

CUPID'S ARROW

by

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ABSTRACT

CUPID'S ARROW

Cupid's Arrow is a new Greek Tragedy based on the stylistic guidelines laid out in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and narrative source material from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*. It is a play written in iambic pentameter that conforms to the traditions of ancient Greek tragedy and can be performed by three actors (with masks) and a chorus.

The play is accompanied by an introduction that examines some of the challenges of creating the adaptation, endnotes that explain mythological references and theatrical conventions, and a structural analysis that provides a scene breakdown and casting plot. In addition, an appendix looks at Aulus Gellius' story of Polus the actor and briefly examines the relationship between ancient and modern acting technique.

Keywords: Tragedy; Greek Drama; Jason; Medea; Hera; Argonautica; Apollonius

*(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than roses)
e. e. cummings*

for lma

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

When I began this project, my intention was to redeem Medea.

A few years ago I was telling the story of Euripides' *Medea* to a friend – revelling in the free-wheeling evil that could lead a mother to murder her own children out of revenge. My friend caught me up short:

- That's not how she starts, you know. I don't know if she ends up evil or not, but she doesn't start that way.

She went on to tell me of Apollonius' *Voyage of Argo*, of the young Medea who first meets Jason and the innocence of her love.

That was the beginning.

I bought a copy in a second hand bookstore (the sweet, somewhat romantic translation by E. V. Rieu) and met Medea again – or maybe for the first time.

It is a fascinating story that maps the trajectory of love, from fresh, unknowing innocence to hard-bitten experience (perhaps it is an allegory for all marriages - although I hope not: infatuation, the blossoming of each individual, then duty, and eventually sacrificing the fruits of the union to selfish jealousy or ambition... oh, I hope not).

My friend was right; Medea at the beginning is just a girl. She is absorbed in her study of the occult: a 'daughter of Hecate', an herbalist, and someone who seems destined to a virginal, spiritual path. And then along comes Hera, jealous queen of the gods, who needs Jason to retrieve the Golden Fleece in order to achieve her ultimate revenge on Jason's uncle Pelias.

Pelias had usurped Jason's rightful throne but more outrageously to Hera, he had committed murder inside one of Hera's temples. Jason as a boy is hidden away for his own safety and raised by Chiron (the centaur who mentors many Greek heroes). Grown to manhood, Jason is on his way to claim his birthright when he meets an old woman asking for help across a river. Being a good fellow, he helps her across but in the process loses one of his sandals. The old woman is Hera in disguise and she knows that Pelias has been warned that he will meet his doom at the hands of a man wearing one shoe. Pelias immediately recognizes the threat posed by Jason and asks him what he would do if confronted by the man destined to kill him. Jason's answer is swift – send him to retrieve the Golden Fleece – Pelias does just that; he sends Jason on this apparently hopeless mission. Hera knows that Jason will need help to succeed – and poor Medea is centered in the frame. Hera enlists Aphrodite to help with the scheme, who in turn tempts her son (the unpredictable imp with the arrows, Eros or more commonly, in the Roman, Cupid) to infect Medea with a love dart that leaves the chaste and naïve Medea smitten with Jason. And then things really begin to roll – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

I had decided to write a Greek Tragedy, following as closely as I could the style and spirit of the masters. What exactly did that mean? I undertook a study of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, their plays and tendencies; I read commentaries that illuminated the evolution of Drama from Epic and Lyric poetry, to choral poetry, and ultimately to the great age of Tragedy – the fifth century BCE – when most of the plays we still possess were written and performed; and finally, Aristotle, whose analysis of drama and its structure (*Poetics*) is still the gold standard in dramaturgy. After this exhaustive research, I was, of course, completely lost. Blocked. Couldn't write a word. I could not figure out how to write the play that I wanted – the play that showed Medea as an innocent; the calculation and manipulation of Hera; Medea's struggle and fall; the way Love can just take you and mess your world around.

I struggled with the staging challenges of the ancient Greek amphitheatre – very limited scene changes, and with Aristotle’s notion that an action (play) should be complete in itself and limited in duration so that its plot occurs over the course of no more than one day. I knew that I wanted to get to the tragic mistake (*hamartia*) – Medea convincing Jason to murder her brother Apsyrtus – but I also wanted to include Medea before the arrow hit, the girl under its influence, and the dance of guilt and love that brings her to the final tragic act. I wanted also the scene between Hera and Aphrodite, so the audience could understand how little the gods feel about meddling in mortal lives. How could I have all these diverse scenes in one place, at one time? As I said, I was stuck.

My liberation came from a completely unexpected source – the modern theatre. I went to see a production of Edward Albee’s *Who Is Sylvia?* or *The Goat*. I knew little about the play before I saw it. As I watched, I realized that Albee was attempting his own modern version of Greek tragedy, that the ‘goat’ in the title (ultimately deceased and defiled on the stage) was an overt nod to the origins of tragedy or *tragoidia*, which translates as ‘goat song’, and that the little clues he drops along the way could inform my process. His subject, in accordance with Aristotle, was that of a great man brought low – *peripeteia* or reversal of fortune – through a mistake (*hamartia*), and leading to catharsis in the audience through pity and fear. Albee must have wrestled with the fact that we are so inundated with news reports of matricide, fratricide, patricide and incest as to render these horrors almost commonplace.

- Q: What then is the unspeakable act that will arouse our pity and fear?
- A: Sex with a goat.
- Correction: Sex with a goat with which you are in love.

Now that is tragedy – especially if you are a world famous architect and city planner about to receive a humanitarian award, and you reveal your indiscretions in a television documentary. In the case of Albee’s play, the tragedy is compounded by the protagonist’s refusal to see anything wrong in his behaviour and his inability to stop his liaison with the goat – he is in love. His wife ultimately kills the goat and trashes their home – a temple and shrine to the god of materialism that she worships – and so finally, that which they each hold most dear has been destroyed and they are both left bereft. It is a fine piece of stagecraft and an inspiration to me. Albee though, was attacking a different problem than mine – he wanted to create a modern play that had the impact and bones of Greek Tragedy; I wanted something closer to the source. I had my material, and following a long-standing tradition in ancient Greek drama, I wanted to adapt an existing story to the stage, not create a new one. What I learned from *The Goat* was how to compress the action into one location and time frame: start the action where you want it to end and then fill in the back story as you go along. This is a technique known as *in medias res* (in the middle of things) – in truth I probably should have learned the lesson from Homer, who uses it extensively in *The Odyssey*, but one can never tell exactly where inspiration will come from and mine came from a goat.

Where then did I want my story to end, for that was where I would find my beginning? The play must start on the island where Apsyrtus meets his doom and as close to that event in chronological time as possible – it is a rule that in my days as a dramaturg I have advocated to other playwrights: start as close to the end as you can... why is it so hard to remember one’s own advice?

The next decision was one of what Aristotle would call diction and what we might call more familiarly idiom or vernacular. (The idea of learning ancient Greek passed fleetingly through my mind – *whoosh* – it was a much greater challenge than the project warranted and in fact would not ultimately have been

useful, as I would only find myself translating the thing back into English.) Reading a number of modern day versions and translations of ancient tragedies led me to conclude that I wanted the formality and heightened form of expression that comes from verse as opposed to prose. In some instances the task of translation has been to render a literal and sensible account of the play and as a result, sacrificing the verse. This seems a reasonable course of action when the major transformation is from one language to another while maintaining the essential form – play to play. My task, again, was slightly different. I wanted to draw on already translated and diverse source material (the story is told in Ovid as well as Apollonius), to create something completely new – render these prose accounts into drama. I decided that verse was essential to achieve the stature that this classic story deserves – but what should be the meter, what the verse? Greek meter is based not on stressed syllables as in English, but on long and short syllables – the length of time it takes to pronounce a given syllable (think quarter notes and half notes in music) (Storey and Allan 290). This long and short distinction provided no meaningful guidance but once again Aristotle (Poetics 1449a23-6) provided a path. He suggests that the iambic most closely resembles natural speech – which is certainly true in English and has been one of the long-standing truisms in the theatre regarding Shakespeare. Greek tragedy most commonly employs the iambic trimeter. In Greek, this metric convention ends up having twelve syllables but the English equivalent has only six. William Blake uses it to good effect by using alternating lines of strict trimeter:

*To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love
All pray in their distress
And to these virtues of distress
Return their thankfulness.*

*The Divine Image,
Songs of Innocence*

To my ear though, and I imagine to most native speakers of English, a six syllable line is too restrictive to create a natural flow of language; whereas the meter of Shakespeare and Marlowe – the iambic pentameter with ten syllables per line – falls most naturally. Strangely, as I wrote, although many lines from Shakespeare rattle around my head at any given time, it was Marlowe's *Faust* that provided me with an unerring template to which I returned time and again:

Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?

Drumming that rhythm with my fingers upon the desk, I would reset my brain and begin again to tell the story of Medea and Jason.

After some deliberation then, I decided that for the main action the characters would employ iambic pentameter and that I would adhere to this principle with rigor. This led me inevitably to the question of the chorus – who were they and how would they speak?

The chorus has been a conundrum for modern productions of classic Greek plays – should they sing, speak chorally, alternate speeches, dance? Are they a 'collective character', an ideal and naïve audience, a dispassionate and omniscient observer, a simple narrator? Some more modern writers (can we include Shakespeare in the set of 'modern writers'?) have turned the chorus into a single character – notably Brecht (*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*) and Anhouil (in his Vichy version of *Antigone*). The chorus in Greek tragedy evolved along with the form itself; its role diminished as more characters were available for the drama. There are few hard rules that seem to apply to the chorus, leaving the field of interpretation open for me to explore. In the choral odes, the chorus generally sings or speaks in a meter that is particular to itself; when in dialogue with another character, the chorus tends to match the meter of the other character. The chorus is often someone 'other' than the audience (Athenian citizens – male, prosperous and free): furies, servants, women or old men of Troy, Corinth, Thebes, etc. The chorus sometimes has a specialized knowledge

of the action of the play and its themes; sometimes it is uninformed. I wanted my chorus to have a distinctive voice and to be fascinated by the action but not able to affect it. I was presented with a gift of inspiration: a chorus of dead poets. I imagined them as the dead in Homer's underworld but instead of thirsting after blood (the liquid of life), they would be zombies thirsting for love, addicted to it, wanting stories of it, egging the characters on toward the sweet sting of love. As an added bonus I could quote from some of the greatest poetry ever written.

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:*

*But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

W.B. YEATS:
(He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven)

I had found my chorus.

When I started writing, the chorus became increasingly difficult to work with and I discovered, as I suspect Euripides may have, that the chorus was a holdover from an earlier genre and didn't always fit with a more modern, character driven, idea of drama. Not to say that at times Euripides didn't embrace the chorus, certainly in his last play, *The Bacchae*, the chorus is an integral and vital component, but in some of his other plays it is almost perfunctory. Aristotle criticizes Euripides (*Poetics* 1456a, 25) for not ensuring that the chorus is an integral character in the plot, as did Sophocles, but then goes on almost to say – 'if you're not going to use it well, don't use it at all':

With the later poets, however, the choral odes in a play of theirs have no more to do with that than of any other tragedy. Hence it is that they are now singing intercalary pieces ... And yet what real difference is there between singing such intercalary pieces, and attempting to fit in a speech, or even a whole act from, one play into another?

(Poetics 1456a, 27-30)

I struggled to keep the chorus from being mere “intercalary” intrusions, and finally I think they add rather than detract from *Cupid’s Arrow* but it appears there may have been an Aristotelian escape clause had I needed one.

