

Euripides *Medea* 1056–80

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SINCE THE RENEWAL of an old attack on the authenticity of *Medea* 1056–80, above all in an influential article by M. D. Reeve, the conviction that the lines are spurious bids fair to become the new orthodoxy and has been incorporated into the recent Oxford text of Euripides.¹ The attack carries the warning that arguments in support of authenticity drawn from interpretation of the whole play are circular if the passage in question contributes to that interpretation, and the matter can only be solved by independent examination of individual problems. Accordingly I propose to discuss five major points that constitute the main targets of attack. For three of these I believe that a precise answer is available; for the others I support proposals that are reasonable if not entirely compelling. Finally I indulge briefly in the prohibited type of argument, with a comment on what is lost aesthetically by the excision.

I

A disruption of logic between lines 1058 and 1059 is alleged as one of the strongest arguments against authenticity (1056–64):

ἄ ἄ·
μὴ δῆτα, θυμέ, μὴ σὺ γ' ἐργάση τάδε·
ἔασον αὐτούς, ὦ τάλαν, φείσαι τέκνων·
ἐκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ζῶντες εὐφρανοῦσί σε.
μὰ τοὺς παρ' Αἰδη νερτέρουσ ἀλάστορας,
1060 οὗτοι ποτ' ἔσται τοῦθ' ὅπως ἐχθροῖς ἐγὼ
παῖδας παρήσω τοὺς ἐμούς καθυβρίσαι.

¹ M. D. Reeve, *CQ* n.s. 22 (1972) 51–61, with references to earlier discussions; for further criticism of lines 1078–80 see O. Zwierlein, *LiteraturwissJb* 19 (1978) 27–63. Subsequent attempts at rehabilitation are criticised by B. Manuwald, *WS* 17 n.f. (1983) 56–61; U. Hübner, *Hermes* 112 (1984) 401–18, regards the point at which the spurious passage begins as the only problem, and would delete everything after line 1039; J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae* I (Oxford 1984), deletes 1056–80 with reference to Reeve. The most substantial contribution to the defence has, I believe, been made by H. Lloyd-Jones, *WürzJbb* 6a (1980) 51–59, with the essential point about 1078–80 (32 *infra*); H. Erbse, *Archaiognosia* 2 (1981) 66–82, is too optimistic in basing his interpretation of the speech on the defence as it stands at the moment.

πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη καθθανεῖν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χρῆ,
 ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν.
 πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κοῦκ ἐκφεύξεται.

1062–63 del. Pierson

Medea begs her *θυμός* to spare the children and for a second time (*cf.* 1045) contemplates taking them with her into exile, but at once rejects the idea. Why so? Because, say the critics, she refuses to allow the children to fall into the hands of the Corinthians. And so we can point to a contradiction: the Corinthians will not kill them if she takes them with her, so that this particular fear cannot logically be the basis of her decision not to take them.²

The inconsistency has, however, been imported into the text by a misunderstanding: in lines 1059–61 Medea does not say that she will not allow her children to be put to death cruelly by her enemies the Corinthians, but that she will not allow her children to be humiliated by enemies in general—that is, to be subjected to the treatment which orphans could expect in exile. And this does constitute a logical reason for her decision.³

It is moreover a reason that carries great weight. For even before the action starts we are told that the family were displaced persons, both parents being in exile (35, 166f, 551). It is to escape from the helplessness and poverty of their situation that Jason forms his new connection with the Corinthian royal house (551–56). His action, he says, might have saved Medea and the family (595–97); and although Medea repudiates his decision, she does not disagree with his assessment of their predicament as that of friendless exiles (880f). Thus when he betrays her, her position is one of extreme isolation, for she cannot, as other women might do, fall back on her kin for support

² Erbse (*supra* n.1) 70–72 avoids the *non sequitur* by regarding 1057f as containing not a real project but a seductive illusion. In his view the illusion is not rejected on the grounds of Corinthian threats to the children, but presumably—he is not explicit—because Medea recognises it for what it is and dismisses it accordingly. She then goes on to declare that she will not let the Corinthians kill them, on the assumption that their death must follow the attack on the princess. However, this sequence of thought is unacceptable, since the oath and οὔτοι . . . must be a counter to the otherwise unrejected appeal of 1056. Incidentally, the alleged inconsistency occurs *within* the suspect passage, which does not enhance its rôle as a sign of interpolation; *cf.* Manuwald (*supra* n.1) 48, who has the interpolator ‘forget’ that Medea could take the children with her at line 1045.

