *Medea* 214 ff.," *CP* 55 (1960) 249–51; U. Schindler, "Euripides *Medeia* vv. 214–221," *Hermes* 91 (1963) 495–99.

Although the demands of syntax and sense are best satisfied, in English, by the translation of Page,²

Women of Corinth, I am come forth from the house, lest you censure me in some way: for whereas many I know are proud, as well abroad as in seclusion, yet others win a bad name for idleness from their quiet passage of life,

which follows the antithetical structure,

Many are really proud
as well abroad
as in seclusion,
Yet others win a bad name,

Medea's language still remains distinctly odd, as anyone must admit who tries to explain these lines to intelligent Juniors and Seniors. Page's translation makes sense of them; it also, as R. G. Ussher has argued,³ forces the phrases *σεμνοῦς γεγῶτας*, *ὀμμάτων ἄπο*, and *ἐν θυραίοις* to bear uncommon meanings. I wish to argue in the present paper that both Page and Ussher are right: the former, in his translation of Medea's overt meaning—the only one, surely, of which Euripides' syntax is susceptible; but the latter, too, in his intuitive judgment that these troubled lines betray a quality of half-suppressed resentment, a counter-attack of Medea against her enemies. But I would go on where Ussher leaves off, and argue that Euripides intended Medea's language to be strained and ambiguous in accordance with his general conception of her psychological development. In order to avoid a circular argument, it will be necessary to leave the philological problems of lines 214–18 temporarily, and to generalize about the play as a whole. After this, and after a detailed analysis of 230–51 (on the condition of women), I shall offer an interpretation of the complexities of the opening lines.

In legend, as von Fritz has shown,⁴ Medea apparently began as the innocent maiden who helps the hero in his fairy-tale quest, and only gradually became the evil sorceress who kills first her brother, then King Pelias, by magical arts. In Euripides' plays, however, a reverse

² *Euripides Medea*, ed. with introd. and comm. by D. L. Page (Oxford 1938, repr. 1955) 87–88.

³ Ussher 249–50.

⁴ Von Fritz 325–33.

movement occurs. Medea becomes progressively human. First, in the *Peliades* of 455, she causes Pelias' daughters to kill their father.⁵ The killing belonged of course to the traditional success story of Jason, and the audience were probably enlisted on Medea's side: did they realize, after the event, to what a horror they had committed themselves morally along with Pelias' daughters?⁶ (Significantly, the themes of the power of persuasion, which is almost magical, and the persuasion of a "fussy old king," will be echoed in *Medea*.) Then, in the *Aegeus*, probably produced between 450 and 430 B.C., Medea is the typical "bad woman" of legend, the villainous stepmother who, but for chance, would have succeeded in having Theseus killed by his own father.⁷ The situation resembles those of Bellerophon, Phoenix, Peleus, and (with a sadder outcome) Hippolytus, all innocent young men caught at least temporarily in the wiles of a passionate and scheming older woman.⁸ Again, if the chronology is right, events of the earlier play must be echoed ironically in the latter, especially the *Aegeus* scene.

We may presume that Euripides' audience of 431 B.C. expected the witch again; and certainly, at the end of *Medea*, they see her. Atop the house, in the dragon-chariot lent by the Sun, Medea is revealed to Jason and to us as a demonic figure of vengeance; indeed, she replaces the usual *deus ex machina* who foretells the future and, often, initiates a religious cult-practice. But this time—and here is the great change—Euripides does not begin with the witch. Instead, by humanizing Medea, by playing down, though not altogether omitting, references to her witchcraft and past evildoing, he confronts us with the new and deeply tragic situation of a passionate and intelligent woman, even, despite her "barbarian" background, a woman of modern Athenian culture and sensibility, who is brought through suffering to lose her humanity and kill her children—the coinciding psychological and

⁵ For *Peliades*, see T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 32–37.

⁶ Webster (above, note 5) 35. Note also Webster's suggestion, pp. 33 and 36, that at the play's end Medea stands on the roof and signals to Jason, reporting her success. Such an ending, if remembered, would provide a significant foil for that of *Medea*.

⁷ Webster (above, note 5) 77–80 (*Aegeus*).

⁸ Webster (above, note 5) 80–84 (*Sthenoboeia*), 84–85 (*Phoenix*), 85–86 (*Peleus*). Webster observes (p. 31) that nine plays out of the nine productions of Euripides' first period, from 455 to 428 B.C., were about bad women.

dramatic tendencies of the play. This is what matters. Jason's pathetic reduction to helplessness is secondary; our pity and fear are awakened by what happens to Medea.

The procedure is typical of the playwright who takes neither good nor evil for granted, whose imagination seeks out both the admixture of evil in actions conventionally represented as noble or just (the achievement of Admetus, Orestes' killing of Clytemnestra) and the possible pre-existence in a traditional villain or villainess of a good, even noble nature, that could be corrupted through suffering and the contagion of evil. Clytemnestra, another "bad woman," is an example. In *Electra*, she is as much sinned against as sinning; in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, she is a high-minded noblewoman whose extremity of suffering will drive her, as she herself prophetically states, to some dire action. We know the sequel and are meant to foresee it. If the lost plays of Euripides existed today, we should probably realize how much he delighted, almost paradoxically, to re-examine in a new light of innocence or guilt figures sullied or exonerated in legend or his own earlier versions. Thus Helen, always an elusive figure, is (or so we think) guilty in *The Trojan Women*, innocent in *Helen*, guilty again in *Orestes*. But Phaedra offers a closer parallel with Medea. In his first *Hippolytus*, Euripides apparently presented her as a bad woman, a victim of passion, who tries to seduce her stepson and, that failing, destroys him.⁹ To judge from references in comedy, the Athenian audience saw her as just another "whore," like Sthenoboeia and the rest. Yet in the second *Hippolytus*, of 428 B.C., Euripides shows how an honorable, morally upright woman could be brought through suffering to precisely the same point as the "whore," of traducing her stepson and causing his death. Not that the play is Phaedra's: Hippolytus, though less sympathetically portrayed than before (in contrast with Phaedra), remains the central character; but Euripides' central theme, of the loss of innocence in human beings and the universe generally, is shown as much in the corruption of Phaedra as in the death of Hippolytus.

⁹ For the fragments of the first *Hippolytus* and a conservative estimate of that play see *Euripides: Hippolytus*, ed. with introd. and comm. by W. S. Barrett (Oxford 1964) 11-12, 18-45. Perhaps, however, Barrett uses the evidence from Seneca's *Phaedra* too cautiously (granted that Seneca may also use Sophocles' *Phaedra* as a model); cf. B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley 1964) 23-46.

So too, in *Medea*, we are shown the corruption of a human being, which has its dramatic climax in the killing of the children; but the psychological meaning of her corruption is further, and terribly demonstrated, by the triumphant self-revelation on the magic chariot of a witch totally lacking in human feeling, who has nothing in common with the earlier princess except her name. While opinions somewhat disagree to what extent an objectively existing, demonic force may be said to manifest itself in this ending, triumphant, as Rivier argues, in having overcome Medea's natural feelings of maternal love¹⁰—and there does seem, as in *Macbeth*, to be sufficient evidence of a tacit compliance of supernatural powers with what Medea is doing that we ought not to simplify her tragedy by reducing it to a merely psychological process, conflict, and result—still most critics would agree with Cunningham's judgment that the chariot is a "visual metaphor" of the inner transformation. As he says:

By the tone of her speech and by the use of the machine Euripides seems to suggest that the price Medea has paid for her own course of action has been to suffer the loss of her own humanity. On this interpretation the final scene of the play presents visually and strikingly the dehumanizing effect upon Medea of what she has done.¹¹

The dramatic timing, however, of Medea's dehumanization has been subject to serious debate. When precisely does the woman die, the witch emerge triumphant? Medea's first entrance on stage is dramatic; we have waited in suspense, learned of Medea's passive suffering at second hand and from her own cries of anguish; and now, it seems, that helpless passivity ends and the resulting action, which is also a reaction—the Nurse spoke of heavy clouds of sorrowing soon to be "kindled with greater spirit"¹²—is set afoot. The question is, whether Medea's entrance speech, which has surprised many readers, at least, by the apparent calm and self-control that it manifests,¹³ may be taken

¹⁰ For the extreme position, of the demonic as an external force in the play, see Rivier 51–63. Against Rivier, see the arguments of Pohlenz 259 ff. (the demon exists only within Medea) and A. Garzya, *Pensiero e Tecnica Drammatica in Euripide* (Naples 1962) 49–50 and note 10. A fairly balanced treatment in Conacher 147–48.