Dramatic action in Greek tragedy differs from what we conceive it today. Based on cultural trends and theatrical necessity, the Greeks found action in speech. It was a listening and persuading culture with rhetoric having a high value in cultural and educational achievement. Because the formal institutions of law and politics relied heavily on these rhetorical skills, and the emerging Athenian experiment of democracy demanded that all of the *polis* take part in these institutions, it is understandable that the popular culture born of this society would reflect these values. (I leave each reader to reflect with horror or optimism on what the values of our society are that have spawned our pop culture... *Time you must unravel this not I – it is too big a knot for me to untie.*)

Aristotle tells us, “the objects the imitator represents are actions, with agents who are necessarily either good men or bad” (*Poetics* 1448a2) and then a little later, “...[poets or playwrights] present their personages as acting or doing. This in fact, according to some, is the reason for plays being termed dramas, because in a play the personages act the story” (*Poetics* 1448a28-29). Drama means action – as opposed to narration or tableau or some other representative form of imitation – and for the ancient Athenian, speech or rhetoric, was indeed action. This is one of the hurdles that modern audiences have when attending a classic tragedy – ‘too talky’ – also, our modern sensibilities tend to focus more on

the character and less on the argument. This though, is where Aristotle can assist my modern undertaking – the “actions” have “agents” – how do we come to know these agents? How do we understand character? We know the characters through their actions. What then puts a character into action? Conflict. When a character is in conflict, he must act or die. From our modern perspective, we may view this struggle as an internal one. In Greek terms however, this contest or *agon* is between two antagonists and is often expressed in a verbal duel. The *agon* is a testing ground where ideas or people are tested and proved. To refine Aristotle’s principle:

– We know who we are by what we do:

Action reveals character. Conflict precipitates action.

The use of masks in classic Greek theatre has some influence on our understanding of character. The passive stoicism of a mask eliminates our modern fascination with the minutiae of emotional histrionics that flicker across the face of any actor. The mask forces us to focus on larger blocks of emotion, and by negating the particular individuality of any given actor, opens up space in the imagination of the audience. The great distance between the audience and the stage in the ancient Greek theatre (at the Theatre of Dionysus the front row of the close to 13,000 audience members – across the orchestra – was 60 feet from the ‘stage’ front; the back row more than 300 feet away) made the use of iconic, representative masks important to assist the audience’s recognition of characters, and put a great burden on the voice, arm and body movement, and particularly the text to convey emotion. In a funny way, the anonymity of the mask allows us to identify more closely with the character and her dilemma – the drama plays out in our mind with our imagination filling in any details of behaviour; therefore these details of behaviour become our details and it is us – each individual in the audience – who inhabits each character.

Synopsis

I conceived *Cupid's Arrow* as part of a trilogy. A competing poet produced three tragedies (along with a satyr play) for the festival of Dionysus. While Aeschylus occasionally composed thematically linked trilogies (*The Oresteia* being our only surviving example), I never imagined *Cupid's Arrow* to be part of this type of trilogy, but more in the way that Sophocles dipped three times into the story of Oedipus and his family (in the plays that survive – he may have visited other aspects of this story, a fragment of *The Progeny* for example seems to deal with the siege of Thebes). Along with *The Medea*, there is evidence (we have the title and some commentary but no play) that Euripides' first produced play was called *Peliades* or *Daughters of Pelias*. This tragedy would have dealt with the story of Medea vanquishing Pelias in an attempt to return Jason to his rightful throne as it appears in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (*Met.*288-349). Medea visits the court of Iolcus while Jason and the Argonauts wait hidden in a nearby port. She befriends Pelias' daughters and demonstrates her powers of sorcery by taking an aged ram, draining its blood, and then rejuvenating it; the ram with youthful blood flowing through its veins, becomes a young, energetic lamb again. Pelias' daughters desire this renewal for their own father who is growing old and close to death. Medea persuades the daughters to cut Pelias' throat and drain his blood but the restoration doesn't occur and Pelias dies, completing Hera's revenge and leaving Jason and Medea more bad karma to wade through.

Cupid's Arrow would be the first in the narrative sequence of this series of plays. It focuses on the beginnings of Medea's doomed and tragic love. We begin on an island in the Cronian Sea. Medea has helped Jason overcome all the traps and trials set by her father, Aeetes, and has assisted Jason in capturing the Golden Fleece. Knowing that her father will be furious and want to punish Jason and drag her home, Medea convinces Jason to flee in the Argo – they sail through the night and imagine themselves safe when they put ashore on our island. On

this island stands a Temple to Artemis; they believe the goddess will afford them safe haven. The play begins with a prologue delivered by Hera that sets the scene and piques our interest as to her ultimate ends – giving us a glimpse of the selfish hand that is spinning this particular wheel. She exits into the Temple as Jason and one of the Argonauts arrive from the harbour. They recount to each other the adventure of the previous night – the capture of the Golden Fleece – Jason is amazed by how close to death he was and suspects that Medea saved him; his friend the Sailor confirms the story. The Custodian, who we later discover to be Hera in disguise (it is a question for production whether it is better for the audience to suspect this disguise or not), interrupts their recapitulation. She pretends to mistake them for other soldiers who have visited earlier, and she and the old Sailor seem to be on the brink of a personality clash when Jason's good looks pull her back to focus on the task at hand – she obliquely informs them of the danger that may await, and returns into the Temple.

Jason and the Sailor exit to the harbour to prepare for whatever danger may come their way.

As they exit we meet the Chorus of Dead Poets who seem to be summoned by the unfolding of a tragic love story. They muse on the nature of love, and then call on one of their number to recite – Percy Shelley obliges. They sense the arrival of Medea – we seem to feel that they are all in love with her and wish her well, although that is not to be. Medea enters, tormented by love and the twists and turns it is causing in her life – the chorus convince her to tell her story – partially to make her understand the gift she is living, and partially out of their own voyeuristic need. Medea recounts the beginning of her love, with the chorus interjecting and clarifying as they can. Exhausted by her story and her life, Medea goes to sleep. The chorus sings a lullaby to soothe her and helps her into the Temple.

Jason enters in despair. He prays for help and the chorus appears to him for the first time. They counsel him that fate is ultimately unknowable to mortals and that all we can do is to act from love as best we can.

Apsyrtus arrives and angrily threatens Jason. They argue, with Jason maintaining the cooler head and ultimately convincing Apsyrtus to give him until nightfall to decide on his course of action: either to surrender Medea and go on his way with the Fleece or to face Apsyrtus and his flotilla in an all out fight. Jason and Apsyrtus both exit leaving the chorus to try to pull the theme of the play back to love and away from war.

During the chorus' song, Medea and the Custodian emerge from the Temple and the chorus persuades Medea to pick up the tale of love. During the story the Custodian reveals she may know more than is strictly possible – the chorus grows suspicious, but is addicted to the tale of love and allows their question to drop. Medea is transported by feelings of love and confirms her trust in Jason's good intentions – not suspecting that there is any jeopardy. The chorus tries to warn her, but the Custodian quiets them and keeps Medea focused on her love story and dreaming of her marriage – she ushers Medea back into the Temple, then turns to face the chorus. The chorus, with growing suspicion, shifts to their original rhythm. When the Custodian shifts to match them they are sure that there is more to her than meets the eye – she allows that there is, and then fills in a bit of the story of how this all came to pass.

When the Custodian leaves, the chorus muses on the nature of life and passion; a messenger from Apsyrtus interrupts them. Jason, Medea, and the Custodian all emerge to hear the messenger. The messenger delivers an ultimatum from Apsyrtus: either Jason will fight the Colchians or he will take the Fleece back to Greece and leave Medea there.

Jason dismisses the messenger and it looks as though he will avoid the battle and agree to the proposed terms. Medea tells the Custodian that she needs

time with Jason alone and the Custodian ultimately and reluctantly agrees to leave.

For the first time we see Medea's full strength. When she thinks that Jason is about to betray her, she gives him a blast of her righteous anger. Jason appeases her, and together they decide on a plot to escape. In this scene we see Medea's *hamartia* or mistake: she does not recognize the bond of blood and sets out to kill her brother.

The chorus warns of trouble ahead and sets the scene: Jason in the Temple, ready; Apsyrtus on his way to the rendezvous; the moon in the star-filled night sky; Medea singing to the moon.

Apsyrtus comes on stage. Medea tells him to go into the Temple, strip off his armour and make offerings to the gods. He will be defenseless when Jason attacks. Jason appears at the door, asks Medea if there is any other way – she insists that they press forward with the plan.

The Custodian emerges and describes the actions within, as Jason, covered in blood and standing astride the fallen Apsyrtus, is revealed. They are brought onstage through the central doors of the *skene* on the *ekkyklema*.

Medea experiences the *anagnorisis*, or recognition, that in killing her brother they have done some irreparable harm – and her *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, is from the joyous state that she had anticipated to the rueful, foreboding future that they now foresee.

Now, onward – time to change narrative into action.

CUPID'S ARROW

(I know, I know – the Roman anachronism... oh well)

Characters

HERA

JASON

A SAILOR

CUSTODIAN (AN OLD WOMAN)

MEDEA

APSYRTUS

CHORUS OF DEAD POETS

Note to the Reader

In general the verse is regular iambic pentameter –

(“Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?”)

The chorus on its own has a more lyrical (123, 123, 1234) rhythm, but when interacting with a character, tends to adopt the iambic. When one of the chorus members ‘quotes’ from their work, the rhythm is obviously that of the original author.

The Play

The action of the play takes place in front of the Temple of Artemis on one of the Brygean Islands in the Cronian Sea

HERA: *(appears above the temple)*
My name is Hera, and I am the Queen
Of all the great Olympian Deities;
Of birth and marriage I'm the patroness,
Though certain things will stir my jealousy...
That's part of love – I think we'd all agree.
Is love's strong pow'r a force for good or ill?
That all depends, in whose employ its used,
One thing we know, it is the strongest pow'r
10 We gods can use to shape a mortal life.
One such life now prays within this temple –
This monument to goddess Artemis.
It is the practice of young virgin girls
In preparation, when they're soon to wed,
To sacrifice all signs of girlish joy
And leave behind the trappings of their youth.
The girl within has no more thoughts of dolls
Or songs and games she played with other girls.
Her eyes shine now with maiden's eager love
20 And new desire flows strongly in her blood.
Medea is her name and she's in love,
This love of hers will work to bend a man
Who serves my turn, although he knows it not.
... An altar in my temple was befouled,
By bloody murder – done by Pelias –

In time he'll feel my vengeance and my wrath –
And these young lov'rs will be my instruments
Now Cupid's love-smear'd dart has pierc'd her flesh
And bound her by its blood-charm to this man,
30 This Jason, who e'en now ascends the hill.
Exit Hera into the temple.

Jason and one of his sailors enter from the harbour below.

JASON:
These Islands will provide us haven now
To let our oarsmen rest their weary arms.
Although our course did not run straight and true
The good ship Argo kept us safe from harm –
Knifed through torrential wind and towering waves
As if a fire-warm'd blade was drawn through butter.
40 But tell me friend, with all that's come to pass –
Is this real life, or must it be a dream?
Come sit and help me recollect the tale,
For since we moored beside the Colchian shore,
The whirlwind of my fate has blown my life
From urgent to e'en more essential deeds.

SAILOR:
Good Jason, these old legs are more at home
On rolling decks than on this solid shore,
And foreign lands that breed the strangest sights
50 Have long ago become my 'custom'd bed,
But troth – this voyage doth defy my ken
And strains my brain to bring it all in close.
The axle of this wheel whose wild spokes

Splay outward in such mystifying ways –
That girl – Medea – she’s the core.
Her knowledge deep, her spells, her charms, her songs –
They mystify the learning of my years.
And she it is who seems to pull the rope
That draws us through the perils that befall.

60 JASON:

It’s true without her wisdom I at least
Would be sailing with Charon at the helm.

SAILOR:

Oh, Jason – with the serpent – in the wood?

JASON:

My friend it’s true, I think I caught a glimpse
Of that foul waterway and that grim boat.

SAILOR:

70 We worried that the end had come for you.
The sounds we heard filled us with shock and awe.
Relief and joy flood-tided us when you
Emerged intact and with the Golden Fleece.

JASON:

I feel your curiosity good friend,
And I will share as much as I can say.
A path that led us through the sacred wood
We walked along, toward a massive oak.
There hung the Fleece – bright – dazzling our eyes
As if the fiery beams that emanate
80 From off the rising sun had lodged within
Its curly locks and shone there day and night.