³ I owe this interpretation to a suggestion made by Professor A. Thornton of Otago University. Close is J. Baumert, ENIOI ΑΘΕΤΟΥΣΙΝ (Tübingen 1968) 190 n.2, who says that, since at divorce children legally belong to the father, Medea’s children would be under threat at Athens; but I believe that he still means threats on their lives from the Corinthians.

(255–58). And when, on top of this, comes her expulsion from Corinth, she has nowhere to turn; the chorus sympathetically develops the hopelessness of her plight (357–63, 435–45); they would sooner die than face such a life (645–53). Obviously we are meant to see exile as a terrible part of Medea’s calamity.

And the children are to share this affliction. Jason’s apparent readiness to permit this shocks others (74f), and Creon yields against his better judgement to the appeal by Medea for time to make some provision for their needs (340–47). This is the culminating point of Medea’s abuse of Jason (512–15), and he himself wants to offer help to her and the children in their desperate plight (461–63, 610–14).

The prospects of the children in exile are, then, uniformly regarded as wretched in the extreme. No substantial alleviation is envisaged in Aegeus’ offer of a refuge to Medea, for the children are not mentioned in this connection, and the insecurity of her own dependent status is vividly brought out in her insistence that he take a formal oath (735–41). Enemies who might humiliate the children in exile certainly exist: she specifies the house of Pelias as well as the Corinthians (734f); but the miseries of orphans and exiles is a general theme in Greek literature, and it is the degradation of such a life for her sons that in her eyes makes their survival no viable alternative.⁴ As her sense of pride contributes to her demand for revenge (404–06), so it diminishes the force of this counter-argument. She envisages nothing but humiliation for them should they remain in Corinth with their father, and would reject that (781f); all the more, given the great emphasis developed in the previous scenes, ought an audience be ready to feel the validity of this consideration in Medea’s mind as an objection to the plan to save them by taking them with her out of Corinth. It is not, of course, meant as sufficient reason for killing them: revenge on Jason is her only motive for that; yet it does serve to exclude the alternative suggested by motherly love. Medea holds a view in common with Megara at *Heracles* 302ff, who also considers pleading for the lives of her children with the tyrant intent on murdering them, but discards the plan (302–07):

⁴ For the helplessness of orphans see *Il.* 22.487–99: even if Astyanax survives the war, as an orphan he will be cut off from his fellows, must rely on scant charity from his father’s friends, and will be bullied by those with parents to back them. The dangers of children in exile, or at home while their fathers are exiled, are vividly portrayed at Lysias 12.97–99, with a use of *ὑβρίζεσθαι* very pertinent to our passage (98): οἱ δὲ παῖδες ὑμῶν, ὅσοι μὲν ἐνθάδε ἦσαν, ὑπὸ τούτων ἂν ὑβρίζοντο, οἱ δ’ ἐπὶ ξένης μικρῶν ἂν ἔνεκα συμβολαίων ἐδούλευον ἐρημιά τῶν ἐπικουρησόντων. For exile in Euripides see *Phoen.* 388–407, esp. 400.

ἤδη δ' ἐσῆλθέ μ' εἰ παραιτησαίμεθα
 φυγὰς τέκνων τῶνδ'· ἀλλὰ καὶ τόδ' ἄθλιον,
 πενία σὺν οἰκτρῶ περιβαλεῖν σωτηρίαν·
 305 ὡς τὰ ξένων πρόσωπα φεύγουσιν φίλοις
 ἐν ἡμαρ ἠδὲ βλέμμ' ἔχειν φασὶν μόνον.
 τόλμα μεθ' ἡμῶν θάνατον, ὅς μένει σ' ὄμως.

The life of exiles, for which alone they might be saved, is not worth living. Both women are proud and have high traditions to live up to. On similar grounds they reject a softer alternative before pressing on with the course that principle dictates. The parallel from *Heracles* clearly shows that the consideration should be accorded sufficient weight to figure at this crucial stage of Medea's deliberations.