¹¹ Cunningham 159.

¹² *Medea* 106–8.

¹³ On Medea's alleged calm and self-control in her entrance speech, cf. Grube 151; Blaiklock 25; Cunningham 157; Pohlenz 253; W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (Berlin 1966) 189–90. Rivier 53 comes closer: "Elle est froide maintenant,

as an indication that Medea has gained self-mastery and is embarking in cold blood on the series of steps that will lead to her revenge, albeit its final form has not yet crystallized in her mind. Thus Cunningham divides the play into three clear stages:¹⁴

(a) the Prologue and Parodos, giving the background of Medea's situation and true feelings;

(b) the large central portion, from Medea's first entrance onstage to her exit into the house, to kill the children—through which time she "plays a part"; and

(c) the Exodos, in which Medea's true feelings are once more clearly revealed.

Now, her entrance speech aside, the psychological presentation of Medea in section (b) is evidently more complicated than the phrase "playing a part" might allow. Her mood fluctuates throughout: the relation of intellect to feeling is highly ambiguous. Most obviously in the first scene with Jason, Medea airs her outraged feelings: she is as honest here in helplessness as later, in the exodus, after victory; and her hatred, far from having congealed, receives passionate expression in contrast with Jason's cold, self-deluding rationalizations. It is true that earlier with the Chorus and Creon, and later with Aegeus and Jason (in his second scene), Medea makes a weapon of persuasion. At moments, especially as she manipulates Creon or Jason, or confronts the Chorus with her fixed resolution after the Creon and Aegeus scenes, she much resembles Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, or perhaps the witch of *Peliades* and *Aegeus*. Yet until her exit we remain in suspense. We do not know that she will kill the children. We see a woman still capable of suffering, whose inner conflict—especially of course in her great soliloquy—at once foreshadows the inhuman outcome and shows that rigor mortis of the feelings has not yet set in. While there is inner struggle, there is uncertainty. Only at the end, in Cunningham's section (c), does the figure on stage altogether coincide with the witch of legend. All between is ambiguous.

But especially, Medea's entrance speech is ambiguous, much more than critics have observed. Too often it has been examined as a

s'exprimant non sans raideur dans un langage quasi abstrait où se trahit l'effort qu'elle fait pour se contenir."

¹⁴ Cunningham 154-55.

brilliant piece of rhetorical exposition only, or as the means by which Medea makes the chorus an instrument of her plans. But this is not all. The speech, and especially the opening lines (with which the philologist will mainly be concerned), betrays a frightful inner strain and tension, pointing at once to the suffering and alienation that Medea has undergone and to their demoralizing effect, which is still, significantly, in process. It therefore permits us to grasp the extent of Medea's tragedy, though not yet its inevitability, by looking backward and forward at once: to the intelligent and passionate woman who has suffered so much, and to the cold and inhuman witch to whom, Euripides seems to be saying, the alienation of emotion and intellect produced by intense suffering and isolation invariably leads. The entrance speech, therefore, which is also (and I shall return to this point) Medea's *first exit* from the house, presents us in condensed form with the double vision of the whole central section, which makes the tragedy so effective: of the woman who has been, whose human excellence wins our sympathy, as it wins that of the Chorus; and the witch of legend into whom that woman is, unavoidably, transformed.

Just how much Medea's speech shows of the earlier person, and the kind of pressure that has affected her, can be seen from the coherent and controlled section on women's condition, to which I now turn. It will be easier afterwards to grasp the troubled phrases of the opening section in their complete psychological and dramatic context.

πάντων δ' ὅσ' ἔστ' ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει
 γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν·
 ἃς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῇ
 πόσιν πρίασθαι, δεσπότην τε σώματος
 λαβεῖν· κακοῦ γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔτ' ἄλγιον κακόν.
 καὶ τῷδ' ἀγὼν μέγιστος, ἢ κακὸν λαβεῖν
 ἢ χρηστόν. οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγὰι
 γυναιξίν, οὐδ' οἶόν τ' ἀνήγασθαι πόσιν
 εἰς καινὰ δ' ἦθη καὶ νόμους ἀφιγμένην
 δεῖ μάντιν εἶναι, μὴ μαθοῦσαν οἴκοθεν,
 ὅπως μάλιστα χρήσεται ξυνευνέτη.
 καὶ μὲν τὰδ' ἡμῖν ἐκπονουμέναισιν εὖ
 πόσις ξυνοικῇ μὴ βίᾳ φέρων ζυγόν,
 ζηλωτὸς αἰών· εἰ δὲ μή, θανεῖν χρεών.

ἀνὴρ δ', ὅταν τοῖς ἔνδον ἄχθηται ξυνών,
 ἔξω μολῶν ἔπαυσε καρδίαν ἄσης·
 [ἢ πρὸς φίλον τιν' ἢ πρὸς ἥλικα τραπεῖς·]
 ἡμῖν δ' ἀνάγκη πρὸς μίαν ψυχὴν βλέπειν.
 λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον
 ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, οἳ δὲ μάρνανται δορί·
 κακῶς φρονούντες· ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα
 στήναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἄπαξ. (230-51)

On the simplest level, this section proves Medea's intellectual competence, her ability to marshal an antithetically structured chain of ideas in response (the technique is common) to the arguments of an imagined opponent. She is not simply arguing that women are worse off than men. Rather, she is rebutting a critique of marriage from the male viewpoint—a critique whose essential spirit of dislike and contempt for women goes back to an ancient anti-feministic tradition, reflected in Hesiod's Pandora story and in Semonides' elegy, but which has undergone refinement and systematization in an increasingly conceptualizing age. Such a prose argument is found, whether or not Euripides could or did draw upon it, in a long fragment of Antiphon the Sophist, in which the institution of marriage appears as a socially enforced trap whereby man's natural striving after happiness must be, one way or another, betrayed.¹⁵ Man is born free, Antiphon implies,

¹⁵ Antiphon the Sophist argues that existing family customs, like other social institutions, run contrary to man's instinctual needs of freedom of movement, self-expression, and security. On the one side, children harm themselves by submitting "justly" to the whims of unjust parents (*VS*⁸ 87 B44, A5); on the other, a husband and father is trapped by the institution of family (B49). On Antiphon's philosophy generally, see M. Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, trans. K. Freeman (Oxford 1954), and E. A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven 1957); I also used, by the author's courtesy, C. P. Segal, *Reason, Emotion, and Society in the Sophists and Democritus* (Harvard diss. 1961). On the relation between Antiphon B49 and Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea*, see J. H. Finley, Jr., "The Origins of Thucydides' Style," repr. in *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) 90-95 (with bibliographical refs.). Finley argued that Euripides and Thucydides drew on a common rhetorical tradition, breathed the same atmosphere of sophistic argumentation. Yet granted this common influence (which matters greatly to our understanding of Thucydides' method), it remains difficult to establish the particular debt of either Euripides or Thucydides to any one thinker at any given time: partly because "the sophists" exist only fragmentarily or in secondhand report, paraphrase, and criticism, and their dating is highly uncertain; partly too because what may seem striking parallels today were often commonplaces then, or, especially in Euripides' hands, independent variations on a familiar theme. So with Antiphon B49. It may be reflected in *Alcestis* 882-88; if so, we would at once establish a *terminus*

but everywhere he is in somebody's arms. Until the present system is changed, it is obviously better for a man neither to marry nor, if he does, to beget children—a responsibility that crushes the once so free and “skipping” spirit.

Medea's speech is framed structurally by her reply to two traditional male arguments. The first is that wives are expensive, not worth it. Medea counters sarcastically that women pay too, and receive—a “lord and master of their person.” The phrase would jar on Athenian sensibilities habituated to democratic procedures. It is meant to. The end implies another male argument, a justification of the husband's traditional authority and the “two spheres” theory. Men go to war; women, protected, must mind the house. Medea's answer is striking. It also points to the theme, of domestic relations turned hostile, that runs through the play.