The sound you heard, I heard as well, and froze.
For round the base of that huge oak was coiled
A scaly monster whose unsleeping eyes
Had spied us from our very first approach.
It stretched its neck and then began to hiss.

SAILOR:

That hissing echoed deep within the wood
And seemed to grow in volume as it flew.
90 Sure, babes across the far Caucasian sea
Were wakened from their sweet sleep by that sound
And anxious mothers hugged them to their breasts.

JASON:

Black smoke that swirls and eddies from a log
And smoulders close to flame but does not burn –
Uncoils, as did the monster from the tree.
And even as it hissed and stretched its neck,
The horny scales were scraping on the ground,
Its fangs exposed – the yawning mouth agape,
100 Into this doom filled pathway stepped the girl.
Still wearing her white night-dress and bare feet,
In which she from her father's house had slipped,
She faced the monster with no trace of fear.
I drew my sword and leapt between the two –
And then – I know the rest, but know it not,
The story now is clouded like a dream.

SAILOR:

I'll tell you Jason, what my eyes did see.
We heard the hiss and ran to find its source,

110

And when we reached the clearing in the wood,
We saw the girl Medea all alone.

The moonlight lit her eyes and shining hair
And though the coiled monster roared at her,
Her face betrayed no fear; instead she smiled
And tilted back her head and op'ed her lips.
A song that is the sweetest sound I've heard
Flowed out like liquid honey from a jar.

120

This song - it seemed connected to the earth,
To heaven, to the sea – the gods themselves –
It came not so much from her as through her
As though she were a channel for this song.

JASON:

I know that song. I heard it through the fog.
It called me from the river 'neath the earth.
I caught a glimpse of shades across the shore,
And heard an eerie calling of my name,
About to shout an answer to that call –
Medea's song - it pulled me from the brink –

SAILOR:

130

The song poured out of her sweet ruby lips,
Myself I stood there frozen where I stood,
And you, good Jason – nowhere to be seen.
The serpent, though it slowed, kept coming on,
Toward the girl – O, Jason you were lost.
Medea did not move or bat an eye.
That song of hers was sweeter than the dawn
That shows its first gold light upon the sea

To sailors blasted by dark hurricanes.
Her song was full of hope, and life, and strength.
140 The scaly beast, its eyes began to droop,
It's hissing could not match Medea's song.
And then, good Jason – this defies my brain –
The monster ope'd its mouth and there you were,
Delivered from its gorge by powers dark.
And standing, veiled in mist, I thought I saw
Athene, our great goddess with her owl.

JASON:

Your story makes me grateful for my life
And fills me with an awe that makes me quake.
150 This Medea who can summon up the gods
And tame such mythic beasts with just a song
Has somehow chosen me to be her mate –
I wonder, who's the author of my fate?
You say you saw Athene standing by...
Medea though, serves Hecate I believe,
Perhaps the owl was with that nether Queen.
Whatever, I am bound by life and love,
To Medea, with all her spells and charms.
But speak no more – who's this that does approach?

160 SAILOR:

An ancient one who keeps for Artemis
Her Temple's gate both clean and free from harm.

CUSTODIAN: (Coming from the Temple)

I've told you once – I've told you this before.
We'll have no truck with warfare on this green.

Pack up your swords and climb back in your boats
Or my Immortal Lady will unleash
Her hounds – they'll chase you yelping from this shore.

170 JASON:
You speak as though you've spoke to us before.

CUSTODIAN:
Perhaps not you, but others of your ilk.

JASON:
My "ilk" you say? I think you are mistook.

CUSTODIAN:
"Mistook"? Not I. I might have been mistaken.
Your outfit's odd, and so's the way you speak.
In any case, you're dressed with sword and spear,
So get you gone. You are not welcome here.

180 SAILOR:
Old woman, wait. Belay your flapping tongue.

CUSTODIAN:
Belay my tongue? Oh, you're a saucy sir,
And fear you not, you never more shall hear
From my old lips a word toward your ear.
But you good sir, you stand so straight and tall
And now that you've drawn closer I can see
Your handsome face – it suits your body well.
So listen close and if you overhear
190 An ancient woman prattling as she works –
Then take whatever council you see fit.
(as if to herself)
I wonder where those hundred warlike ships

That passed this way this morning have found port?

I wonder too if they will catch that man

A foreigner and outlaw did they say?

His fate, like mine is in the hands of gods,

And like my life, I hope that his is long.

(She turns back to the Temple.)

200

My day begins so I will back inside,

There's one who sits in contemplation there.

I'll light the lamps and incense for her now

To help her meditations find the gods.

(Exits into the temple)

SAILOR:

What does this old one's prating make you think?

JASON:

It sounds as if some others came before.

SAILOR:

210

That's my thought too.

JASON:

Could it be Apsyrtus?

Outstripped us by some trick of stars or wind?

SAILOR:

Ensnared us here within a noose of ships?

JASON:

Come we must assess our present danger,

Prepare to flee before Apollo dips.

SAILOR:
220 Fight not Flee! The brother or some stranger!

(They exit to the harbour)

(We become aware of a chorus of dead poets who have been lounging around the stage. We may recognize some – Shakespeare, Blake, Mr. and Mrs. Browning, the Rosetti's?)

CHORUS: *(Severally)*
Does anyone have a rhyme? Who can recite?
Love is here in the air for good or ill.
Where is she, who is she, where is this girl?
Jason is handsome and strong - by the book.
230 Love can be strong as steel for good or ill.
Often one's love has more strength than the other.
Love is pain. Whose is worse? Lover or loved?

(They recite from P. B. Shelley's "To –")

*"When passion's trance is overpast,
If tenderness and truth could last,
Or live, whilst all wild feelings keep
Some mortal slumber, dark and deep,
I should not weep, I should not weep!*

240 *It were enough to feel to see,
Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly,
And dream the rest – and burn and be
Couldst thou but be as thou hast been."*

How will this love of theirs weather the trials,
Through the years, this life runs a rocky course.
But for now love is young brimming with joy.
Look it's her, see how she comes floating on air.

Laughing eyes, rosebud mouth, quick-witted mind,
This girl is surely a match for that man.

(Medea enters from the Temple.)

250 MEDEA:
Oh gods above what torment I am in
Pulled by my so enflamed and racing heart
To leave behind my home and native land,
And with this crew of boatmen to set sail
For reasons that my mind can't understand.
I ask myself - why am I in this plight?
Is there some wisdom that I can avail?
Is what I'm feeling, what I'm doing right?

CHORUS:
260 Oh daughter, we have all stood where you stand.

MEDEA:
What people are you? From whence do you come?

CHORUS:
Medea, we are chroniclers of love.
We write about that sweetest stinging pain.

MEDEA:
You know of love?

CHORUS:
We do. We know it well.

270 MEDEA:
Then speak to me and tell me all you know.

CHORUS:

No, my child, it's you must speak to us. Begin
And tell us from the start – we love to hear
The birth of love – it makes our spirits soar.
And as you tell your tale of love you'll find
This mystery is not a place to flee,
Rather a time full-fit for revelry.
What happiness or joy we find in life
280 We must bathe in – immerse us – soul and heart
Blow loud the song on trumpet, drum and fife
For joy will leave and happiness depart;
The joy of love is such a precious gift –
Enjoy the now, and let the future drift.

MEDEA:

When did it start, this most exquisite pain?
It was the moment that my eyes first lit
Upon this man who has invaded me.
Is there some bone or sinew deep within,
290 That carries fire or lightning in my breast?
A bolt of heat went flashing through my core –
I only know that then my heart stood still.
A crack in time – the cosmos seemed to stop –
When next it beat, full-brimmed with agony,
My throbbing heart o'erflowed with sweet, sweet, pain.
And now each pulse, pounds driven by destiny –
My compass-heart seeks Jason, my true north.

CHORUS:

It was the boy. He loosed a shaft at you.
300 This 'first sight love' is cupid's calling card.

His quiver's full of many varied bolts
Not all beget this sudden, shatt'ring, love.
The pain you felt, it isn't always first,
He chose that shaft specifically for you.
It's in you deep, and nothing you can do
Will change that now until it's run its course.
And though there's pain there's also zest for life,
Your face lights up, your beauty's manifest.
The world feels sharp and everything's aligned
310 Along the axis runs twixt you and him.
Now tell us more, we're hungry for your tale
What happened next – hooked up that very night?

MEDEA:

Oh, no - that night ... that night, I couldn't sleep...
There was a banquet, Jason soon stood forth –
He asked the king, my father, for the fleece.
My dad is such a jerk – just “No” he said,
And then he made it worse. He said he would ...
(If Jason could complete the tasks he set)
320 Send Jason, and the fleece, and all his men,
With blessings and good wishes, back to Greece.
These tasks were so devised that certain death
Would reward any brave, though vain attempt.
But Jason truly wears a hero's cloak,
With boldness he agreed to all proposed,
And strode, this man of men, out of our hall.
My heart smouldered, and as he passed from sight,
My soul, it seemed, crept from within my breast,
And fluttered in his footsteps like a dream.

330

That night inside my room I cried alone
And mourned for him as one already dead.
“What meaning has this grief!” I cried aloud.
“This man is going to die – just let him go!
Yet truly, I do wish he could be spared.
O Hecate! Sovereign lady, hear my prayer:
Please let him live to reach his distant home.
But if he must be conquered by the bulls,
Then let him know – Medea – I at least,
Rejoice not in this cruel and senseless fate.”

340

This praying seemed to ease my fevered heart
And brought relief – the cooling breeze of sleep.

CHORUS:

In sleep reside those harbingers of fate
Those spurs to conscience, windows on our lives,
I mean our dreams – but tell me do you think
That dreams cause sleep by needing to be heard?
Or does a dream, like opportuning thief,
Slip through the door that’s left unlatched at night?

MEDEA:

350

It matters not. I know but that I slept.
And in that sleep I was assailed by dreams.
Deceitful dreams? Or dreams revealing truth?
These dreams that came they spurred me from my bed
I left my room –and then shame held me back.
Shameless desire urged me betray my kin,
Abet Jason, and so defy the king.
Three times I tried, and yet three times I stopped.

I wailed aloud and writhed upon my bed,
Entrapped between my heart's pull and my head.
360 And then it happ'ed my sister came to me.
She calmed my fears and told me she'd had word
From Jason's crew – to ask me for my help.
They knew my skills, with potions, charms and salves,
Would I assist their hero with his quest?
It felt as though Hecate answered my prayers
This course must be my destiny, my fate.
An arrow, when the bowstring is drawn back,
Sits quivering and ready to fly forth
But when it's loosed the eye cannot keep track
370 So swiftly does its flight tear through the air.
To me, does time, seem kin to archery.
For years I was that shaft with string pulled taught,
Full ready although stuck in ambered time,
Then Jason came, the bowstring was released,
And now my small self hurtles through this world.
At this pace life exacts its weary toll
And I must rest now – close my eyes and sleep.
(Medea lies down and sleeps)

CHORUS:
380 This girl lies curled in sleep here at our feet.
Sleepless though, days ago, love rendered her.
Sleep brings peace to all who toil and despair:
Travellers and watchmen, a mother who mourns
Her child who's too soon gone, even to her,
will sweet sleep soothe and mend her tattered soul.

Love kept Medea up – kept her awake.
Torments that racked her soul here we set out:
Father-king, to betray, this she could not;
Jason-love, to his death, stand by and watch –
390 This would be worse than death to her bright soul.
Would she then, by some means take her own life?
Pondering this cold fate, grace came to her –
Showed her the joys of life – all that it holds
Life has a power that holds onto life:
Sunshine off water – light’s shimmering dance,
Breath of wind lifts the hair carries the sound,
Distant loon on the lake haunting and proud,
Berry’s taste in the mouth – all burst with life,
Skin touching, eyes meeting, soul of another;
400 All these gifts from the gods would not let her die.
So she determined to keep Jason safe,
Save him from iron bulls and the stone-men,
There’s a tale, you should hear – some other time.
But for now, rest my sweet, Medea’s asleep.
Who has a lullaby? Soften her dreams.