Nor is there anything in details of language that rules out this interpretation. Admittedly Medea's particular enemies are Jason and Creon, and she has just used the words ἐχθροὺς . . . τοὺς ἐμούς (1050) in a way that naturally refers to them. But it is doctrinaire to exclude a wider reference at line 1060. Indeed, Jason cannot be included anyway, for he is no threat to his children, so that the audience would be less inclined to take ἐχθροῖς in the more restricted sense, and the wider is helped by the absence of the definite article. The oath at line 1059 properly introduces her declaration: to swear by the spirits of vengeance is to proclaim that the supreme principle they represent will not be betrayed for so little gain.⁵ And now καθυβρίσαι has its proper sense of 'degrade' or 'dishonour', as it has at lines 782 and 1380, without the extra implication of 'put to death' with which it has been saddled in this passage on the reading of the scholiast. Medea refuses to expose her children to a life in which they would be vulnerable to the sort of shameful and insufferable outrage to which she herself has been subjected (255: ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἀπολις οὐσ' ὑβρίζομαι).

II

Line 1060 is, however, only too easily misunderstood, and someone who jumped to the obvious but wrong conclusion that it refers to the Corinthians had to explain why Medea thought that they would mistreat the children. A reason was not far to seek, for later in the play revenge from that quarter is regarded as inevitable should the children fall into their hands (1238f, 1301–05); this gives a motive that can be

⁵ The inappropriate use of this oath as an introduction to the declaration that she will not let the Corinthians kill the children is an important part of the criticism of these lines; see G. Müller, *StItal* 25 (1951) 76.

read back into Medea's monologue, buttressed by the marginal quotation at this point of the couplet from 1240f, which in due course becomes incorporated into the text as lines 1062f. The result is a strain on the sense of *καθυβρίσαι* and on the sequence of thought: what prompts Medea to think of Corinthian revenge at this stage?

Lines 1062f are, of course, at home only in the later passage, where the context explains why she will kill the children herself. She is going to kill them anyway—they must die for the sake of revenge (1240)—but if she delays she will be caught and the children killed by others more cruelly (1237f). This is the way in which, when the deed is actually upon her, she steels herself to do it. But once one sees that line 1061 does not refer to the death of the children at all, then her declaration at 1062f that she, *as their mother*, will kill them herself, is unmotivated and is clearly adrift from its proper context: it only makes sense if *other* killers are envisaged, as in the later speech. Thus lines 1062f are rightly removed.

What is the effect on the sequence of Medea's thought? The meaning of *πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κοῦκ ἐκφεύξεται* (1064) is literally: "In any case this has been done and will not get away." *ταῦτα* refers to her plan as so far completed, the most important element of which is the acceptance of the poisoned gifts by the princess. The word is vague, certainly, but is helped by the similar usage at line 1013: *ταῦτα γὰρ θεοὶ κάγω κακῶς φρονοῦσ' ἐμηχανησάμην*. Here it is also the subject of *ἐκφεύξεται*, which should be understood in the sense in which it is used several times in Demosthenes with, as subjects, *τὰ πράγματα*, *ὅσα ἐβουλήθητε*, *περὶ ὧν βουλευέσθε*.⁶ The use of *ἐκφεύξεται* in situations involving success or failure in achieving goals and carrying out projects makes it suitable for the present context; and since *ταῦτα* has already been used as the subject of a verb denoting action, it fits perfectly here also. There is no problem with *καὶ δὴ . . .* (1065f), which

⁶ Since *ἐκφεύξεται* is not passive in Attic, the only other plausible subject is the princess, but she is virtually ruled out because she is not mentioned until the next lines. For the Demosthenic sense, perhaps a metaphor from hunting, see J. E. Sandys, *The First Philippic and Olynthiacs of Demosthenes* (London 1897) 187; cf. 3.3, 14.15, 18.33, 19.123. I quote 5.2: *συμβαίνει . . . τὰ πράγματα καὶ περὶ ὧν βουλευέσθ' ἐκφεύγειν ὑμᾶς*. The context is always political, and the verb is always transitive; neither point seems to be a serious objection, since it is clearly an imaginative expression in Demosthenes, and the verb is frequently intransitive. Alternatively one could write *κοῦ μ' ἐκφεύξεται* if necessary. There is a somewhat similar idea of something sought 'getting away' at Soph. *OT* 111. The context of planning and action in Demosthenes readily explains *πέπρακται*—this much at any rate has been done and will not slip through her fingers—whereas with other interpretations the meaning is problematic; see Reeve, *GRBS* 13 (1972) 260.

follows on correctly, vividly expressing Medea's conviction that the death of the princess is already taking place.