Medea takes another, more modern male argument based on uncertainty (a man never knows for sure how his choice will work out) and pushes it further. Women cannot even choose. They are passive victims—an unfairness compounded by their maiden ignorance, the abruptness of their change of condition, and the traumatic effect of sexual initiation under such unpropitious circumstances. Like an Athenian lady, Medea is reticent about the sexual problem, “how to live with the man who shares your bed.” But her delicate phrasing, “new habits, new laws of conduct,” suggests that the ordinary Greek bride is *like a foreigner*—a position, to be sure, to which the uprooted barbarian princess that Jason marries is doubly sensitive.

A still more modern argument against marriage, that it abridges man's natural freedom and spontaneity (an example of *nomos* outrunning *physis*), is posed typically by Antiphon in the form of a dilemma. To live with an uncongenial wife is painful; but society, through potentially hostile in-laws, makes divorce painful too. But Medea reminds us that social pressures are still more binding on the wife. Not only can she not “refuse” a husband: divorce stains her reputation, whatever

ante quem for Antiphon's work, *On Harmony*, and a particular influence on Euripides' thought. Yet the parallel is scarcely remarkable. Euripides has taken an old truism, that to bear children is to give hostages to fortune, and decked it out in modern conceptual dress. Not the conceptual structure of Admetus' lament nor Medea's plea is significant, but rather the psychological and dramatic use to which they are put.

the rights or wrongs of the case.¹⁶ Again, women are trapped, an unprivileged class within the democracy (for evidently we are to think of Athens and Athenian custom-law).

The idea of a trap, as important to Medea's psychology as to her argument, emerges more explicitly as she attacks the double standard favoring the men. The wife's happiness depends on her giving one-sided satisfaction to her husband in the hope that, at best, he will "bear the yoke" patiently. We should notice the sarcasm, the half-suppressed resentment that the male feels "tied down" by family. Furthermore, Medea continues (and the idea is crucial to this play), the wife has *no escape*. The husband, of course, can simply "go out." Here we may read between the lines. If we remove line 246, which Wilamowitz seems rightly to have branded as the interpolation of a "prudish schoolmaster,"¹⁷ the obvious implication remains that the husband may seek refuge from domestic "distress" in the arms of a mistress—a kind of consolation that the double standard renders unthinkable for the wife. But the vague *ἔξω μολών* signifies more than sexual freedom. It suggests the more encompassing feeling of the wife, that she is a prisoner. The husband has another world, of amusement, distraction, companionship—we need not be more specific—into which he can escape at will from any discomfort at home. His wife, however, while not literally a prisoner in the *gynaikeion* (a myth which has been quite exploded),¹⁸ is still expected by the traditional code of the "two spheres" to make the center of her emotional existence at home. She must always look inward. The point, in our play, is not so much the theoretical unfairness of the indoor-outdoor dichotomy indicated by Medea (although it is a telling point, and one

¹⁶ On the practical difficulties of a woman wishing to obtain a divorce, despite an equitable law, cf. E. Caillemer in Daremberg-Saglio, s.v. "divortium," 319.

¹⁷ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Analecta Euripidea* (repr. Hildesheim 1963) 206–7, objects to the verse on metrical grounds (*in quinto pede claudicantem*) and finds it due to the *pudicitia* of an *indoctus interpolator* who disliked the possible reference to concubinage. Regenbogen 27 argues, but I think unconvincingly, for retaining the verse.

¹⁸ For the comparative freedom of women in the fifth century at Athens, cf. C. Seltman, *Women in Antiquity* (London 1956) 87–116; for their restraint and seclusion, cf. C. A. Savage, *The Athenian Family*, Johns Hopkins diss. (Baltimore 1907) 22–42, and R. Cagnat in Daremberg-Saglio, s.v. "gynaeceum," 1706–9 (while the gyn. was not a harem, it was nonetheless "narrow, obscure, and stifling"). A very balanced treatment in A. W. Gomme, "The Position of Women in Athens of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries," *CP* 20 (1925) 1–25.

that might strike home among the audience), as the *pressure built up* in a wife by the feeling of imprisonment enforced by social conditions.¹⁹ It is a potentially explosive situation.

The same argument, Medea continues (in the last section of the speech), does not apply to the Chorus and herself; for while they have a city, a father's house, friends and resources to fall back on, she herself is totally isolated, without "anchorage." All the more, therefore, she deserves their support. Yet although Medea is indeed more uprooted from her background, more isolated, and consequently (we assume) more helpless than the ordinary Greek wife, it would be wrong to imagine that her brilliant and passionate statement of the wife's condition applies only to the Chorus or is merely a technique for gaining their help. Certainly they are won over. They—and we also, as Buttrey has shown—will be accomplices in the murder of the children.²⁰ But more: the account is two-edged. It shows, on the one hand, what a pressure could have built up within Medea from the frustrations, the one-sided effort, and the constraint of her marriage-situation alone—a situation falling under the civilized *nomoi* which, as Jason sees it, Greece bestows upon the benighted barbarian.²¹ His desertion of Medea, which these same *nomoi* scarcely discourage, sets off the psychological explosion; but the combustible material is already there; and, the greater the pre-existing social and psychological pressures, the more violent and unpredictable, as always in Euripides' plays, must be the response—the lightning breaking from dark clouds.

On the other hand, quite apart from Medea's psychological deterioration, Euripides seems unmistakably to surprise his audience with the awareness that pressures analogous to those working upon Medea exist in their own comfortable homes. This is not to say that Euripides is acting as the women's champion (consider the allusions in Aristophanes), or writing social criticism, or pleading for some reform of Athenian custom-law that might brighten the women's situation and

¹⁹ On this particular pressure and its results, see H. Diller, "Umwelt und Masse als dramatische Faktoren bei Euripides," *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique VI: Euripide* (Geneva 1958) 93–95; also Grube 152.

²⁰ Buttrey, esp. 15–16.

²¹ *Medea* 536–38. In view of lines 294–305, discussed below, note the irony of Jason's claim directly following, in lines 539–41: all the Greeks realized that you were clever, and you got a reputation . . . !

reduce domestic pressure to a minimum. On the contrary, Euripides' tragedy has no positive moral or message. It is founded on a lack of love, or rather a disuniting of love and wisdom, of which the careful planning of a Jason is more symptom than remedy. If anybody represents Euripides' own thought in the play, it is the nurse when she complains that music cannot heal that pain in the human heart that leads to disaster.²² The anachronistic, fifth-century ideas with which Euripides enlivens his myth point to no program for better Athenian living; but they do bring the tragedy nearer home for the audience, and by extension for ourselves, by focusing the general failure of human aspirations in specifically Athenian terms. To say that Medea's case is unique, that she is, after all, an uncontrolled barbarian, or monster, or witch, is to miss half the point of the tragedy, much as Jason misses it when he cries out, rationalizing as always, that "No Greek woman would have dared this deed!"²³

To make sense, Medea's argument about women requires an Athenian background in which individual liberty and equality before the law are taken for granted. The Rights of Women, historically, have always followed the Rights of Men.²⁴ For freedom is contagious; the more it exists, the more its absence is noticed in different areas; so that, the theoretical question of women's intelligence and ability (was it as great as men's?) aside, there must have been much speculation in the later fifth century, both private and public, about possible extensions of Athenian *isonomia* to metics or slaves, to women, perhaps even (and at least in comedy) to children. On these subjects, however, Athenian practice was untypically conservative. It is significant that, in the winter after *Medea* was performed, Pericles (in Thucydides' rendition of his funeral oration) deals so very briefly and negatively with women after extolling the brilliance and vivid grace of life in a free society. That woman does best, who is least spoken of among men for good or evil!²⁵ Perhaps the remark is part of the balancing act by which

²² *Medea* 190–203.

²³ *Medea* 1339–40.

²⁴ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, tr. H. M. Parshley (Bantam Books: New York 1961) pp. 99–118.

²⁵ Thuc. 2.45.2: "Not to turn out worse than your nature is constituted brings you great glory, and that woman too [will do well] who is least spoken of among men in regard to excellence or blame."