410 *Golden slumbers kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise;
Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby,
Rock them, rock them lullaby.
Care is heavy, therefore sleep (you),
You are care, and care must keep (you);
Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby,
Rock them, rock them lullaby.*

*(Thomas Dekker
1572 - 1632)*

The Chorus helps the sleeping Medea into the temple.

JASON (*Enters*):

420 Our moorage is surrounded by their ships
 E'en now these sons of Colchis disembark.
 They come for retribution and the Fleece
 As numerous as waves on winter seas
 Whipped by stormy winds into a frenzy,
 Or leaves that fall in autumn from the trees.
 To fight against so many would be death.
 Oh gods above what fate will we incur?
 Aeetes, King of Colchis, was enraged,
 And sent his son Apsyrtus in command
430 To keep their fevered vengeance running high.
 Will blood-lust overwhelm us here today,
 Is this far shore to be our destined end?

CHORUS:

 The fabric that is woven for our lives
 Is made of many different coloured threads.
 A broad cloth keeps us warm and beautifies;
 It clothes us, shields our bodies from the skies.
 A single thread, unraveled from this shawl,
 Is poor comfort against the cold and rain.
440 So, Jason, when you ask about your fate,
 Be careful, lest you pluck a single thread
 From a richly woven garment cut to fit.
 We struggle here on earth amongst ourselves
 The outcomes, though, seem stenciled by the stars.
 A force accessed by mortals strong enough

To shake the fated world from off its course?
It could be love, buoyed up by hope and faith.
But this same love it might be stirred and sparked
To serve the very fate designed for us –
450 We know not where love takes us on its ride
We only know it cannot be denied.

JASON:
You speak of love – but war consumes me now.
Apsyrtus comes, he climbs this very mount.

CHORUS:
Remember love, when you parlay of war
It all connects – but we can say no more.
Apsyrtus is Aeetes only son
We'll stay to hear what goes between you two.

460 *(Enter Apsyrtus from the harbour.)*

JASON:
Apsyrtus, here we stand on hallowed ground,
And though your eyes bespeak fire-blooded rage
I know that you'll respect this holy place.

APSYRTUS:
Jason! – Your name's enough to boil my bile,
To pour it from my gorge like bubbling pitch
That spews out of the bowels of the earth.

470 JASON:
If we must fight, then let us step away
And not defile this temple with our strife.

APSYRTUS:

Do you set terms? You sister-stealing thief!
Defiler of hospitable attempts!
Your boat and men are all within my power.
It is not you who will dictate the terms
By which we will bring balance back on board
The ship of fate that you did set awash.
But though my anger burns, I still can see
480 The truth of what you say about this ground -
Daughter of Zeus, this solemn oath I swear,
No violence will this my hand commit
Within the sacred precincts of your land.
But Jason – do not think you’re off the hook
I still will hold your actions to account.
And though you are a hero of renown,
Whose fame has reached to Colchis and beyond,
I ache to match my blade and arm ‘gainst yours,
So designate right now the time and place
490 Where your great wrongs and insults can be tried:
We’ll test with might whose case is in the right
And if it’s mine I will these wrongs erase.

JASON:

Apsyrtus. I respect your bravery,
I recognize your anger and its cause,
I see the steel that glints within your eye,
And do not doubt that you’re a worthy foe.
I’ll fight with you, if that must be our course
But first, let’s take advantage of this truce,
500 This gift to us, bestowed by Artemis.

Let's talk about the rightness of your claim
And recognize the stars that set my fate.
From one who's fought, in many varied wars,
Know combat's joy is mixed with combat's pain,
Brothers in arms are also dogs of war.
I know you're young and fire's in your breast –
To fight means pain, of this assured do rest.

APSYRTUS:

510 You speak of pain as if you are afraid.
Well I fear not. Let's put it to the test.
Come let's begin. Decide this blade on blade.

JASON:

First tell me this – we'll fight – but what's the cause?
You see, to me, my actions have been true.
I want to know the harms that fell on you.

APSYRTUS:

520 What wrongs have we endured? Ye gods above!
It makes me spit! You came into our house –
Enjoyed our food and wine – and then you stole –
Yes stole – the fleece from off the golden Ram
That Phrixus, to great Zeus had sacrificed,
In gratitude for saving him from death;
That fleece was then given to my father
Who nailed it to a tree - that you know well.

JASON:

Let's talk about that Fleece —

APSYRTUS:

— Fleece nothing! No!

My sister. Sweet Medea where is she?

530 JASON:

She sleeps within this Temple here at hand.

No harm will come to her I guarantee.

So calm your hot blood now, and let's parlay

We'll find a resolution to your pain.

APSYRTUS:

Your cold, calm words belie your hero's rep.

My passion I will set-aside for now,

And listen while you spin your politics.

But know this, gentle Jason, will alone

540

Does take my boiling blood from off the flame

And if this tale of yours does not suffice,

It simmers ready quick to scald your soul.

JASON:

Apsyrtus, though you taunt me, I will speak

With calm and level words so you can hear

The truth as it presents itself to me.

My quest was to retrieve the Golden Fleece

To bring it safely back to Hellas' shores,

Not wishing to presume antipathy,

550

Protected by the hospitable laws,

I asked the king, your father, for the fleece.

We all did see the outrage on his face,

But kingly, he did keep his rage at bay.

Instead of war, he set me certain tasks –

These labours whose intention was my death –

But vowed your king and father, all did hear:
If I could yoke Hephaestus' iron bulls
Then plough the field and sew the serpent's teeth
In one day and be standing still at dusk,
560 Then the fleece was mine to take – if I could.
You saw me take on all that was required,
Achieve it to the letter of the law.
The fleece, you see, is therefore mine to keep.

APSYRTUS:

Aeetes, my good father, had no way
To know you would deceive his little girl
To bend her heart against her home and kin
And use her hard-won wisdom for your turn.
That Medea, her father could betray,
570 Was not within the orbit of her world
Before, Jason, her eyes did light on you.
So what I'm left to wonder then is this:
Did you bewitch her, my sweet sister dear?
And will you set her free from in your trap?
My father is a man of honour true,
And though I think deception won the fleece
I concede that you won it by the book.
So take the fleece – to Hellas you may go.
I will take my sister back to Colchis
580 And there will set my family back to rights.

JASON:

Apsyrtus, let me take what you propose,
And think what ripples emanate from it.

APSYRTUS:

What's there to think? –

You said it was the fleece that was your quest.

JASON:

Yet give me time. I'll send for you anon.

APSYRTUS:

590

My father's righteous wrath has been aroused.

Medea could perhaps cool down that ire

With supplications and sweet words to him –

Apologize and tearfully return.

Or else your spitted head upon my sword

Could equally calm down the old man's rage.

Don't take too long – my anger is not dead –

And patience sits not easy on my sword,

Attempt escape, that would suit it better,

And I could wreak my vengeance on your head.

600

I'll leave you now to mull upon your choice

And by tonight then, must I hear your voice

Or in your blood will my good blade rejoice.

(they exit in different directions)

CHORUS:

How did we get to here, what came before?

Where's the love in this plot – it's all talk of war.

Take us back to that night – Eros's dart

Pierced the breast of the girl – Jason she loved.

All that night wrestled with life or with death;

610

First bird sings, sky turns light, she chooses life:

Blonde and sweet, she awaits, fateful sunrise,

Tearstains washed from her cheeks, O, Medea.
Skin scented, hair shining, glowing with love,
Carriage reins in her hand, rides through the town.
Handmaids with skirts tucked up run at her side,
Out of town, cross the plain, stop at the shrine,
“Handmaids now dance with me and sing our songs
While we dance, stranger’s eyes may seek us out –
You must pledge secrecy – no one must know.”

620 (*Medea and the Custodian emerge from the Temple*)

Here she comes, call her out – Come out, sweet child.
Tell us how Jason came, tell us what passes,
When you dance on that hill with all your lasses.

MEDEA

My friends, I’m sure that you, of all, must know
The story that you ask me to relate –
Of how each melody – however gay
Did quickly cease to please. To keep my mind
Fixed on the song was more than I could do.
630 How many times my eyes would search the paths
When wind blown leaves did rustle in my ears.
Each tiny sound for footfall I mistook
And thought it must be Jason drawing near.
And when at last he rose above the crest
Brilliant and beautiful he was to me.
My heart stood still. My feet were rooted too,
My cheeks flushed warm and mist did cloud my eyes.
My servants disappeared and there we stood.

CUSTODIAN:

640

Without a word or sound – stood face to face –
Like trees adjacent on the mountainside
Stand silent when the air around is still
But chatter without end when stirred by wind.
So these two quivered silent for a beat
And then the breath of love opened their mouths
And tales, questions and laughter did pour forth.

CHORUS:

How come you by this knowledge – were you there?

CUSTODIAN:

650

I there? No way. I'm held by loyalty
To serve my lady goddess at this post.
But love's an oracle that fires my mind
And shows me both the past and things to come –
But ask me not the outcome till it's time
For many joys and lessons are in store
For those who tread courageously this path.

CHORUS:

660

These words of yours are full of mystery
And hint at some dark 'lesson' yet to come –
Still let us listen as the tale unfolds –
This day will be whatever it will be.

MEDEA:

Why do you speak of darkness – it's all good.
When Jason spoke he filled the sky with words –
He spoke of Ariadne's crown and how
That ring of stars pays homage to her love.

He told me how the gods had favoured him,
And how my gift to him would make them smile.
He told me how my praises he would sing
670 And shout out in his far and distant land
Til all would know 'his sweet Medea's name'
And join him in this song of praise for me.

(Pause)

His words just melted me.
I could not speak.
But with the charm I did not hesitate
And from my scented girdle drew it out.
He took it in his strong but shaking hands.
And then I revelled in his need of me –
680 Like roses need the glorious morning sun –
And when I saw the love-light in his eyes
I would have poured out all my soul to him,
But sometimes, meager words are not enough -
So instead I told him how to use the charm
To save him from my father's wicked trap.

CUSTODIAN:

My child, your eyes still glow at thought of him,
You speak and rosy sunrise paints your cheeks –
Is this not love, that so effects the heart
690 E'en though the beloved object is not near?
And know you this – his heart was stolen too.
Your kindness and your courage won the day.
And though his manly countenance may seem
Preoccupied with politics and state,

Still know my girl, it's you that hold the key
Unlocks the secret cabin of his heart.

And women – through the ages – we have known
That when we hold this pow'r we hold the throne
And if you turn that key and ope that door
700 Whatever you desire – it will be yours.

So tell us now, what is it that you need?
Then in this man of yours we'll plant the seed.

MEDEA:

I need? Why, just the marriage of our souls.

To be forever with him, by his side,

And of course, O of course, to be his bride.

These things to me he has already pledged

He takes me now to be his wife at home

And though I felt some guilt for leaving mine

710 Your counsel, good old woman, rests my mind.

So now we sail toward my Jason's home

And may the seas be smooth and winds blow fair.

CHORUS:

Although the winds be fair and smooth the seas

We see some bumpy times for you ahead.

MEDEA:

What do you mean – what knowledge do you have?

CUSTODIAN:

You close your mouths, you ratty, mongrel crew!

720 O Medea, their words you need not hear –

These poets? Whose stock in trade's invention?

We'll put no faith in them. But tell us now –

When words of marriage first crossed Jason's lips,
What words were they, how sweetly did they sound?

MEDEA:

'Twas on that very hill by Hecate's home
When first we two, alone, together spoke,
That he first put the notion into words.
He told of how – if I to Hellas came –
730 The people there would sing my praise and shout,
"It's thanks to you that our dear sons came home
Our husbands, brothers, kinsmen were unhurt;
And due to you are thanks for their success
Please live here, with us now, forever blessed."
And then before the high Olympian gods –
Both Zeus and Hera too did he invoke –
He took my hand, and then these words he spoke:
"Medea, love, a bridal bed awaits,
A bed, my sweet, that you and I will share;
740 No thing, til death at his appointed hour,
Will part our love. To you these words I swear."
And saying thus, he sealed with hand and kiss,
And my vow too, did mingle sweet with his.