Given this, it can hardly be said that excision of 1062f spoils the clarity of the passage by removing the most explicit reference to the murder of the children, thus leaving Medea's change of mind undeclared. Surely what we have is sufficient: "I will sacrifice them; ah, spare them, they will be your joy in exile; by the spirits of vengeance, I will not surrender them to humiliation by enemies; the thing has been done and will not fail, the princess is dying." This is not explicit; but hearing it, an audience whose minds are not mesmerised by the prospect of Corinthian vengeance in line 1061 would have no difficulty at all in following the logic of Medea's thought.

III

1071 ὦ φιλότατη χεῖρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα
καὶ σχῆμα καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενὲς τέκνων.
εὐδαιμονοῖτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε
πατὴρ ἀφείλετ'.

Fault has been found with ἐκεῖ and ἐνθάδε as being incompatible with the implications of the first part of the monologue. By "there" Medea and the audience understand 'in death', and by "here" they understand 'on earth'; but the words must also have an acceptable meaning for the children to whom they are addressed and who believe, as we know from lines 1021–24, that they are to continue living in Corinth. They must hear the words, for Medea is embracing them as she speaks, but at first sight it looks as if "here" should mean 'in Corinth', which runs counter to their earlier assumption and leaves no intelligible reference for "there." And so it has been claimed that the two parts of the monologue must be the work of different hands.⁷

A survey of locations in the play shows, however, that "here" does not inevitably mean for the children 'in Corinth', but refers naturally to the house in front of which they are standing, which has been their family home until now; "there" refers to their father's new home in which they will live when Medea has gone. They will understand her words to mean: 'My blessings on you, but in the other house; Father has put an end to our life together in this house'.

Jason is in fact already married (19) and living elsewhere with his new bride (378–82). He may be occupying a part of the palace complex, since the robes are to be taken to a "rich house" (969, although

⁷ See Reeve (*supra* n.1) 60.

Creon himself seems to be at some distance, to judge by line 1177). In any event, at the end of the play Medea tells Jason to “go home” and bury his wife (1394). It is clear that Jason is living elsewhere and that, since the children have just made a visit, they know it. It is almost inescapable to suppose that when they are released from exile, they will go to live with their father. There is no sign in the text of the new wife moving into Medea’s house, which, in the family’s straitened circumstances, should hardly be visualised as grand. The children, then, may well take a coming move for granted, and ἐκεῖ for them will have the same reference as does τὰκεῖθεν (1117) for Medea: that is, the house called νυμφικοὶ δόμοι (1137), which includes women’s quarters with the princess installed (1143), and from which one of Jason’s servants brings Medea news (1118).

The likely supposition is in any case supported by indications in the text that Euripides wants his audience to understand the situation in this way. When the tutor has been sent inside to see to the children’s daily needs, an expression which itself may be thought to point beyond today in particular, Medea tells them that they have a city and a *home*, in which they will live *when they have left her* (1022f: δῶμ’, ἐν ᾧ λιπόντες ἀθλίαν ἐμὲ οἰκήσεται αἰεὶ), while she will go into exile. The participle is appropriate to someone going away; she is departing, but so are they, and since they and everybody else know that they are staying in the same city, the *home* in which they will live can only be a new house. Similar support for what is in any case the natural assumption occurs at line 1039, where the participle ἀποστάντες implies a change of location as well as of life-style.

When Medea contemplates taking them with her into exile, there is a different contrast to the fore, namely that between Athens and Corinth; in this context ἐκεῖ (1058) naturally refers to Athens. The children are offstage at this point, and when they return she simply takes up the original standpoint again and uses the same double meaning, while their expectation that they will be leaving this house anyway establishes the context in which “there” and “here” are understood in terms of contrast between houses in Corinth. Thus the writer of line 1073 is very much aware of what he must do to maintain consistency with the first part of the speech.