Pericles tried to reconcile older traditional values with liberal experimentation. If so, it was perhaps the same instinct for balancing things that led him, back in 451 B.C., to promulgate the curious, illiberal law by which children of Athenian fathers but foreign mothers were deprived of the rights of citizenship.²⁶ Euripides may have noticed how these mothers were "disprized" (*ἡτιμασμέναι*, like Medea); how they were reduced at a blow to second-class citizenship; and perhaps, how some Athenian husbands found their *βάρβαρον λέχος* a source of embarrassment—as Medea claims Jason does.²⁷ Euripides may then have sympathized with these dishonored wives; but more important, he may have observed the psychological consequences of their social mistreatment, much as Brecht has described the hardening of soul that his character, the Jewish Wife, undergoes in Nazi Germany.²⁸ What fosters or damages the human soul: that has always been, in politics, the writer's main concern.

Not only the social, but also the intellectual context of *Medea* is fifth-century Athenian. It has often been observed that Jason uses sophistic arguments of motivation and advantage to justify his behavior. What is more important, the entire tragedy is played out against a background of Athenian intellectual aspiration, the optimistic belief in regular progress in all areas of life through rational calculation and the control of passion. We can see, ironically, in certain fragments of Democritus the idea that family relations, like others, could be improved by continuing rationalization²⁹—an idea later carried to an

²⁶ On the law of 441 and its possible purpose, see C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford 1952) 343–47. It is discussed in relation to *Medea* by Mead 16–17, and Blaiklock 21; also by R. B. Palmer, "An Apology for Jason: A Study of Euripides' *Medea*," *CJ* 53 (1957–58) 49–55.

²⁷ *Medea* 591–92: "As you grew older your barbarian marriage was proving rather inconvenient for your reputation."

²⁸ In *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays By Bertolt Brecht*, trans. by E. Bentley (Grove Press, New York 1965).

²⁹ See *VS*⁸ 68 B275–78; good discussions in Havelock and Segal (above, note 15), also T. Cole, *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology*, A. P. A. Monograph (Cleveland 1967) 80–81, 112–15. In B278, the rule that children should return benefit to parents appears as a sensible, civilized, yet quite natural corollary of the parental responsibility that animal nature generally requires. In the area of family, as in other areas now being rationalized, progress is judged by utility: thus care for the aged has value as compensation for the acknowledged disadvantages of child-rearing. In B275–77, Democritus envisages a progressive improvement of the family situation, eliminating uncertainty and risk, through an extension of the same principle of building on nature

extreme by Antiphon's above-mentioned attack on the very institution of marriage, and to another extreme, in an anti-individualistic reaction, by Plato's dissolution of the private family in his Republic in order to create a larger organic unity. It is possible therefore to see in the failure of Jason's plans for home-management a symbolic expression of the more general failure of the prevailing rational spirit of the Periclean Age to create a better, more truly successful society than had existed before. Indeed, resemblances exist between Jason's language and mentality and that which Thucydides attributes to Pericles—Jason attempting to soothe down or remove recalcitrant emotions in his household, as Pericles in the state.³⁰ But although the theme of *sophia*, of wisdom used and (more often) abused, runs through *Medea*, the play deals not with the failure of reason as such, but with the breakdown of that harmonious union of reason and passion which the chorus celebrates in the great Erechtheidai ode:

... and they tell of her [Aphrodite] that, placing on her hair a fragrant garland of roses, she sends the Loves to sit by Wisdom's side, fellow-workers of every Excellence.³¹

In the action of the play, and in the pathology of *Medea* which that action reflects, Euripides shows what catastrophic results follow when love and wisdom are disunited. Jason's remarriage in itself is only a catalyst of events. Had he acted from passion, *Medea* says, she would have understood; but Jason characteristically never acts from passion: it is rather his cold-blooded, selfish utilitarianism that turns *Medea's* love to hatred and her intelligence, far surpassing his own, to a helpless instrument of the uncontrolled will to vengeance. Her psychological deterioration and the consequent murder of her children illuminate, with a lightning flash, the failure of the lovely aspirations voiced in the Erechtheidai Ode and heard, we may imagine, with such pleasure and complacency by the audience. In the same way, Pericles' Funeral

that had shown its usefulness already in the practice of adoption. The strain he places here on the theoretical continuity between *nomos* and *physis* perhaps anticipates the more radical analysis by Antiphon the Sophist.

³⁰ As Pericles generally attempted to control the passions of the Athenian people (Thuc. 2.65.8-9; cf. also 2.59.3 ff.), Jason condemns passion as an evil (*Medea* 446-47) and tries to calm it (455-56, 1149-51; also, ironically, 866-71 ff.).

³¹ *Medea* 840-45.

Oration is ironically placed by Thucydides, to celebrate precisely those Athenian ideals which are subsequently destroyed in the Peloponnesian War. For all tragedy, private or public, involves the loss of real or potential good, and the private tragedy symbolizes, even as it is contained within, the public one.

We may go further and say that Medea, though changing before our eyes, might have represented in her person precisely the union of reason and passion that the Chorus praise. Her speech on women, if we associate with it later remarks of the Chorus on women's intelligence and musicality, is very reminiscent of an Athenian hydria of about 440 to 430 B.C.³² This shows a beautiful woman ("Sappho"), her head and neck gracefully bent to read a bookroll, absorbed in meditation and curiously isolated from her woman servants, one of whom holds a wreath over her while the other stretches forth a lyre. The attitude of concentration, while suggesting a classical individuality and inwardness, enhances her dignity and grace—traditional attributes of women in vase-painting and sculpture—even while it sets her apart. Just so, in our play, a woman embodying the finest, most Athenian traits of mind and spirit is lost to humanity.

To be sure, we never quite see that woman: she is lost before the play begins. But in emphasizing *what might have been*, I am following Euripides' own tendency, which is sufficiently apparent in the syntax of the play's opening lines, the condition contrary to fact in past time setting the mood for what follows. The same concern appears in the idealizing odes of the Chorus, which heighten the tragedy through contrast even as they provide relief from an otherwise intolerable sequence of passionate and suspenseful confrontations. Not only the Erechtheidai ode: the first stasimon is as much to the point; for after Medea has *already* enlisted the support of the Corinthian women, wheedled Creon against his better judgment into giving her time, avowed her purpose of vengeance to the Chorus, and even concluded with the sarcastic remark (407-9), "Further, we are by nature women;

³² Athens 1260: bibliography and discussion in H. R. Immerwahr, "Book Rolls on Attic Vases," *Classical Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman* (Rome 1964) 26 and note 1 (but Plate 18 concentrates on the book roll and so omits the face and neck, which I studied from another, unpublished photograph given me by Professor Immerwahr). Cf. also pp. 27-28 for evidence in vase-paintings for the literacy of women and their interest in literature.

towards noble deeds most ineffectual, but for evildoing, most consummate in skill"—after all this, the Chorus, still meditating on women's condition, sing an ode whose first half looks to a new vindication of women's honor (410-30):

Holy rivers are running upstream,
Justice and all things turning backward;
Men have treacherous plans, the gods
 inspire no certain trust.
But *my* reputation will change, for the better:
Honor is coming now for the race of women;
That sex will no longer be bound by ill-sounding report.

The old stories will come to an end,
Singing about *my* unfaithfulness.
Lyrical song was never made a gift
 to the mind of women by
Phoebus, leader of strains, or they
Might have sung a reply to men; still, long
Time will have much to say of my portion and men's.

Strophe and antistrophe brilliantly evoke a revolutionary excitement, of fifth-century Athens. Values may be inverted and old sanctions lost, as witness men's treachery (i.e. Jason's) and failure to keep god-sworn oaths; yet amid this whirl of change an underprivileged group may hope to gain. The old songs of women's faithlessness (we are to think of legendary villainesses like Clytemnestra and Eriphyle) will have their end; time still has much to tell.