CUSTODIAN:

Go back inside, and dream on these sweet words,
For soon enough will Jason take you home.

MEDEA:

I thank you nurse, my mind is clearer now,
And rests on love, my faith has been restored.

750 *(Exit Medea)*

CUSTODIAN:

What mean these looks? What's spinning in your mind?

CHORUS:

Wondering what is your stake in these two.

Seems as though you know more than one who's lived

All her life on this isle, sweeping the floor.

CUSTODIAN:

Well my friends, what do you want me to say?

Why do you speak like this – in this strange way?

760 CHORUS:

Speak like what? You've changed too. You've matched our
style.

CUSTODIAN:

Sometimes it's better to not know too much,

Are you sure you want to know who I am?

Knowledge is power it's also a curse.

But you're right these two mean something to me -

One for sure – Jason is key to my plans.

CHORUS:

770

Tell us all, let us know, what is to come.

CUSTODIAN:

No one knows in this world what is to come.

Fate there is, will there is, man's in between

Though the stars plot a course life is not clear

Winds and tides pull us all this way and that.

Gods are immortal, their lives have no end

But for men, each one knows where the road leads

Pathway or river, or highway of life –

780 Travelling down that road, that is the gift,
Bumps and turns, detours and even dead-ends –
These are the journeys that make life a *LIFE*.
As to me, you will know all in good time.

(Chorus changes rhythm.

Custodian tells the story of Jason, the old lady and the river)

CHORUS:

How was it Jason started on this quest?
A challenge from the gods – is this some test?

CUSTODIAN:

790 Our hero Jason came upon a stream,
A raging torrent is more true to say,
This river stopped him in his rightful quest:
Strong Jason was a rightful Prince denied
By his usurping uncle Pelias.
This Pelias, in his profound hubris,
Had disrespected Hera, Queen of heav'n,
And she now watched and waited for a chance
To balance things again – exact revenge.
So, on his way to claim his rightful throne,
By rushing river waters Jason's stopped,
800 As he's about to plunge into the flood,
A voice and crooked finger beckon him.
There sits a crone as ancient as the stones.
She asks for help across this watery fence.
And Jason, at that moment, proves his worth:
He picks her up and puts her on his back
The youthful muscles bulge and swell beneath

His skin, so smooth and soft - it glows with youth;
Against what she calls flesh – this sere, cracked hide;
(It's strange how things can share the self same name,
810 Yet be in sight and feel like night and day.)
As Jason through the torrent made his way,
The woman's weight did try to force him down,
But full of grit, good Jason persevered
His sinew and his will pushed him across.
And on the farther shore he placed the crone
Who told him she would help him gain the throne.
But in the flood, good Jason lost a shoe –
A fact that scornful Pelias will rue.

(Custodian goes into the temple)

820 CHORUS:
What do you think about this ancient one?
Vengeful thoughts seem to lie deep in her heart
Far more so than one who humbly sweeps steps...
Fingerprints of the gods are on these two:
Medea you poor girl, fallen in love –
Jason your hero's blood forces you on –
The gods understand what drives on our kind
Mortals have passions too strong to subdue.
Some at least find themselves driven beyond
830 Good sense or good duty or sage advice
These ones are those whose lives flow from our pens
Hurl themselves into life – risking it all,
Brief or long, their lives are ones we admire
Or at least stand in awe as they flame out.

Are we all tempted by passion's strong lure?
Do only some respond when the blood stirs?
Are there some for whom good sense will prevail,
Whose passion's for duty – a peaceful life?
Those are they for whom no poems are spun.
840 What about happiness where does it land –
With passion, or duty, where is there more?
Each life has measures of joy and of strife
Find your true nature and follow its path
Throw yourself into life – just don't hold back.
The gods will scatter temptations like crumbs
Medea and Jason have swallowed theirs
Now they must play it out – whatever comes
Play it strong, play it full, these are our prayers.
Painted sky, sun dips low, bathes in the west;
850 But there is much to see before we rest.
(They spot a messenger coming from the ships)
Look from Apsyrtus' ship here comes one now
In all haste, sinews strain, galloping forth.
Jason too, from his ship, strides up the hill
Godly man, Jason comes, heroic and tall
Not but good, could reside in his brave breast
He will know what is just – follow his course
For the best he will choose – always the good.

(Jason and Messenger enter from different sides)

860 *(Medea and Custodian from the Temple)*

JASON:

You come with words for me from Apsyrtus
So let these hateful birds fly from the nest.
We clearly are out-numbered and ensnared –
Apsyrtus will take joy in setting terms
Let's hear what Colchis' prince foresees for us.

MESSENGER:

870 Apsyrtus, our king's son has thus decreed:
The Argonauts, and too, their Lord Jason,
Outnumbered as they are, are free to fight
(Which we ourselves would love to see them do,
Our sword and shield do thirst to right these wrongs
Enacted by these oh, so haughty Greeks.),
To fight, and taste disaster at our hand.
In order to evade a battle pitched,
The carnage and defeat that would ensue,
You Argive sons, now do you hear our terms:
As to the Fleece: Take it back to your home.
Since thus it was decreed by our great king –
880 No matter that some deeds were done in stealth,
And some defied outright our king's command –
The tasks that you were set, you did achieve:
By right the Fleece is yours, and you may go.
Medea, our king's daughter, that girl there,
With Zeus' daughter Artemis she'll stay.
Here in this temple's precinct she'll await
The judgment of those kings whose right it is
To mete out justice in a case like this.
That she elope to Hellas, is it right?

890 Or to her father's house should she return?
This decision – it is not ours to make –
We'll leave it to the kings and walk away.
This message was I charged to bring to you,
Your answer to await. What do you say?

JASON:

Your words, good sir, do fill me full of rage.
And yet it is no less than I'd expect,
From your quick-ired general who waits below.
Go tell Aeetes' son that I'll respond
900 Before Apollo dips into the sea.
Be quick, lest payment comes from my sharp blade
And for these labours you are recompensed.

(Exit messenger)

JASON:

Apsyrtus! You have bound me in a knot.
A knot that I can see no way to loose.
And so, I think I must submit unto
This course that is laid out in front of us.
I'll send him word that we accept his will,
910 And break the news to all my Argonauts.

MEDEA: *(From above)*

Ancient companion, will you give us leave,
With Jason I must have some words alone.

CUSTODIAN:

Oh, Miss, I think I should be here —

MEDEA:

— No. Go.

The words I need to speak need privacy,
And he alone will hear what I will say.

920 CUSTODIAN:

If that's your wish, I shall retire within...
But I might have some thoughts that bear upon
This subject that does sit betwixt you two –

MEDEA:

I'll seek your counsel at a later time.

CUSTODIAN:

But –

MEDEA:

Just Go!

930 *(The custodian retires into the Temple. Jason and Medea are alone.)*

MEDEA:

Jason. My Lord. What is this plan you hatch?
Is there some spell that's wrought of your success,
That fogs your mind, destroys your memory?
When your straights were dire, you did seek my help –
Do you forget all that you said to me?

JASON:

My love, be calm – you heard your brother's words.

MEDEA:

940

Be calm? Not I! Where are these oaths you swore?
Sworn by Zeus! The god of suppliants!
And where the honeyed promises you made

That drew me to defy my own conscience,
Abandon country, home, and parents too –
Yay, everything that I did value most?
And now, I'm far away across the sea,
Carried here by you who will now leave me
With only circling seabirds as my friends.
All this because I saw you through your trials:
950 Ensured you'd win your battle with the bulls
Defeat the giants and come out alive.
And grasp the fleece – for which you crossed the sea –
You won it through my folly and my love...
I have disgraced my sex.
But now I say I'm yours! I am your wife!
And will you, nil you, I will follow you,
Follow to your homeland back in Hellas.

JASON:
960 It's only circumstance that brings us here,
To this decision that we're forced to take.

MEDEA:
Leave me alone, while you consult the kings?
Whatever comes, still you should stand by me –
Why not run off with me and no more said?
We two are now in law and honour pledged.
Abide by that, or else take out your sword
To slit my throat, that I might make amends
To you for my infatuation here.
These kings, to whom you both defer my fate –
970 Think of the misery that falls to me

If in my brother's case they do decide –
How can I look my father in the face?
His cruel revenge for my imagined crimes
Will rain down mighty tortures on my soul.
And you – is it a happy homecoming
That shines bright in your imagination?
I hope that it will never come to be –
That Hera, whose favourite you claim to be,
Denies you that ecstatic fantasy.
980 You will recall me when someday you stew
Deep steeped in your own painful suffering.
I hope the fleece does vanish like a dream
And my avenging furies harrow you
Repaying you for all I have endured
At the hand of your inhumanity.
You do break your own deep and solemn oath.
It seems that I am nothing in your eyes,
Well soon you'll see that this is far from true
And you will rue this hasty course you take.

990 JASON:
You boil with rage, and troth, it frightens me.
Your vengeful heart burns with consuming fire
And nothing's safe that falls within its gaze.

MEDEA:
You read my mind – I'll set your ship ablaze –
That bobbing cork, of pine and pitch and tar,
Will light the sky with licking tongues of fire
And your good ship will be my funeral pyre.

JASON:
1000 My love, good lady please be calm. Sweet love,
My intentions you malign – I love you,
And would not leave your side for any prize.
But cool your fevered heart and you will see
How we are trapped by fortune’s circumstance.
This plan seeks only to stave off a fight –
A fight that we Argives are sure to lose.
The locals here do side with Apsyrtus
Along with them, the Colchian hordes he brought,
Would quickly slaughter our side to a man.
1010 If that occurred, what then would be your plight?
A prize of war, to do with as they like.
That is a fate, which I cannot abide.
But this capitulation that we feign
Will buy some time and distance so that we
Can set a pitfall, through which cunning ruse,
Your brother, Prince Apsyrtus, we’ll dispatch.
Support of natives, and the Colchian troops,
Without a leader will evaporate –
Then we’ll return, and pluck you from this isle,
1020 And ferry you back to our happy home.

MEDEA:
This ruse, this feigned truce you speak about,
It opens up the door to accident
And then some slip, or unplanned hap may fall,
That wrecks our lives, our hopes, and all these dreams
Upon the rocky shoals of this delay.
Don’t wait! Act now! Necessity demands.

And though we visit evil on their souls
It is the spawn of evil from the gods.
1030 'Twas I that took the first mistaken step,
When blinded as I was by powers of love –
This love that must have come from those above –
I helped you out, and so it all began.
So now we can do nought but follow on
And tread this path we're on until the end.
Now you must let Apsyrtus think he's won –
Send word to him that you accept his terms.
Then I will send a messenger myself,
To beg a secret conference 'twixt us two.
1040 I'll tell him that your treachery has killed
This love that does still thrive within my breast;
I'll tell him that I plan to steal the Fleece,
Then return with it to our father's land,
And this will lure Apsyrtus to your hand.

JASON:
What then my love? Apsyrtus is your kin
His blood and yours do spring from the same source.
If I harm him, I'm harming you as well.

MEDEA:
1050 To do what must be done, there is no blame,
So hush – my brother, father, you are all –
More kin to me than them from this time forth,
So if you have the stomach for the deed,
My enemy Apsyrtus you must kill.

They exit. Chorus sings about unconscionable love (159)

CHORUS:

Bane of man, tormentor, fountain of tears,
Conscienceless, source of strife, this thing called love.
Sons of our enemies would rue the day,
1060 Were we to focus this power of love,
On their lives, as did Medea's love aim –
On her kin, brother once, now he will pay,
Stronger than kinship, and stronger than hate
Force of love, 'gainst all odds, will find its way.
Wreckage and broken lives strewn in its path
Love must out, learn from this, do not impede
Love's true course, or you may taste of its wrath.
You've been warned. Someone now tell love's sweet creed.

W.B. YEATS: (He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven)

1070 *Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

Embroidered sky above, heaven's sweet cloth,
Sparkles now – bright starlight, moon at its full,
1080 Tints the earth pale and blue, light as the day.
Jason waits in the shrine - deadly intent...
Here comes Medea now praising the moon.
What of Apsyrtus, is he on his way?
Now is the rendez-vous, message was sent,
Will he come up this path, come to his doom?
Let's hear Medea's song - ode to the moon,

Such a voice, sweet as spring's innocent croon
That will change – future's dark deeds ahead loom.