IV

On the next two problems I support a position argued by others. In connection with the first of these, the movements of the children during the monologue, I think that what the text offers is almost

certainly unsatisfactory and that lines 1069f should be emended. As they stand in context they read:

1067 ἀλλ', εἶμι γὰρ δὴ τλημονεστάτην ὁδὸν
καὶ τοῦσδε πέμψω τλημονεστέραν ἔτι,
παῖδας προσειπεῖν βούλομαι· δότ', ὦ τέκνα,
δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιᾶν χέρα.

The fundamental information is as follows: the children arrive with their tutor (1002), who then goes in, leaving them with Medea (1021). She tells them to go indoors (1053), to give her their hands (1069), and to go (1076).

The difficulty is that if they obey the order to go indoors at line 1053, they are not present to hear the request to give their hands.⁸ We can hardly have them disobeying the order to go in, for their disobedience is unmotivated and would be a quite extraordinary breach of tragic convention. Further, they would be on stage during scarcely mistakable references to their death (1057–61) and an explicit statement of that of the princess (1065f), which makes nonsense of the ambiguity with which they are addressed earlier. Nor will it do to say that they are distracted from leaving by her cry at line 1056 but still do not overhear,⁹ for her cry can only explain their lingering on stage by requiring their attention at the very moment when the content of her remarks requires their inattention. To contrive to send off auditors in order to allow a soliloquy may be artificial, but it makes sense; to contrive that they do not go off when sent, and yet still fail to hear, is a contradiction in conventions, for it cancels the need to send them off in the first place.

They must, therefore, go indoors at line 1053, and they will not be expected to appear without further instructions. Of the two main possibilities the first is that an attendant is at hand to take the first half of line 1069 as a directive to bring the children out. Servants do tend to materialise unexpectedly in tragedy as required, but the presence of one here, after the tutor has been dismissed expressly in order to leave Medea and the children alone, is more disturbing than, say, at lines 820–23 (*cf.* 774), when a messenger is needed to summon Jason, and must therefore be privy to the whole plot. The second possibility is preferable, namely, to accept Dodds's emendation δεῦτ' ὦ τέκνα· for

⁸ D. Bain, *Actors and Audience* (Oxford 1977) 25, supporting deletion, maintains that "this uncertainty and awkwardness of the staging is one of the strongest arguments against the authenticity of 1056–80."

⁹ *Cf.* H. Diller, *Hermes* 94 (1966) 269; Bain (*supra* n.8) 26f, though preferring excision, offers tentative support with reference to *Bacch.* 809. But there Pentheus does pay attention, whereas the children here do not.

δότη', ὦ τέκνα (1069).¹⁰ This replaces "Give, children, give . . ." with "Come, children; give . . ." There will be a pause at the end of the line while they appear. The summons is admittedly somewhat bald, but perhaps no more than it need be; since they have just gone in, it would be odd to have elaboration of the sort found at lines 894f, where Medea is staging a feigned reunion with great pomp and circumstance. The emendation involves minimal change, the corruption is readily explained from δότη' in the next line, and serious difficulties are overcome with maximum economy.¹¹ The only problem is lexical, but this may not be insuperable. Of δεῦτε it used to be said that it is found only once in Attic, but since this is on Medea's own lips in an address to these same children (894), from which editors remove it simply because of its rarity, the occurrence itself might be thought to counterbalance its rarity as support for the emendation under consideration. And since it now is found in regular iambic lines of Aeschylus' *Dicetyulci* and Menander's *Dyscolus*,¹² it is a distinct possibility here. Of course, with a word so rare as this doubt must remain, but with this emendation available I suggest that the uncertainty of the staging of the children's movements cannot really qualify, *in itself*, as a strong argument against the authenticity of the passage.

V

Whether the final problem has any bearing on the question of authenticity or not depends on the degree of consistency which one

¹⁰ E. R. Dodds, *Humanitas* 4 (1952) 14.