It has indeed. But time is working against hope, not for it. What the Chorus cannot know is that Medea will be another Clytemnestra, that her name will be added to the "legend of bad women" of which they complain. As they sympathize with her loneliness, echo her complaint, and illustrate by her case (in the second strophe and antistrophe) the earlier theme of men's faithlessness and the moral inversions of the age, they fail to realize how much the particular instance (*σὺ δ'*) of the ode's second half undercuts the aspirations of the first. Medea will be a test case for "women's honor"; still more, for the general condition of man, of which women's honor is a part. But we might recognize the irony eluding the Chorus: that their sympathy (which is

underscored metrically, echoing the Parodos)³³ comes too late, that at Medea's point of suffering women's rights can be no more than a serviceable, even dangerous argument. If the sarcastic lines (407-9) quoted earlier reflect the common male bias, that women are incapable of doing significant good—a bias that Jason shows quickly enough under pressure, when he cries out that women are all sex-crazed, and the root of all evil³⁴—they suggest, too, an important Euripidean theme, that *prejudice has a self-fulfilling power*. Think ill of women, or any group, and the resentment and hostility your prejudice engenders in their souls is sure to make them worse.

Throughout the play, therefore, Euripides sets off Medea's tragedy against a background, largely evoked by the Chorus, of ideal possibilities that ought, we feel, to be realized in Athenian fact. The failure of one of these, of the hope for "women's honor," perhaps stands for the failure of all. Perhaps the Chorus never understand: for ironically, after Medea's great soliloquy in the last stage of psychological disintegration, they return to the question of women's honor, claiming that they too are familiar with subtle argument, that if not all, yet a few women are favored by a Muse of intellect. Yet to prove their intellectual ability, they produce a tightly constructed but despairing argument, that childbearing does not pay (1094-1111):

- (A) Childless men are freed from grievous toil by the very inexperience which might have been adduced to disprove their right of comparative judgment; whereas
- (B) Those with offspring, however sweet, are
 - (1) worn out with care
 - (a) to rear them well, and
 - (b) to provide them with an adequate livelihood; and
 - (2) uncertain whether their labor will result in a good or bad product; moreover,
 - (3) even if
 - (a) the livelihood is produced, and
 - (b) the children reach manhood, and

³³ *Medea* 435-37 and 442-44, echoing the rhythm of 151-53, 156-58, 176-78, 181-83.

³⁴ *Medea* 569-75; cf. the great denunciation of the female sex by Hippolytus, *Hipp.* 616-68. Such an anti-feminist attitude is echoed ironically by Medea in lines 384-85, 407-9, 889-90, and 945; and sadly, by the chorus, at 1290-92.

- (c) they turn out to be good—
still, they may suddenly die.

The demonstration could have come from Antiphon; it takes his argument against the institution of marriage a step further, in a trim logical reckoning. Seen, however, in a larger perspective, it dramatizes once more the divorce between reason and feeling. Intellectual analysis, in which the Chorus take pride, shows that it is better not to bear children. Rational argument points to incalculable disaster. As both reason and feeling lead, in Medea's soliloquy, to their own negation, so in this last song, which precedes the messenger's report and the play's final action, the Chorus sing a funeral dirge for the hope they voiced earlier.

From our study of the theme of "women's rights" in *Medea*, certain generalizations arise which bear on the rest of the play and not least on the lines, 214-18, with which our investigation began, and to which it will shortly return. First of all, the tragedy of Medea gains force from a background of contemporary Athenian aspirations, at once personal, social, and intellectual; but at the same time Medea is in our play the touchstone by which these aspirations are tested and fail. Second, to use Thucydidean categories, *ergon* precedes *logos*. The theoretical statement of a situation, aiming to improve and control the future through rational judgment of the past, appears submerged in a total sequence of events that was set in process in the uncontrolled past and, from a future retrospect, will appear to have been irrevocable. Thus Medea's plea to the Chorus for women's rights cannot be taken at face value; for it belongs to a complex action of which the Chorus become an ineffectual part, involving Medea's transformation for the worse, and ending with the destruction or disappearance of the ideal evoked variously by her and by the chorus. It is always too late in this tragedy. The consequences of past suffering are past remedying; the Chorus sympathize with a woman who can no longer be reached. But third, even as Medea's fate works itself out, as she becomes the witch that, in a sense (and in retrospect) she always was, Euripides continues to hold up to us the prospect of what might have been. The point is not simply that witches do not emerge from nowhere, that it takes a woman to turn into a witch. It is more that Medea,

if she had been allowed to continue to exist humanly, would have embodied the most ideal combination of traits, the union of love and wisdom as "co-workers of every kind of excellence." It is this possibility that is annihilated even as we, like the Chorus, are made aware of it. Medea's entrance speech is her own Funeral Oration.

*Κορίνθιαι γυναῖκες, ἐξήλθον δόμων,
μή μοί τι μέμψηθ'· οἶδα γὰρ πολλοὺς βροτῶν
σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας, τοὺς μὲν ὀμμάτων ἄπο,
τοὺς δ' ἐν θυραίοις· οἱ δ' ἀφ' ἡσύχου ποδὸς
δύσκειαν ἐκτήσαντο καὶ ῥαθυμίαν.
δίκη γὰρ οὐκ ἔνεστ' ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς βροτῶν,
ὅστις πρὶν ἀνδρὸς σπλάγχχνον ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς
στυγεῖ δεδορκῶς, οὐδὲν ἡδίκημένος.
χρὴ δὲ ξένον μὲν κάρτα προσχωρεῖν πόλει·
οὐδ' ἀστὸν ἦνεσ' ὅστις αὐθάδης γεγῶς
πικρὸς πολίταις ἐστὶν ἀμαθίας ὕπο.
ἐμοὶ δ' ἄελπτον πρᾶγμα προσπεσὸν τόδε
ψυχὴν διέφθαρκ'· οἴχομαι δὲ καὶ βίου
χάριν μεθεῖσα κατθανεῖν χρήζω, φίλαι.
ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ἦν μοι πάντα, γινώσκει καλῶς,
κάκιστος ἀνδρῶν ἐκβέβηχ' οὐμὸς πόσις. (214-29)*

We may now return to Medea's opening lines and examine the troubled phrases, *σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας*, *ὀμμάτων ἄπο* and *ἐν θυραίοις*, in their larger context. Of the three, the meaning of *ὀμμάτων ἄπο* is soonest ascertained.³⁵ Overtly, as said before, it is contrasted with *ἐν θυραίοις* in a secondary antithesis: real arrogance manifests itself as much in public self-display as in an aloofness that keeps out of sight.

³⁵ For bibliography see above, note 1. Mazon and Regenbogen agree with Page's view (following Eirenaïos and Elmsley) that *ὀμμάτων ἄπο* here means "out of sight." Harry 12-15 takes it closely with *σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας*, "judged from appearance" (he compares Lys. 16.19 and other passages to the effect that one should not judge from appearance); similarly, Ussher 249: "Some on the evidence of what they see." A little differently, Schindel 496-97 follows a second suggestion in the scholia, "thought from the state of their eyes" (157.15 Schwartz; the first was, "separated and far away") and so sees Medea as referring to a group who have an inborn *semmotês* in their countenance. In my discussion, I have accepted meaning (i), "out of sight," brought out the considerable importance of a latent meaning (ii), "people judge you with their eyes," and assumed, under (ii), the further possibility of (iii): "that is, from how you look"—an idea which seems relatively unimportant to Euripides here.

But the phrase is odd, and its oddness points to a second meaning which, while syntactically unsuitable here, would be more normal in ordinary speech: namely, the suggestion that people judge by their eyes, by what they see. Precisely this secondary meaning is corroborated by the explicit statement of lines 219–21. It's not fair, Medea says (and we feel her resentment). People ought not to acquire a bad reputation, as for example of irresponsible living, from what is in actuality their unobtrusive or reserved mode of life; men should not judge with their eyes, they should waive judgment until they gain certain knowledge of a person's inner nature. But Medea's protest breaks off halfway, with the δὲ of line 222. A foreigner, after all, must yield to the city's ways, even if these are irrational or unjust.