1090 MEDEA: (enters)
Pale white 'O'
In the sky
You swell so full –
always changing, yet always there –
when you look down on our deeds
what do you see?
We spin and turn
Yet we only grow
Once
We don't return...

1100 Pale white 'O'
Breast of moon
Pour down your loving milk-light on us
Let us do what we should do
Milk-white, milk-light
Pale white 'O'

CHORUS:
Look now Medea, where Apsyrtus comes –
Comes to assist you, to save you from harm.
Will you destroy him now – betray his trust?
1110 He is your brother-kin. He shares your blood.
Think of the childhood games – rolling on lawns,
Times you shared, tears you shared, laughter shared too –

MEDEA:

O Stop! Just stop! You make me crazy now.

I do not know if what I do is right.

If in this world of sorrows this is just.

I only do what I'm compelled to do.

...If I were one who sees the future clear

Or had the grand perspective of the gods

1120 Then would I suit my actions to the songs:

That music that the spheres of heaven sing.

But I am just a girl and nothing more

I follow love's true course as best I can

And take direction only from my heart.

The moon and stars speak through my heart to me –

My nature joins with nature all around

And surely then, the actions that ensue –

Great Nature must give blessings to these deeds ...

I know no other star by which to steer,

1130 So Mother Great, if I have gone awry,

Then set my poor weak vessel back on course.

I know your daughter moon does hear my prayers

And she I trust to keep me free from harm.

CHORUS:

Medea you must put your fears aside –

What's done is done – the spring will now uncoil.

Our mortal lives are brimful heaped with strife

And troubles, they are just a part of life.

It's how we meet these troubles, how we strive

1140 For courage and for grace while we're alive,

That lifts our lives above the general run

And makes it an extraordinary one.
Your brother, Prince Apsyrtus, now draws near –
He slips among the shadows of the moon,
And like the hunting wolf he comes unseen.
You are the prey on which this wolf is locked
So, prey, turn bait – and now your trap is cocked.

APSYRTUS: (*enters*)

1150 Dear sister, I have come to take you home,
To save you from those clutching foreign hands,
And the fog of love that mystified your mind.
How glad that from his grasp you now are free
That Jason – agh! His name curdles my tongue
And would that I could spit him on my sword
Or flay the Argive flesh from off his bones –
But come, Medea, let us hatch a plan:
Deliver me this sister-stealing Greek
And let the gods who judge all from above
Let me act as their earthly instrument.

1160 MEDEA:

O brother dear, you fill me full of joy
These words of yours do match my own intent
I have, in fact, a messenger dispatched
To lure him here – and even bring the Fleece –
And when he's dead, we'll take it home with us.
You must be quick – we must appease the gods –
Ensure their will is with us in this plan.
Now go inside, this temple here at hand,
And strip this gear of war from off your back,

1170 And bathe, and pray, and make your sacrifice
 So that the gods will know our good intent.
 When Jason comes, I'll call his name aloud,
 Then like the raptor screaming from the sky,
 Unleash your righteous fury on this man.

APSYRTUS:

 I'll do it all, exactly as you say.
 And soon enough we'll head our ships for home...
 I miss our home – the rugged Colchian coast
 And do despise these foreign lands and folk –
1180 I'll now to pray and make my body clean.
 (He leaves. Pause.)

MEDEA: *(alone)*

 Is it done now? Are we set free?

(the door to the temple opens)

 Who's there?

 What man stands in the door? I cannot see!

 Who's there?!

JASON:

 Medea, calm your voice. It's me my love –
1190 It's me. Your brother kneels within. He prays ...
 His weapons and defenses are set down
 Am I to kill him in this reverend state?
 Offend the gods with whom he now communes?
 Medea, think. This will compound our guilt.

MEDEA:

 What guilt? We do but as we do. Our love
 Was built and sanctioned by the gods above.

1200 The first time that I saw you I was done
 I felt the love-god's shaft go through my heart
 And still it's lodged there – pain, oh sweet, sweet, pain.

JASON:
 Please wait Medea, think just one last time.

MEDEA:
 No. Quickly Jason, do what needs be done.

JASON:
 A strange foreboding shadows o'er my heart.

MEDEA:
 It's him or us. Act now or else we die.

1210 JASON:
 O gods above! Is there no other way?

MEDEA:
 Go now. He waits unarmed within. And know,
 My love will fill your arm and give it strength.
 O Jason do not fail, let courage grow.

JASON: (draws his sword)
 I go, and with this act I seal our fate
 Whatever it may be. O master Love,
 It seems we have no choice when you command
 And know not where these paths you set will lead;
1220 So forward now, there is no turning back.
 My love, be sure – Apsyrtus meets his fate,
 And when his soul has fled into the dark
 Our fated love will shine bright in the light

Together we will board my loyal ship
And sail toward the new life that we've won.

(He goes within)

(Silence)

(Screams and wailing from within. The Custodian enters.

As she opens the door there is the sound of rushing wind and beating wings.

1230 *The Furies are in the air.)*

MEDEA:

What is that sound? Is something in the air?

CHORUS:

I think we saw... But cannot say for sure...

There, in the air – with eyes askance, and wings –

MEDEA:

Be quiet now! Old friend, what news within?

I heard some fearful cries and screams just now.

What's happened? Is there bloodshed, someone slain?

1240 Quick tell me – am I now destined to grief?

CUSTODIAN:

O lady, heal my eyes from what I've seen.

I don't know how to tell such awful news –

You, grief? Forever from this moment now

I think your life will be steeped deep in grief.

The death of one you loved has come this night

And that's a burden for your mortal soul.

And how it's come – I shudder to relate –

But you shall hear all just as it fell out.

1250 Apsyrtus stripped and laid his weapons down

And bathed and made ablutions to the gods

And kneeling there, he looked a god himself –
His young and glowing body shone with oil
He knelt and offered blessings to the gods.
Then Jason stood behind him sword upraised
He didn't bring it down – that mortal blow –
Instead he called your brother's name aloud –
He said, "I will not kill you while you pray.
Stand up, and pick your sword up if you wish.
1260 Together we will let the fates decide."
Apsyrtus stood, and simply shook his head –
"If you are here, I must have been betrayed.
There's only one who knew where I would be,
My sister's wish is that I should be dead –
So kill me now, and set my spirit free."
Then quick and skilled, with Ares' brutal force,
So did the blow from Jason's sword come down,
As butchers fell the mighty, strong-horned bulls –
So Jason felled Apsyrtus where he stood
1270 Upon the Temple floors of Artemis.
Apsyrtus tried to staunch the dark red flow,
His life was fled before his hand could cup
And catch the precious liquid of his life.
Then Jason made the kill a sacrifice:
He severed hands and feet from off the corpse,
Then licked the blood still flowing from the wounds.
Three times he licked, and so three times he spat
Apsyrtus' blood, polluted by this crime –
As killers do who try to expiate
1280 A murder that has treason at its source.

*(Jason, soaked in blood, standing astride
the bloody corpse of Apsyrtus is revealed)*

JASON:

My love, why do you turn aside and shrink,
From this the deed you bid me to achieve?

(He goes to her, and takes her in his arms, painting her white dress red.)

Medea, love, our fate is now our own.
Let's quickly to the Argo and set sail
For distant shores – we'll leave this all behind.

1290 MEDEA:

The horror of my brother's blood I wear
O brother dear – your eyes, your sweet dark hair
Will never more shine glowing filled with life
And Jason, this I did to be your wife?
Is marriage worth this hefty price its cost,
When weighed against all that we here have lost?
Bound now together we must share our trust,
Our fate is ever forward; yes we must,
Accept the light of love that shows the way.

1300

O, wrap me tight within your loving arms
And chase these fears that raise such grim alarms.

(They kiss and exit.)

CHORUS:

You lady, you – we know you saw them too
That rush of wings – Who flew past in the skies,
When first her brother's soul departed here?

CUSTODIAN:

What is it makes you think I saw something?
If one of those dark Furies was in there,
1310 I'd have to be immortal to have seen.

CHORUS:

A Fury – yes indeed – Tisiphone,
Whose vengeance is focused on murderers.
She flew past – and we think you saw her too.

CUSTODIAN:

All right, I saw her – yes she has a task;
But Jason's life is mine still for awhile
He must unseat the man who wronged my name
I'm Hera, wife of Zeus, if you must know.
1320 And now I will ascend to realms above,
To conjure up the next course of this love.
(*She exits aloft*)

CHORUS:

Here we are, left alone, to end this tale:
Love's true course, so it seems, never runs smooth.
When that boy draws his bow – better take care,
If it's aimed at your breast, all will be changed.
Ride the wave – up and down; everyone does.
Love's a gift, so is life, never forget.
1330 Suffer life's storms with good courage and grace,
Don't for fear stand aside if love should call –
Better to fall in love – part of the race,
Better than never t'have fallen at all.

NOTES

Cast List: Although the early plays of Aeschylus seem to require only two actors and a chorus, an innovation by either Sophocles (who first won the competition for tragedy in 468) or Aeschylus (*The Oresteia*, winner in 458, is the first existing play that requires three actors) added the third actor to the tragic palette. Although there were only three actors available, this in no way limited the number of characters. The only restriction was that only three characters could be on stage at once. It was also acceptable to have silent characters or dead bodies in addition to the three principals (In *Cupid's Arrow* 1420), and occasionally a messenger (CA 1380). In *Cupid's Arrow*, the first actor would play the Sailor and Medea, the second actor would play Jason, and the third actor would play Hera/Custodian and Apsyrtus. A member of the chorus would play the messenger and the body of Apsyrtus.

sd. *Brygean Island in the Cronian Sea*: Medea and the Argonauts have sailed from Colchis (present day Georgia). The Cronian Sea is sometimes conceived of as the Arctic Ocean but in this case we must see the location as the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea.

15 Hera is the goddess who presides over marriages (among other things), and Artemis is the patroness of virgin girls before they marry -- a fitting duo to be concerned with Medea at this juncture. "Occasionally girls are placed for a longer period in the exclusive service of Artemis as part of an initiation ritual [preparing for marriage]; the most famous example is Brauron near Athens." (Burkert 151). It is part of the marriage ritual that

young brides to be will give up their toys and dolls (symbols of childhood) in preparation for their new adult life.

- 25 Although there are some variations in different sources, Gantz in *Early Greek Myths* (172, 191) accepts the version from Apollonius which spins out like this: Sidero is the cruel stepmother to Tyro. Tyro is tricked and ravished by Poseidon and eventually gives birth to twin sons, Pelias and Neleus. Unable to face Sidero's cruel response she exposes the babes on a mountain where they are found and raised by a horse-herd. When Pelias learns of the cruelty that Sidero showed his mother, Tyro, he seeks her out to exact revenge. Sidero takes refuge in a temple to Hera, but Pelias murders her anyway, even as Sidero grips the horns of the altar (Graves 209). Outraged by this defilement, Hera plots and executes a tangled revenge on Pelias, including the events of *Cupid's Arrow*.
- 29 Cupid has different arrows for different tasks. In Ovid's account of Apollo and Daphne, a golden arrow rouses love, a leaden arrow routs it. In *The Argonautica* Cupid carefully selects the arrow he shoots at Medea.
- 33(sd) *Hera exits into the Temple* – The temple in the ancient Greek Theatre would be the *skene* – an elevated structure up stage centre where the actors can change, and from which they make entrances or exits. It first appeared in the late 450's and was probably a pavilion style tent at that time. It later evolved into a wooden structure with doors and a roof (all useful playing spaces) and ultimately furnished the first surface for scenic painting.
- sd. *Jason and one of ...* This entrance would be from one *eisodos*, a path or aisle that runs off from either side of the *skene*, separating the playing space from the audience. A *stichomythia* is a dialogue between two characters using alternating metrically identical lines or speeches; this dialogue is not as rigorous in its form.