¹¹ Bain (*supra* n.8) 25 says that the emendation does not really solve the problem. Why not? No other objection is raised except by Reeve (*supra* n.1: 56), who suggests that it is "unduly peremptory." But the passages to which he refers for contrast are, apart from *Med.* 894, first entries where more elaboration is appropriate than our passage warrants. At *De myst.* 150 Andocides explains that he is going to summon prominent democrats in support; the actual summons is very plain: "Come here, Anytus, Cephalus," etc. Four steps in our passage may be compared with corresponding steps at *Ar. Nub.* 78–81: (1) I want to speak to them ~ I want to wake him. (2) Come ~ how shall I wake him? (Medea simply calls them, for, unlike Strepsiades, she has no need to be tentative). (3) Children ~ Pheidippides (with repetition—he is asleep). (4) Give me your hands ~ kiss me, give me your hand (in both cases the command follows the summons directly). The similarities are obvious, and the differences only serve to reveal the appropriateness of each sequence to its context.

¹² Aesch. fr.864.18 (Mette); Men. *Dysc.* 866; the late tragedian Cn. Pompeius Macer (*TrGF* I 180F1) has a mother addressing her ominously unaware children: δεῦτε ὦ τέκνα . . . τί προσλάξεσθε . . . μου; In view of these passages, J. C. Kamerbeek, *Mnemosyne* SER.4 39(1986)96, doubts if it is defensible to remove δεῦτε from *Med.* 894. Professor W. G. Arnott draws my attention to a possible occurrence in comedy: C. Austin, *Comicorum graecorum fragmenta in papyris reperta* (Berlin/New York 1973) fr.347.2.

expects of a great poet, and that is a matter which involves subjective judgement (1078–80).

καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἶα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά,
θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,
ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

Fault has been found with Medea's summary here of her dilemma as a conflict between passion and reason, because the word chosen for the latter, *βουλεύματα*, has been used with some regularity in the play to denote her plans for revenge, to which her passion is not opposed, and because in any case her tragedy does not admit of analysis in terms of this conflict.¹³

It seems to me that these criticisms are too rigid and that the key to a correct interpretation of these lines is provided by the observation of H. Lloyd-Jones that *βουλεύματα* is not in fact used exclusively of Medea's schemes for revenge, but takes its colour from its context.¹⁴ On this approach one may say that, although the word has been used earlier in the speech of plans for revenge (1044f, 1048), nevertheless Medea has just been considering taking her children with her into exile, and the phrasing of lines 1044f implies that this proposal amounts to new *βουλεύματα*. Medea plans on both sides, and in the present context, after considering escape with her children, she rejects the idea because of the inexorable demands of her passion (1056f); as she bids farewell and kisses them until she can bear their sight no longer, she admits that she knows what evil she is doing but that her passion overcomes her plans. Surely those plans are any projects formed on the basis of recognition that to kill the children is evil and therefore to be avoided. The project relevant in the context is the escape with them into exile; over this plan revenge takes precedence.

It is not necessary to exclude a moral sense from *κακά* in line 1078. The boundary between prudential and moral applications of Greek value terms is no less imprecise than with 'good' and 'bad' in English;

¹³ See Zwierlein (*supra* n.1) 34, who rightly rejects the strange idea of A. Dihle, *SBHeid* (1977) 13, that by the end of this speech Medea has decided through motherly love not to kill the children; surely it is intolerable that the necessary subsequent change of mind before the actual murder is left unexplained.

¹⁴ Lloyd-Jones (*supra* n.1) 58. His interpretation of *βουλεύματα* as 'counsels' that derive from Medea's knowledge that what she is about to do is evil I modify only to the extent that I interpret τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων to include a specific plan to which the audience has been given access, namely her plan to take the children with her into exile. Manuwald (*supra* n.1) 59 objects that *βουλεύματα* has not been used of the rescue plan, although admitting that it is implied at lines 1044f, and denies that it is colourless because hitherto it has been used either of Medea's revenge or of the attack of her enemies. This seems to me rather to confirm the contention that the word is not restricted to Medea's revenge; see 270, 449, 886, as well as 372, 769, 772, 1044, 1048.

the *κακά* that Medea is going to *do* may exhibit a moral aspect not relevant to the *κακά* by which she is *overcome* (1077). Indeed it is highly desirable that the moral element be felt. When Medea first announces her plan to murder the children she recognises that what she intends is “unholy” (τλᾶσ’ ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον, 796); and although the main accent subsequently falls on her self-inflicted suffering (e.g. 818, 996, 1361), it is not forgotten by the chorus (850), Jason (1346), or Medea herself (1383) that such a deed is an atrocity. It is therefore entirely appropriate that at this point, when Medea expresses greatest awareness of the implications of her act, she should acknowledge the enormity as well as the misery of her course.