Like the unhappy situation of women described shortly afterwards, the prejudice of which Medea complains was an everyday fact in fifth-century Athens, even though Pericles in his idealizing Funeral Oration denies its existence:

What we said about public freedom is equally true in reference to that mutual suspiciousness that might take our everyday private activities as its object. We do not feel resentment toward our neighbor if he does something for his pleasure, nor, while not penalizing him openly, do we burden him grievously with unpleasant looks (λυπηρὰς δὲ τῇ ὄψει ἀχθήδονας προστιθέμενοι).³⁶

Men not only judge with their eyes, they condemn with their facial expressions, as the common word, *ὑποψία* (Latin, *suspicio*, hence our "suspicion") suggests. The phenomenon is common today: it appears in the quick glance of condemnation provoked by long hair or beard or other attributes that seem, in the eye of the beholder, to threaten the stable foundations of society. So too in Pericles' own time, to judge from Aristophanes' comedies, the claim quoted above bore little relation to ordinary Athenian life. Thucydides himself may have noted the disparity between ideal and reality, for envy is sometimes, as in the Alcibiades disaster, a motivating force in his History; and even in the Funeral Oration he has Pericles twice acknowledge the existence of *φθόνος* (men feel envy toward what excels their abilities;

³⁶ Thuc. 2.37.2 (but see 2.35.2, 2.45.1). On Athenian *ὑποψία*, cf. B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven 1957) 74–75.

all living beings feel envy toward their rivals). How much men are influenced and changed in this way of thinking by sense-impressions, especially those entering by the eye, is an important theme in Gorgias' *Defence of Helen*, roughly contemporaneous with *Medea*.³⁷ It was a truism that love entered in by the eyes; Gorgias uses the idea playfully, but as part of a general psychological study of the limits to which human rationality is subject. Yet even without such philosophical elaboration, the impressionability of the Athenian public was a primary fact of late fifth-century history, to be recorded by Thucydides, thrown by Aristophanes in the face of his audience, and constantly implied, behind the scenes, by Euripides.

That men should not judge from appearances was a Greek commonplace—just as it was a commonplace that (as Medea says later of Jason!)³⁸ there ought to be some outward mark or sign by which true or false persons could be recognized just like true or false coin. If this later wish shows Medea's disillusionment at having lived with a dishonest man (and we should perhaps add, in a dishonest world), the earlier protest, on quite different grounds, shows basically the same wish to be treated fairly which is, or was, characteristic of her. For she herself is highly impressionable. Not only is she overwhelmed by Jason's mistreatment of her; she feels resentment³⁹ even at the idea that she may be misunderstood or misjudged by the general society—from which, at the same time, that resentment cuts her off. So too, in her plea to Creon (292–305) that she as an intellectual has been wrongly subjected to mistrust and bad feeling, we are shown the sensitivity at least of her earlier self (the tightly organized but passionate argument will also recall the statement on women, analyzed above):

Dear me. It isn't the first time, Creon: my reputation has often injured me and done me great harm. And really, no sensible-minded person should have his children educated to' be excessively clever: for apart from the inability to act by which they are constrained, they reap a harvest of envy and hostility from their fellow townsmen. It's like this. If you put examples of modern cleverness before stupid people, they will

³⁷ On the power of impressions entering through the eye to change the soul, see Gorgias, *Helen* 15–19, and C. P. Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos," *HSCP* 16 (1962) 101 and note 20, 106–7.

³⁸ *Medea* 516–19.

³⁹ See above, note 3.

consider you to be impractical by nature, not intelligent; while if you are considered superior, in public esteem, to those who think they possess some unusual knowledge, the sight of you will give them pain (*λυπρὸς φανή*). But I have had just that happen in my case. Because I am intelligent, the one group envies me and the other finds me irritating. And yet I have no excessive intelligence.

Here is the same trap as before of the *either/or*, the same contrast between the real situation and the false reputation that one so unfairly acquires. The obvious allusion to sophistic education (is it worth having one's children so educated?) brings us, by an intentional anachronism, into contemporary Athens, with its intellectual distinction but also its widespread anti-intellectualism. It has been thought, and with much reason, that Euripides is here alluding to his own special feeling of isolation⁴⁰—the natural reaction of a man who, introverted by nature and enjoying seclusion, whether in his library or in a cave by the sea, "away from men's eyes," acquired the general reputation of being peculiar, and perhaps stand-offish and arrogant. Indeed, to judge from the content of his plays and their generally unfavorable reception by the public of his time, it would hardly be surprising if Euripides had felt misunderstood, lumped together on the one hand with the mass of sophists by the indiscriminating and uncomprehending majority, yet not really at home, on the other hand, with the self-proclaimed "intellectuals" of the time—the elite for whom Verrall so improbably argued he wrote his plays. But if Euripides, as seems likely, was thinking here of himself, he was nonetheless exploiting his own feelings—the lonely reflectiveness of the introvert—as a true dramatist should, to give substance to what must finally be the independent psychological reality of his character. In a similar way, in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, Dr. Stockmann perhaps embodies certain personal traits of the playwright, his courage and honesty, but also his egotism and tactlessness, so that the same subjective feelings that make Stockmann a convincing character are also examined in the unsparing light of dramatic day. They become, that is, part of the tragic event.

⁴⁰ Cf. Page xii and 94, Regenbogen 31, Conacher 189. Although *argia*, in line 296, may represent an objective fact, experienced by the poet, it also points to the prejudice of 298–99, that thinkers are impractical people—a prejudice for which Plato, not to say Aristophanes, gives much evidence. For Euripides' continuing concern with this problem, see B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley 1964) 82–98.

Just so, Euripides' personal experience of prejudice gives him an insight into the psychology of resentment and alienation that convinces us by its general applicability, its faithfulness to objective truth. Through it, Medea's humanity becomes more real; for here again, while she evokes past suffering to gain present power, her argument should not be read simply in terms of its intention—which is, evidently, to overcome Creon by appealing to and manipulating his better nature. For Medea has felt herself a victim of prejudice; and this feeling, whether justified or not, has contributed to her sense of total and hopeless isolation—from which in turn arises the inhuman will to vengeance that this very speech to Creon admittedly serves. Once more we are given a double vision, of what Medea was and what she is coming to be.

Now I would argue that the same feelings of protest and gnawing resentment are shown in Medea's opening lines as in her later remarks on the situation of women and of intelligent people; only they are half-suppressed in her mind, much as they are half-concealed in her troubled syntax. Significantly, too, the larger, apologetic antithesis of lines 222–26—“a foreigner must yield to the city's ways, but [you must make allowances in my case since] my spirit is utterly destroyed . . .”—encloses yet another half-voiced protest. Some interpret it as merely complementary to the main statement: “Nor do I approve of the citizen who, having become stubborn, is bitter to fellow citizens out of ignorance.” But this is ambiguous. Is the point that one should give in, metic or citizen, rather than give pain by his ignorant intransigence? Or does Medea, while yielding, blame her oppressors, “the citizen, too, who deals harshly with fellow citizens?” This “citizen” resembles the *σκαιοί* later mentioned, who from ignorance are prejudiced against intellectuals; again, in the mention of citizens mistreated by citizens, there may be an allusion to Euripides' own troubles; but more immediately, we hear Medea's own half-formed protest, her resentment of the prejudice to which she as a foreigner must yield, based though it is in ignorance. She returns quickly to her apologetic tone, but the tension, enforced by the syntax, is enormous.⁴¹

⁴¹ Mazon 120 remarks that the idea introduced in lines 222–23 is “hors de propos,” part of a false symmetry and artificial balance, but fails to see the significance of this stylistic peculiarity.