- 68 *Charon* – The ferryman of Hades, he pilots the boat that carries the newly dead across the river Styx.
- 80 The Golden Fleece – A golden ram had carried Phrixus to safety in Colchis. To celebrate his safe arrival he sacrificed the ram and gave its fleece to the king, Aetes, who is Medea’s father. Aetes hung the fleece in an oak tree where a serpent wound round the tree’s base protected the Fleece from harm. The Fleece becomes an integral part of Hera’s revenge plot against Pelias (Apollonius, 1.256). Other accounts in Gantz, 183-6.
- 157 There is a much puzzled over vase painting depicting Jason being disgorged by the serpent, while Athene (unquestionably her, because of her distinctive helmet and owl) watches. There is no known literary source for this depiction, so I thought I’d provide one.
- 215 *hundred warlike ships* Apsyrtus has brought the whole Colchian army with him.
- 252 This is the first entry of the Chorus, and as such the song they sing would be known as the *parodos*. Traditionally everything prior to the Chorus’ entrance is the *prologos* and while there are a variety of forms (monologue or dialogue) it would be usual for the chorus to have entered earlier. *Cupid’s Arrow* seemed better served by this late entry. Bridging the ancient and modern traditions I envisioned a chorus of dead poets who all wrote of love during their lives. Although there is opportunity for more of them to recite, only a few actually do. In their regular songs or speeches the chorus maintains the 10 syllable line in use throughout the play, but change from iambic pentameter, to a more sing-song, waltz-like rhythm: 123, 123, 123, 1.

- 265 *To* -- Shelley has a number of poems with this same secretive title leading one to believe (and knowing his beliefs on free love, how could one not?) that they were intended for several different women, and that either they or he had reason to remain anonymous. This one was written in 1821, in the year before he died far too young. It speaks of the evolving nature of love and how love's beginnings can't foresee love's ends. (Shelley 443)
- 282 Medea enters – We want the feel of a young woman bubbling with anticipation on her wedding day. It is always a good idea for the protagonist (or any character for that matter) to start emotionally and in terms of understanding as far from their ultimate conclusion as possible.
- 315 Although Medea gives the chorus an opportunity to share their works and insights, I want their zombie-like thirst for love to be all consuming – they need her story.
- 327 As with Jason and the sailor previously, these opportunities to fill in the exposition are invaluable – in a modern film they would probably be flashbacks.
- 345 The chorus show their depth of knowledge in the field of love – explaining that what Medea felt isn't what everyone experiences – I think of them here like wine connoisseurs savouring descriptions of different varieties.
- 365 Jason's tasks – Aeetes said that Jason could take the Fleece and leave freely if he could perform three tasks: 1) Harness two fire-breathing, iron oxen and plough a field; 2) sow some serpent teeth (the same ones that started the race of stone men in Thebes) – when planted the teeth would instantly sprout into ferocious stone men who would attack Jason; and 3) if he was still alive, he could go and take the Fleece down from the oak tree – but he

had to get past the sleepless serpent that protected it. Jason could not have managed any of these tasks without the aid of Medea.

408 Chalciope is Medea's sister – it so happens that her two sons (Phrontis and Melas) are crewmembers on the Argo (Argonauts). They go to their mother to get her to persuade Medea to help Jason win the Fleece... it doesn't take much persuading as she's already in love, but it does provide her with an excuse – make it seem like it wasn't her idea.(Apollonius, III 246-282)

426 The chorus, who had conducted their conversation with Medea (when the chorus interacts directly with a character it is known as a *kommos*) in her meter (iambic pentameter), when she sleeps – a symbolic exit – they revert to their own meter.

453 *Golden Slumbers* (Thomas Dekker) I chose this poem mostly for the pop-culture curiosity value that it is not in fact written by Paul McCartney of the Beatles; it is also a sweet lullaby no matter what the melody.

502 Apsyrtus is Medea's younger brother. After the action of *Cupid's Arrow*, in some traditions, Medea and Jason cut the body of Apsyrtus into tiny pieces and cast them on the seas. Aeetes will have to gather all the pieces to complete proper burial rites. The time Aeetes spends collecting Apsyrtus' body allows Jason and Medea to escape.

578 Apsyrtus is making reference to the Ancient Greek laws of hospitality (*xenia*) whereby a traveller who presents himself to a host is under sacred protection of Zeus and must be treated with respect. In return the traveller must also respect his host – it is this point that the two are debating.

580 See note at line 80.

- 620 There is an echo here of the twelve labours of Heracles – particularly the fire breathing Cretan Bull. It is an intriguing coincidence that Hera is stirring both these pots.
- 742 When Jason is persuading Medea he apparently invokes Ariadne’s Crown – after her death Dionysus throws Ariadne’s crown into the heavens where it remains as a tribute to her. Medea seems not to recall that (in most versions) all this came about after Theseus had abandoned Ariadne, despite her love for him and her assistance in defeating the Minotaur.
- 752 Medea gives Jason the salve that will protect him from the fire breathing bulls.
- 785 Medea seems to take the promise of marriage as marriage itself – she is completely trusting of Jason and their future together.
- 850 The chorus suspects the Custodian of being more than a mere mortal because she is able to adjust to their rhythm.
- 953 Including the messenger, we end up with four actors onstage. This is not the traditional, climactically situated messenger speech – but I thought it important to include at least something of the tradition. The actual ‘messenger speech’ falls to the Custodian describing the murder of Aspyrtus at line 1380.
- 1163 Medea’s *hamartia* or mistake – she does not honour the bond of blood between her and her brother.
- 1187 W. B. Yeats’ poem *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* (Yeats, 114) speaks of the vulnerability of the lover. The chorus is wary of the consequences to one who does not “tread softly”.

- 1209 Medea's song: Although choral odes are more common, it was not unheard of for actors to sing. In fact Euripides frequently used 'monodies' for women in distress. In this case it makes great sense for Medea in the throes of her most trying time, as a daughter of Hecate, to commune with the moon.
- 1315 Reminiscent of Orestes in Euripides' *Electra*, Jason offers Medea and himself one last chance to avoid the killing of Apsyrtus.
- 1365 The Furies or *Erinyes* were three snake-haired, female goddesses of vengeance; with blood dripping from their eyes they were sure to strike terror into the guilty. Tisiphone is the avenger of murder. In *Eumenides* they form the entire chorus.
- 1380 The Custodian here delivers what might be a traditional messenger speech – it seemed more dramatically rich to have the Custodian (who we may already suspect is Hera in disguise) deliver this news.
- 1412 Jason's actions, in an attempt to appease the gods through ritual cleansing, are drawn from Apollonius.
- 1421 Jason and the body appear on a piece of machinery known as the *ekkyklema*. It was a wheeled platform that could be thrust through the central doors of the *skene* and was often used (as here) to display recently deceased bodies.
- 1470 *Deus ex machina* (god out of the machine) is a type of crane that would appear over the *skene* and was used for the entrances and exits of the gods. Here we are reminded of Medea's final exit in the Chariot of Apollo at the end of Euripides' *Medea*.

1471 The Chorus' final speech is known as the *exodus*. Euripides had a relatively standard speech that appears (with minor variations) at the end of *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, and this from Lattimore's translation of *Alcestis* (1159):

*Many are the forms of what is unknown.
Much that the gods achieve is surprise.
What we look for does not come to pass;
God finds a way for what none foresaw.
Such was the end of this story.*

APPENDICES

Appendix One

Structural Analysis

Cupid's Arrow was written to conform to the presentation style of the later evolution of tragedy that we are most familiar with (later Aeschylus, or Sophocles and Euripides), that is, three actors between whom the parts are distributed, and a chorus. The following table shows the distribution of parts in what are called 'French Scenes' – a scene break occurs whenever a major character enters or exits the action.

SCENE	ACTOR ONE	ACTOR TWO	ACTOR THREE	CHORUS
Prologue line 1-30			HERA	
Sc. One 31-162	SAILOR	JASON		
Sc. Two 163-220	SAILOR	JASON	CUSTODIAN	
<i>Parados</i> 224-250				CHORUS
Sc. Three 251-379	MEDEA			CHORUS
ODE 380-415				CHORUS
Sc. Four 418-459		JASON		CHORUS
Sc. Five 460-601		JASON	APSYRTUS	CHORUS
ODE 602-623				CHORUS
Sc. Six 624-748	MEDEA		CUSTODIAN	CHORUS
Sc. Seven 750-819			CUSTODIAN	CHORUS
ODE 820-859				CHORUS

Sc. Eight 860-929	MEDEA	JASON	CUSTODIAN	CHORUS/ MESSENGER
Sc. Nine 930-1053	MEDEA	JASON		CHORUS
ODE 1054-1087				CHORUS
Sc. Ten 1088-1147	MEDEA			CHORUS
Sc. Eleven 1148-1180	MEDEA		APSYRTUS	CHORUS
Sc. Twelve 1181-1225	MEDEA	JASON		CHORUS
Sc. Thirteen 1230-1280	MEDEA		CUSTODIAN	CHORUS
Sc. Fourteen 1280-1300	MEDEA	JASON	CUSTODIAN	CHORUS
Sc. Fifteen 1301-1320			CUSTODIAN/ HERA	CHORUS
Final ODE 1321-1333				CHORUS

A quick scan of this graphic representation of the play exposes some interesting observations. To begin with, if I were directing this play I would be very tempted to recruit a member of the Chorus to play the Sailor. It seems preferable to keep Medea's voice distinct and allow the actor playing Medea to focus on that emotional journey. The drawback to this tactic is that presumably it would mean using a less-skilled actor as the Sailor, who, being one of the first characters on stage is critical for introducing the audience to the action. In the balance of plusses and minuses though, I would work hard to let Medea be only Medea.

The next thing that I see is that we meet Medea relatively late in the play. This, to my mind, is a good thing; the story will be well established by the time we meet her, as well we will already be speculating about her emotional state and how she will respond to her dilemma.

Thirdly, the play seems to 'thicken' nicely at about two thirds of the way through (about line 850). There is a short Ode that leads us into Scene Eight where four characters appear on stage – the most we see at any time during the play (looking at the content of Sc. Eight, it is a pivotal scene: a crisis is announced, action must be taken). Also, from this point in the play, Medea leaves the stage only briefly (for about thirty lines at 1054) before her final exit. As a director I would look for a way to keep her onstage for these thirty lines, perhaps even dovetailing her action with the Ode of the Chorus: night falls and the moon rises as the Chorus perform their Ode; Medea, in a state of turmoil watches the moon rise and her song grows immediately from theirs (a little modern stagecraft may be required, but then why couldn't I use the *machina* to hoist a moon?). It is important that from Sc. Eight onward there is a growing sense of momentum, the play must drive toward the end from this point, and the scenes must almost tumble one upon the other like dominoes falling – unstoppable.

The last immediate observation that occurs to me is that Hera only makes two appearances. The same can be said for the Sailor and Apsyrtus, but Hera's are significant because she is the first and the last character we see. There is a structural 'book ending' to the play, which as a director I would seek to exploit.

THE ACTORS

If we assume that someone other than Actor One plays the Sailor, then we can allow Actor One and Actor two to concentrate on the two central characters of Medea and Jason. Actor One must be able to portray both the vulnerability and ecstasy of a young girl in love, as well as the steely, driven determination that we recognize as the mature Medea.

Actor Two, Jason, must have a heroic appearance and be able to portray a man of action – he may be indecisive at the outset of the play but there must be a latent, brooding drive within him so that we are in no doubt that if he decides to act, it will be with conviction and force.

Actor Three has an interesting challenge – to play the combined Hera/Custodian as well as the fiery Apsyrtus. Hera and the Custodian both have similar qualities, although from different ends of the status spectrum. They both have an internal authority that brooks no questioning although Hera's is that of a divinity, and the Custodian's that of a servant whose status derives from her position and age. There is a revelatory scene when the Custodian and Medea face off in direct confrontation (around line 920) with Medea's will ultimately winning out. From this scene we see that the (until now) pliable Medea is a real force to be reckoned with, and at the same time that the Custodian/Hera is willing to accept a small defeat to achieve her ultimate ends, proving that she is canny as well as powerful. In contrast to this powerful female energy, Actor Three must also be able to portray the testosterone-fuelled energy of the young Apsyrtus who seems always on the brink of violence.