So we should not be over-systematic and rule out the clash of passion and reason as inconsistent with the analysis of Medea’s predicament elsewhere in the play. She is convinced that she has been wronged and in taking revenge she is implementing (however barbarically) a Greek principle of justice. If in the main the tragedy lies in the inevitable cost of pain to herself of her commitment to revenge, that does not preclude her recognition of wrong done to the children. It is one aspect of her experience of her dilemma, and her course is only very inadequately characterised as right but painful. It is critical despotism to deny Euripides the chance to illumine this facet briefly, powerfully, and in due place. His dramatic method, in this play and elsewhere,¹⁵ surely accommodates such highlighting: already in the prologue we have heard that Medea hates her children; since then we have seen her use them as pawns in her strategy; now that we know how much she loves them we need to feel certain that she understands the enormity of her action, even while she affirms that her dominant motive is an irresistible passion for revenge which she sees as the most destructive force in human life.

Medea is generalising at the close of the episode, both about her own course of action and about human life as a whole. It is, we may feel, a pity that she does not use a word other than “plans” for this purpose, for though it suits the immediate context of escape with the children perfectly, it has been used five times in the play of her schemes for revenge—when, of course, it does not provide a suitable contrast with the passion that inspires that revenge. But this should only count as an argument against authenticity if Euripides can be shown to have a marked commitment to consistency of this sort. If a friendly critic had pointed out to Euripides that Medea is typically a planner for revenge,

¹⁵ See e.g. *Alc.* 694–705, where Pheres launches into a sudden and unexpected imputation of cowardice in Admetus’ acceptance of his wife’s sacrifice. Admetus hardly comes out of the particular confrontation well, and yet it is a presupposition of the plot that he feels only grief, not remorse, at the loss of Alcestis.

not against it, and that this limits the application of the generalisation, he might possibly have sworn softly and chosen a different word. But I doubt if he would have bothered.

VI

None of the main points at which our passage has been attacked reveals the weaknesses that should justify wholesale excision. With the spectre of the Corinthians exorcised from line 1060, the removal of the intrusive couplet 1062f, the recognition of the proper meaning of *ἐκφεύξεται* and *βουλευμάτων*, and the acceptance of the emendation *δεῦτ'*—not drastic measures by any means—the passage is back on its feet. And once on its feet it more than holds its own against the alternative.¹⁶ Without it, Medea's farewell is curtailed without blessing or embrace; with it, her farewell is duly complete. Without it, moving as the first part of the monologue is, we never see Medea *unreservedly* loving her children, as the action of the play demands if we are to feel her as tragic; with it, the final embrace leaves no doubt as to her love and her torment. Without it, we have a Medea whose purpose never wavers except for a moment; with it, we feel the overwhelming force within her which drives her to the slaughter of her innocents. Without it, there is half a scene; with it, there is a structure built round the focal private plea to her *θυμός*, which is hardly conceivable as anything but an organic unity. Such considerations are not objective arguments for the authenticity of the passage; but they make those arguments worth looking for. If I might urge the advantage of my treatment, it allows us to keep all the tempest of Medea's struggle with her feelings, as defenders of the passage want, without having her surrender rationality, which the critics rightly will not countenance.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
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¹⁶ The case against lines 1040–55 brought by Hübner (*supra* n.1) rests on the assumption that the following lines are spurious; it fails automatically if they are vindicated. Further, he is obliged to have the children sent indoors at line 1020, despite the address to them that immediately ensues, a defiance of the obvious which is all the more incredible in view of the subtlety of the arguments brought against the suspected lines. However, his demonstration of stylistic unity in the monologue from line 1040 is a problem if lines 1056–80 are spurious. And from a dramatic point of view, surely it is better to allow Medea no back-sliding at all than to lame her for one brief moment with doubt (1042–48); this I find utterly feeble and quite unworthy of Euripides. But neither do I find it credible that Euripides, having come so far, would evade the passionate confrontation of the mother with the children whom she is going to kill.