All this time we are aware that the Corinthian women wish to help Medea. The difference from the earlier version of the legend, where they were hostile to the foreign sorceress, is pointed up early in the play when the Nurse tells how Medea, from her arrival, "continually pleased" the Corinthians.⁴² Throughout the parodos the women demonstrate their good will. Their soothing paroemiac lines suggest how much they would like to calm Medea's troubled spirit; and they directly express the wish that she might come face to face with them, ἐς ὄψιν, and be comforted.⁴³ The Nurse, though pessimistic, goes accordingly to summon her. Yet when Medea in fact emerges from the house, ἐς ὄψιν, she nonetheless remains mentally isolated, feeling that all eyes are hostile to her, that she is being judged. Although she may be projecting her own hostility upon others—and Ussher seems right in perceiving a considerable aggressiveness in her opening lines—her distrustfulness is not without warrant in Jason's mistreatment of her and in the Greek reality of the world of the "eyes" which her imagination conjures up. Indeed, that world corresponds remarkably to the one described by a modern Swiss psychiatrist:

No one is immune to the judgment which lurks everywhere in society. If you are taciturn, you are called aloof; if you talk a lot, you are said to be ostentatious. . . . Because recriminations and reproaches fill the world, everyone feels under constant criticism, or at least threatened with judgment, and he fears its repercussions. No one is indifferent to it; all are hurt by some word, by some look or some opinion contrary to their own.⁴⁴

Although in this quotation Paul Tournier is discussing the psychology of guilt, which he finds universal, while Medea's lines convey more hostility than guilt (which in this play Euripides chose not to stress), still his words very closely resemble hers, suggesting how seriously they should be taken as an indication of her mental state. For she (and this is the dramatic point) has too long felt, like the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnet, "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," has too long "bewailed her outcast state and troubled deaf Heaven

⁴² For Medea's popularity, see lines 11–12 and Grube 151; for the hostility of the chorus in the older version, of Parmeniskos, cf. Page xxi and von Fritz 329.

⁴³ *Medea* 173 ff.

⁴⁴ P. Tournier, *Guilt and Grace*, tr. A. W. Heathcote (New York 1962) 34, 77.

with her bootless cries," to be receptive to the friendly overtures of the Chorus. Their sympathy, like Creon's pity and Aegeus' offer of refuge, comes too late; indeed, as an instrument of her vengeance, it leads to a worse result than did the hostility of the Corinthian women in the earlier version of the legend. How far she is gone, past real help, the opening lines show.

The clash of possible meanings in the phrase *ῥομμάτων ἄπο* is nicely conveyed in Way's Loeb translation ("Some since they shrink from public gaze"), by Regenbogen in his 1950 article ("solche, die sich den Blicken entziehen"), and by Mazon (1952), the last only a slight modification of Page:

Il y a, je le sais, une foule de gens qui sont pleins de hauteur, aussi bien parmi ceux qui fuient tous les regards que parmi ceux qui se montrent en public.⁴⁵

It is harder to do justice in translation to the other much-debated phrases, especially *ἐν θυραίοις*.⁴⁶ Is there common ground between its meaning in this immediate context, "people at (or outside) the door"—i.e. who display themselves in public, as against those who withdraw themselves from public view—and the more natural meaning, "among strangers"? The second meaning, as before, reveals more of Medea's emotional state. She has felt isolated in a foreign land, judged as a foreigner as well as by men's eyes. This aspect of her estrangement is brought out in lines 222–24, discussed above ("a foreigner must yield . . .") and later at greater length in the concluding section of her plea. She is all alone, unprotected, in a strange land. But how is this idea connected with that of her being "outdoors"?

⁴⁵ Euripides, tr. A. S. Way, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass. 1958); Regenbogen 29; Mazon 120.

⁴⁶ Interpretations of *ἐν θυραίοις* have varied greatly, like those of *ῥομμάτων ἄπο* (above, note 35). Thus Harry 16–17: those one knows by hearsay (as contrasted with sight, which is also unreliable); Ussher: "others in the case of foreigners (like me)"; Schindel 497: Medea would seem proud in the judgment of the people "outside the door," i.e. not belonging to the family. The cause of prejudice would, in this last interpretation, remain open; but later (p. 498) Schindel identifies the people being judged with those who through their quiet life are thought indifferent by outsiders (as contrasted with Schindel's other group who have an inborn *semnotēs* in their countenance). While accepting the overt meaning, "in public," as have Page, Mazon, and Regenbogen, I have stressed the secondary importance of the idea, "among foreigners," which Ussher, Schindel, and others see as primary.

There is a connection: but it is complicated and must largely be understood from the central section of the plea, on women. For there, despite Medea's later disclaimer, that the statement of women's condition hardly applies to her, Euripides suggests that the general and the particular case are interrelated, and not only in sympathy-inducing rhetoric. This, we saw, was partly because the ordinary, Greek wife seemed a stranger in a new country, like Medea; partly too, because the ordinary wife seemed *imprisoned in a situation* like Medea, unable for the most part to find her way "out"—though not of course as desperately isolated as the woman from Colchis. Now the first idea, that every wife is a stranger, appears in the *Alcestis* of 438, expressed in precisely the adjective *θυραῖος*.⁴⁷ When Heracles asks Admetus who has died, he is deceived with a half-truth: it is a "stranger woman." So, in his gracious turn, Heracles later deceives Admetus, presenting him with the stranger woman who is, in fact, his wife returned from the dead; but the point underlying this playful and ironic deception is that, as Admetus has learned, the outsider or stranger-woman which every wife was by Greek convention can in fact be tied to her husband in a voluntary bond of love closer than the blood-tie itself.⁴⁸ Admetus' parents betrayed him, but Alcestis saved him; the egotistic selfishness of Pheres, who pays lip service to virtue but in his heart acknowledges only the instinct for survival, is not only a foil to Alcestis' sacrifice: it shows how under sufficient pressure the traditional family relationships can crumble, thus supporting the idea, paradoxical surely to Euripides' audience, that a more personal and lasting bond might be created between husband and wife than existed, in the traditional view, between father and son. Indeed, *Alcestis* is the forerunner of all sentimental comedies from Menander onwards in which men marry for love, or fall in love with their own wives, the more so because these turn out to be "strangers" to them—a point beautifully brought out in Eliot's Euripidean adaptation, *The Cock-*

⁴⁷ Cf. *Alcestis* 532–33 and 646 (ὄθνεῖος), 778 (θυραίου πῆματος), 805 (γυνὴ θυραῖος ἢ θανοῦσα), 810–11 (λίαν θυραῖος), 814, 828, 1014. Cf. also the play on the two meanings of φίλος, "dear" and "related," throughout the play.

⁴⁸ On the novel or even revolutionary idea of the marriage relation in *Alcestis*, see J. L. Myres, *JHS* 37 (1917) 212–14; J. T. Sheppard, *JHS* 39 (1919) 39–40; S. E. Bassett, *CJ* 12 (1916–17) 333–34; D. M. Jones, *CR* 62 (1948) 53; Blaiklock 1–5.

tail Party.⁴⁹ In *Medea*, however, the word *θυραῖος* points to no such romantic conclusion. It indicates in part a kind of pressure, latent in ordinary marriages, and belonging to the extraordinary concatenation of pressures by which, Medea says truly, her "soul has been destroyed." At the same time, the odd conflation in one word of the "foreigner" and "outdoors" motif points to the result of those pressures, which is symbolically conveyed in word and action as *Medea goes outside*.

For out of her entrapment—which, though differing in degree of hopelessness, yet resembles that of the ordinary wife who cannot "go out" and for whom "departure brings ill fame"—Medea finds escape. This action, as it develops, is marked by numerous verbal ironies. Her claim to Creon that no way out of disaster is accessible to her; her statement after Aegeus' departure that she has "no turning away from ills"; the messenger's prophecy that she will easily enough provide herself with "a turning away from punishment"⁵⁰—all these in different ways herald the ultimate inversion of the traditional *sôtéria* theme by which Medea will achieve "safety" but not "salvation" as she departs, at the same time, from the house in Corinth with its human connections and from her own humanity. The theme of "going out" is counterpointed throughout with that of "No Exit."⁵¹ Jason's uprooting of her from her home, his removal of himself from the house, and Creon's decision to exile her "beyond the bounds," all contribute to the terrible journey, inward and outward, by which she must break out of an impossible situation, and about which she becomes more fatalistic as the action proceeds. "We have set foot on the way," she says at line 766; at 1068, "For I shall go the most-enduring way"; and at 1245 (to herself): "Move on to life's painful goal." The connection, on which Euripides is intent, between the inner change and the outer action is half grasped by the Chorus, who compare Medea just after she kills the children to "Ino driven mad by the gods, when Zeus'

⁴⁹ Cf. K. J. Reckford, "Heracles and Mr. Eliot," *Comp. Lit.* 16 (1964) 1-18.

⁵⁰ *Medea* 279, 799 (see 603-4), 1223.