Appendix Two

Technique

The attempt to codify the technique of the actor probably began with Aristotle's *Poetics*, while Stanislavski (in his two seminal books, *An Actor Prepares*, and *Building a Character*) initiated our modern understanding of that technique. Since Stanislavski there have been a number of different 'systems' and 'schools', all with slightly different terminology and emphasis, but ultimately all are interested in the same problem: how to take a written 'character' and turn it into a living, breathing human, on stage or screen.

The most common, and probably the most universally understood way to talk about the craft of acting is through a system that we refer to as 'objectives'. In the introduction I proposed: "Action reveals character; we know who we are by what we do." But how do we arrive at action? In every play a character will have a hierarchy of objectives, from the macro 'super-objective' to the detailed micro 'action'. A super-objective is something that the character wants that holds true for the duration of the whole play. In *Cupid's Arrow*, for example, Medea's super-objective is to be with Jason, married and in love. She will do whatever is necessary to achieve this objective, running roughshod over family, culture, and convention. As Simon Goldhill puts it in his book *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*:

The hero... is a figure who makes the boundaries of normal life problematic: the hero goes too far, and in going too far is both transgression and transcendence. The greatness of the hero is achieved at the expense of his ability to fit into normal social parameters... The hero is often destroyed – or destroys himself – in the pursuit of his own goals, and this passionate self-belief and self-commitment is set in juxtaposition with the cooperative virtues of the community. (Goldhill, 47)

Within the super-objective, each character will have an 'objective' for the scene as a whole, and a number of different objectives for each beat of the scene. Finally, within each objective, there are a number of small 'actions' that the character will use to achieve their objective. An objective must be pursued until it is either achieved or finally and irreversibly thwarted. Referring again to the introduction, we are reminded that "conflict precipitates action", so we try to set each character's objectives in opposition to each other to achieve the maximum conflict and the greatest potential for action.

Looking at Sc. Eight (860-929) of *Cupid's Arrow* we can set out the super-objectives for each main character, and then look at Medea's first beat in the scene to illustrate this hierarchy of objectives and actions.

Jason's super-objective is, and always has been, to return home with the Golden Fleece – an objective that will benefit him and return an important cultural icon to his people. His super-objective is one in accord with his community and the actions of a good citizen of that community (neither transgressive nor transcendent).

The Custodian is Hera in disguise, so while she may appear to have motivations that relate to her character as the keeper of the Temple, this disguise is merely one of the actions that Hera takes to achieve her super-objective, a super-objective that has a life even outside this play: to exact revenge on Pelias. Within the play, she needs Jason to get home – with the Fleece and with Medea if her plan is to be fulfilled.

Apsyrtus (although he doesn't actually appear in the scene, he is represented by the messenger), like Jason, has a super-objective in line with conservative community virtues. He wants to restore his home to order – bring back his sister and the Fleece to the confines of their home (this explains why he

doesn't fight Jason at the end – if his sister has betrayed him, the fabric of society has already unravelled beyond his capacity to restore it).

After the departure of the messenger in Sc. Eight, Jason reveals that he intends to accede to Apsyrtus' demands and leave Medea on the island. This of course, is in accord with his super-objective (to get home with the Fleece), but contrary to Medea's (to be with Jason, married and in love). Medea is forced into action. What is her specific objective in this scene? Medea must get Jason to commit to her and prove that commitment. The first beat for Medea though, has nothing directly to do with Jason. Before she starts on him, she must get rid of the Custodian – so, although her objective for the entire scene is to get Jason to commit to her, her first objective *within* the scene (at line 910) is to get the Custodian to leave so that she can work most effectively on Jason alone. Within the objective of getting the Custodian to leave, a number of specific tactics, or 'actions' are available to her: she may entreat, implore, reason, conspire, appease, or any number of similar actions – all with slightly different nuance to the particular actor – and finally she commands: "Just Go!"

This process can be done with every character in every scene but ultimately the goal of the actor is "to behave truthfully under fictional circumstances." Truthful behaviour is more fluid and sinuous than this 'bit by bit' approach, so the process of rehearsal is to discover all of these minute shifts in behaviour, and then to erase the lines in between them. As a director collaborating with the actor to achieve this goal, I continually ask two questions: "What do you want?" and "What are you doing?" To make the process personal and develop that idiosyncratic portrayal that is the hallmark of fine acting, and to establish the deep connection between the given circumstances of the character and the personal emotional life of the actor, there is one question that I have found to be the most useful of all: "What would you do if it were you?"

This whole process is designed to put the play into *action*. Rarely, if ever will I talk about what the character is feeling – emotion may arise out of action, but acting, as the word suggests, is about action. By posing these questions, the hope is to engage the creativity of the actor – let them put themselves fully into the circumstances of the play and thereby give the story a full and rich presentation. Ultimately, the goal is for the emotional impact of the story to be felt in the audience – not necessarily on the stage – that, in a democratic sense that I suspect would please Aristotle, is where the catharsis belongs.

Appendix Three

The Alchemy of Acting

There was in the land of Greece an actor of wide reputation, who excelled all others in his clear delivery and graceful action. They say that his name was Polus, and he often acted the tragedies of famous poets with intelligence and dignity. This Polus lost by death a son whom he dearly loved. After he felt that he had indulged his grief sufficiently, he returned to the practice of his profession.

At that time he was to act the Electra of Sophocles at Athens, and it was his part to carry an urn which was supposed to contain the ashes of Orestes. The plot of the play requires that Electra, who is represented as carrying her brother's remains, should lament and bewail the fate that she believed had overtaken him. Accordingly Polus, clad in the mourning garb of Electra, took from the tomb the ashes and urn of his son, embraced them as if they were those of Orestes, and filled the whole place, not with the appearance and imitation of sorrow, but with genuine grief and unfeigned lamentation. Therefore, while it seemed that a play was being acted, it was in fact real grief that was enacted. (Gellius, VI.v.)

This account from Aulus Gellias' *Attic Nights* raises a question that is as pertinent today as it was when he wrote it almost two thousand years ago: what is acting, and what does the actor bring to the table?

Aristotle was a firm believer in narrative. He tells us that "even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents" (*Po* 1453b,5). This manifestation of emotion in the audience, the unbidden arousal of pity and fear, are not only the desired outcome of tragedy, but a defining criterion: if you don't feel anything, it isn't a tragedy. If a simple relating of the incidents of a tragic narrative is enough to incite an emotional response, why compound the issue by adding

actors? Why not just have someone recite the story – or even read out a newspaper-style account of some event – and then go home? Because what we are seeking is a *catharsis*, a deep emotional experience that exercises our emotions and leaves them clean and ready for use in the day-to-day world. As Stephen Halliwell reasons in his book *Aristotle's Poetics*, "... pity and fear are not undesirable emotions in Aristotle's eyes, but represent a natural and appropriate reaction to certain situations, it will hardly do (despite orgiastic *katharsis*, for which this does hold) to suppose that tragic *katharsis* is no more than an outlet for overcharged feelings, a working off of emotional excess... [rather] the emotions become better attuned to the perception of reality, and, consequently, as Aristotle believed, better disposed towards virtue." (Halliwell 197). Although Aristotle does not draw this conclusion, it seems a logical extension to his thoughts on emotion in *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* that the impulse of tragedy is to create compassion for our fellow human beings through an emotional identification that leaves no doubt that there is something profound that we share – that there is a community of humanity and we are all part of it.

One of the hallmarks of Attic society was citizenship – a core belief that the good of society trumps the desires of the individual, an essentially democratic ideal. Tragedy, as an important cultural practice, needed to uphold and build on that belief. However, instead of trumpeting the virtues and accomplishments of Athens and her citizens, tragedy takes a much broader view: it is not Athenians who are virtuous because they have stumbled onto the idea of democracy, but perhaps democracy can allow Athenians to inhabit a kinder more compassionate world. How does this work? Let's take two examples. First, in Euripides' *Medea*, a foreigner, someone who might be considered a barbarian by Athenian citizens, murders her own children. The task that Euripides sets for himself is immense; to create enough points of identification between the audience and the heroine, as well as the hero Jason, so that when the play ends we feel not, 'what a monster!' – but, 'Oh my god, that could have been

me!' Euripides sets an even greater challenge in *The Trojan Women*, where the conquered though civilized and aristocratic women of Troy are held captive by Greek soldiers who exercise the rights of the victors up to and including rape and murder. The Greek citizens watching the play and knowing the story of the Trojan War would doubtless experience a conflict of loyalties as their nationalistic pride wrestled with their rising pity for the Trojan women. The play succeeds if the Greek audience feels pity for the foreigners and not the Greek soldiers – a very sophisticated and difficult journey of compassion. This 'emotional intelligence' is the result of the *catharsis* described by Aristotle. It is a rebalancing of the emotions that makes them useful to those in the audience and allows a compassion that is essential in the practice of citizenship.

Somehow, the task of tragedy is to make the audience feel – Aristotle suggests pity or fear – but for me, *feeling* is job one. If simply relating the incidents of the narrative is enough to evoke an emotional reaction in the audience, however, why go the extra step of putting those incidents into poetic form, and why further embroider the process with actors and the other trappings of dramatic presentation? It must be that the emotional experience of the audience is made richer, fuller, deeper, by the more complex representation of these incidents; and that the collective experience of encountering a story in the company of others somehow enhances the emotional impact. Aristotle does acknowledge in his definition of tragedy in *Poetics* ch. 6 that dramatic representation, rather than narrative, is essential for tragedy.

In adapting the story of Jason and Medea, I made use of the tools of the poet and dramatist: rhythm and meter; allegory, simile and metaphor; assonance and rhyme; conflict and characterization; and, of course, invention. These tools, along with the base metal of the story, through the alchemy of imagination, are transmuted into poetic drama (I'm not claiming that lofty result for myself, only using my work as an example of what the great poets have accomplished). The

next step in the process is to achieve the living embodiment of this fiction – and that is where the art of the actor takes over.

I have spent most of my adult life in the theatre and its modern offshoots. In that time I have encountered many varied techniques and methods – attempts to codify and explain the process of acting. Through all of these I have developed my own definition of the goal of the actor: to live truthfully under fictional circumstances. The story is provided by the playwright, and it is the actor’s task to build a highly individual, deeply integrated, emotional relationship between herself and the written material. There are specific techniques studied over years that assist in building this relationship between personal emotion and the written word of the playwright. In the same way a painter studies form and colour as the building blocks of her technique, so too the actor studies and practices her technique. As it is with the painter, the goal of these techniques for the actor is to free the inspiration, to allow the intuitive, idiosyncratic, artistic impulse to flow, and in a final act of generosity and courage, to expose and share it in front of an audience. This brings us back to the extraordinary story of Polus quoted at the beginning of this section.

Although Gellius was reporting on a performance that took place some five hundred years before he wrote of it, there was something magnificent in that performance that kept it alive for all those years and has sustained our interest in it until the present. Gellius characterizes that ‘something’ as “real grief that was enacted” (ibid.) – and so it was, but we see real grief in other contexts (funerals, deathbeds) and it is not nearly so memorable. The combining of real grief and fictional story are what elevates those emotions and makes them useful to the rest of us. There are two small words in Gellius’ account that hold the key to this process: “*as if*.” These two words are the fulcrum on which the lever of imagination rests to pry open the actor’s soul. To treat the ashes of his son *as if* they were those of Orestes, and *as if* he were the desperate Electra – it is this deep

imaginative identification that forms the bond between personal emotion and the well-known story of Electra. Beyond this initial artistry, to share his emotion with his fellow Athenians is the final gift of the actor – the gift of courage and generosity – two qualities as much prized in that ancient democracy as they are needed in our current one. It is the actor's alchemic art to combine the rough metal of the written word and his own emotion, and to then transmute them into something finer, something almost unattainable – and that is pure gold.

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