⁵¹ See above, note 50; also, for variations on the double theme of "going out" of the house or "departing" from one's own character, and related ideas, see *Medea* 56 (the nurse has "gone out," ἐκβέβηχ', to such an extent of pain); 229 (Jason has "turned out," ἐκβέβηχ', vilest of men); 439, 591-92; 766; also 181-82, 245, 272, 277, 487, 624, 795, 800-1, 1259-60, 1284-85, 1312, 1330.

wife sent her out from her home in crazed wandering.”⁵² It is never realized by Jason. To him, self-preoccupied to the end, Medea was always the witch, the wild beast, the barbarian woman. “Departure is easy,” he says—and we catch a significant echo from the statement on women.⁵³ For her, departure has at last become easy. A god, as the play’s closing lines attest, found a way out. But the way out is intolerable.

Although the tragedy of the “way out” which is really “no exit” seems clearly defined in retrospect, the stages of Medea’s departure from family ties and humanity are not so clearly marked. Euripides was too faithful an observer of character to do so: hence the disagreement between critics as to precisely when Medea turns cold and inhuman. There is no precise moment. And here is an important difference between *Medea* and Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, to which it has sometimes been compared. The two plays are indeed similar in their psychological interest—the authors’ insight into the feelings and reactions of a woman mistreated and misunderstood by a mean-spirited man, on whom she has altogether depended—and in the way both reveal that such tragedies are inevitable because rooted in the failure to love. The tragedy, that is, whose finality is indicated in Ibsen’s stage direction,

(The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.),

like that symbolized by the magic chariot that will bear Medea away, could not have been prevented by marriage-counseling or better divorce laws or any other device of an enlightened and civilized society. That would be Jason’s mistake, or Helmer’s. The contemporary, everyday references in both plays bring the tragedy home to us, evoking fear as well as pity; they do not point to a practical way out. Despite these important similarities, however, Euripides preserves the full mystery of human corruption in a way Ibsen does not. In particular, the half-fatalistic sense he shares with Homer or Sophocles of how accident, character, and choice contribute to a pattern of destiny that, in retrospect, must seem to have been irreversible, is reinforced by the Greek convention of masking the actor: for while Medea’s

⁵² *Medea* 1284–85.

⁵³ *Medea* 1375: ῥᾶδιοι δ’ ἀπαλλαγαί; cf. 236: οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγαί.

"corruption of soul" (significantly, her own phrase) is conveyed in subtleties of tone, and finally of course in action, her expression remains always the same. By contrast, Ibsen's stage directions give away the mystery of process:

Nora (looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face): . . .

Helmer: Nora—what is this?—this cold, set face?

Here we can measure love's cooling, as it were, by degrees. To the audience, Nora loves her husband less, then less again, then not at all—even though poor Helmer rather misses the point until the door bangs shut. In Euripides' play, on the contrary, Medea's killing of her children and escaping on the magic chariot are, taken together, the end point or "goal" of a long dissolving process whose stages were never defined. We witness instead, from Medea's first entrance onstage until her exit to kill the children, a sequence of ambiguous scenes portraying the complexity of her feelings and the ambivalent conflict within her of reason and passion divorced from their naturally harmonious state; scenes which depict at once an interior process of decay and an external progress from defeat to victory, from entrapment to escape.

In retrospect, then, we understand what could only be intimated earlier: that Medea's entrance scene looks to the past, the present, and the future. Her plea expresses what she has suffered but also how she is in process of being transformed in reaction to that suffering. Like the Chorus, therefore, we are misled practically into feeling compassion for a person who no longer quite exists. Furthermore (but this too can only be understood in retrospect), Medea's first line,

Κορινθίαι γυναῖκες, ἐξῆλθον δόμῳ,

marks her first entrance as also being a *first exit*, foreshadowing the ultimate one. The verb, followed by a purpose clause in primary sequence, must be allowed the force of a perfect, not an aorist: "I am come forth from the house."⁵⁴ Medea has completed her first action, has gone "out" (unlike the Greek wife), has set foot on the fated path. In the same apology, her inner state is also conveyed by the perfect tense (225-26): "An unexpected thing, when it fell upon me, has destroyed

⁵⁴ Cf. Page, 88.

my soul.” Likewise, the completion of a process by which someone turns out bad, is suggested in the concluding line of the first section: “My husband has turned out (ἐκβέβηχ’) the vilest of men.” Here, then, as at the play’s climax, the outer and inner changes are suggestively juxtaposed; and each, while not yet complete, is sufficiently so to indicate the beginning of the end.

Now it may be argued that the complexities of meaning suggested by the above interpretation of Medea’s opening lines are too much for a Greek audience to grasp, or a Greek actor to convey. I would quite agree. Euripides was writing, not for a Verrallian clique of subtlety-gathering sophists, but for an average Greek audience—who incidentally gave the tetralogy third prize. The many ironies and ambiguities of language contained in the play must therefore have been intended to enhance its clear meaning—clear enough, that is, from the action—and not to alter it. Yet it often happens in Euripides’ plays, as in those of Sophocles, or Shakespeare, that early words, phrases, and lines hint at a larger knowledge not yet available to us. At the same time, the ambiguity of language in Medea’s first lines onstage corresponds to an ambiguity of mood and language that the actor *should* convey and the audience grasp. There is tension, as before a cloud-burst. The change in Medea is incomplete, but it has begun. The passion she feels and, in this scene, tries to suppress is still human: it corresponds to her mistreatment by Jason and her general feeling of rejection and alienation (hence the secondary but stronger connotations of ὀμμάτων ἄπο and ἐν θυράοις); but the surprising control with which she manages her passion suggests how much she is already dominated by the will to vengeance. Yet the tension we sense in her almost tortured language reflects the ongoing struggle she still endures between human emotions, including wounded love and pride, resentment, and hostility, and the inhuman self-mastery later gained, which is actually a kind of suicide. Medea is already far gone. She cannot be reached by the women’s compassion. Yet her plea to them shows, like many moments in later scenes, her still living humanity. We feel at once the fluidity of the situation, so seemingly open to alteration through some saving word or action, and the pull of fate towards an ending that we might have anticipated all along. Both are essential to the tragedy, to our response of pity and fear.

Let me argue, then, for a last ambiguity in Medea's opening lines. Earlier, we followed Page's view that in the odd phrase, *σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας*, she is contrasting a true situation with a false prejudice which might nonetheless claim her as its victim. But perhaps there is more.⁵⁵ The word *σεμνός* connotes more than merely pride. It expresses basically the idea of being revered, suitable to the gods, an intolerable pretension in men. Thus Hippolytus seems *σεμνός*, to have, in modern terms, a "holier-than-thou" attitude.⁵⁶ The other word, *γεγῶτας*, has a range of possible meanings. Pointing out that it "inclines towards the present," J. E. Harry decided that the idea of "being thought to be something" (*censés, estimés, réputés, regardés*) best suited the context. We have seen that his interpretation is partially justified; for, while Page's translation stands, it is also true that Medea resents the idea that she may be judged by men's eyes and found guilty of pride without real proof. Yet other possible meanings suggested but then dropped by Harry—*rendus, produits, s'étant montrés*—may better convey the idea of a completed real process of transformation. At the play's end, Medea will become quite literally *σεμνός*, a quasi-divinity to be revered if only with horror. Therefore the phrase, *σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας*, just like the phrase *ἐξήλθον δόμων* and its accompanying action, anticipates the completion of that mysterious process by which the woman Medea is transformed, through the in-between stage of psychological and dramatic ambiguity, into the unequivocal witch of legend. In all, her remarkable first exit at once delays, gives body to, and anticipates her second exit from the house, when she will stand, proud and inhuman, on the chariot of the Sun, prior to her departure for sacred Athens.

⁵⁵ Again (cf. above, notes 35, 46) there are many interpretations. Much useful material in Harry, albeit his final version makes little sense. I have, as before, followed Page: many people are haughty . . . but others get a false reputation. There is, however, some merit in Ussher's suggestion (p. 250), that "many people are haughty" should refer to the women who, Medea believes, have come to taunt her; and in the other implied meaning, "are considered haughty," which is given in the scholia and accepted as primary, though interpreted differently, by Agar 15 and Schindel 495-96.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Hipp.* 93-94 and 99, and the apposite discussion in the commentary of W. S. Barrett (Oxford 1964); also 1364.