

# Reading the *Medea*

## Fergus Kerr OP

The *Medea*—in a Japanese version—performed outdoors—after dusk—in the neo-Classical courtyard of the Old College Edinburgh—late in what had been a cold and wet August: was it worth buying a ticket for *that*—even if Yukio Ninagawa's production of *Macbeth* had been the sensation of the 1985 Festival? After all, that had been indoors, and the Shakespeare play had been part of my mind for over forty years. You had to choose between Greek and German, in my day, at a Scottish grammar school, and I had opted for German (entirely because I feared the principal Classics master). But then—I understand Japanese as little as I can follow spoken Greek, and would not that be the case for nearly everyone in the audience? We should all be relying on the eloquence of gesture, lighting, tone, and perhaps music. It seemed advisable, for all that, to study the text in advance of the performance. What follows is an attempt to capture my reading of the *Medea*. For the first time in my life I found myself gripped by the greatness of the play. I used, and am quoting, Philip Vellacott's translation for Penguin Classics, and my interpretation is wholly dependent on a marvellous essay by Bernard Knox.<sup>1</sup>

Euripides, whose dates are *c.* 480—406 B.C., offered the *Medea* at the Athens festival drama competition in 431 B.C. He won third prize. What we know about him would go on a postcard; it has no perceptible bearing on the play. It is much more important to remember that the Parthenon—the temple of the Maiden Athene—had just been completed on the Acropolis: the huge statue of the goddess, in gold and ivory, was installed, and Phidias was also supervising the final details of the frieze which is now mostly in the British Museum. The Peloponnesian War was just about to break out. The great monument to artistic containment of the goddess was completed just as the cruel war that ended in the subjugation of Athens was about to begin. But the tension between savagery and civilization would no doubt have been Euripides' theme in any case.

The play is about a woman's feelings when her husband leaves her for a new, younger wife. It begins with the family nanny alone on the stage, ploddingly explaining that Medea has been set aside by Jason now that he is going to marry the local mayor's daughter. 'If only they had never gone ...': but for the fact that these *men* (line 5) had gone off in search of the Golden Fleece none of this would ever have happened. But

with her *thumos* literally ‘knocked out with love for Jason’ (line 8), and we shall have to come back to the key word *thumos* (passion, spirit), Medea left her native land and now lives in exile in Corinth, ‘with her man and children’ (line 11). She has come from Colchis, a country at the eastern end of the Black Sea, bounded by the Caucasus. She has sacrificed her own home and native culture to make her life entirely with Jason. She is now totally estranged from her own family, and this is due to her attachment to her husband. This has been amply demonstrated: she engineered her brother’s death when he pursued them and got Jason his birthright by arranging a second murder. The point is that Medea has done terrible things for Jason’s sake. The family—they have two sons—have settled happily in Corinth, although they are foreigners (Jason comes from Thessaly, in northern Greece). And, according to the nanny,

to Jason she is all

Obedience—and in marriage that’s the saving thing,  
When a wife obediently accepts her husband’s will.

More literally, Medea does everything for Jason’s benefit, and the nanny’s ideal of a happy marriage is exemplified: ‘when the woman never stands apart from the man’ (line 15).

Medea’s loyalty has now been betrayed:

But now her world has turned to enmity, and wounds her  
Where her affection’s deepest.

Literally, in a single Greek line: ‘Now all has turned to hatred, and what was most deeply loved is now diseased’. The nanny goes into a long and graphic description of the rejected woman’s grief: weeping, appealing hysterically to the marriage vows, refusing to eat, lying face to the floor, ‘no more than rock or sea-wave’ able to listen to her friend’s counsel, and lamenting her father,

her own land and home,

Which she betrayed and left, to come here with this man  
Who now spurns and insults her.

In the isolation of betrayal, as the nanny notes in words that prefigure the terrible outcome of Medea’s grief, ‘she hates even her sons—seeing them no longer delights her’ (line 36). But we are going to see how deep her maternal affection ultimately is.

The boys now enter with their minder—in the words of the Loeb translation, dating from 1912: ‘A trusted servant, responsible for keeping the boys out of harm’s way: he was present at their sports, accompanied them to and from school, and never let them be out of his sight. A similar institution is familiar to Englishmen resident in India’. He hails the nanny in these memorable Loeb words—‘O ancient chattel of my mistress’ home’; and she replies with ‘O grey attendant thou of Jason’s sons’. The dramatic upshot of their comic moralizing is that their

jobs are under threat: the gossip is that Jason's new father-in-law is insisting that his ex-wife and their sons should leave the town, and Jason seems unlikely to oppose this. The nanny admonishes the minder to keep the boys out of their mother's way: she is 'dangerous' (line 44), she has been glaring at them with the eyes of an angry bull (line 92).

At this point Medea is heard wailing, and the nanny hustles the boys off with their minder. Medea is heard screaming at them—'You are cursed—your mother is hated—perish with your father and the whole family'. We, the audience, wonder, in the nanny's words, why Medea's children should be so implicated in her husband's offence—we are being prepared for the dreadful possibility that she will have to take their lives in order to punish him. The nanny's fears for the boys modulate into somewhat self-congratulatory relief that she herself does not have the burden of Medea's emotional life—'For moderation is the great thing, and to behave moderately is far better for mortals—what is excessive never brings profit to mortals' (line 125 ff.). The 'Mean' may be preferable, but Medea is in the grip of something that exceeds all bounds.

Her cries sound again from behind the scenes. The Chorus of local women now enter and join the nanny, sympathizing with Medea's plight but longing to moderate her anguish:

I wish she would come out here and let us see her  
And talk to her; if she would listen  
Perhaps she would drop this fierce resentful spirit,  
This passionate indignation.  
As a friend I am anxious to do whatever I can.  
Go, nurse, persuade her to come out to us.  
Tell her we are all on her side.  
Hurry, before she does harm ...

They want to reason with her, to 'talk to her'; but her 'heavy spirit, her anger, and her temper where things are most deeply felt' all suggest that they will be defeated. She is like a mad bull, the nanny disconsolately repeats, as she goes off to fetch Medea.

Medea now comes on stage, cool, perfectly composed and self-possessed, and addresses the local women at great length on the subject of women's place in society. Some readers, Alan Elliott among them, think that the striking contrast between the desperate cries from behind the scenes and her calmness when she appears either demonstrates Medea's wiliness in suiting her manner to the needs of the moment or else must be put down to some convention about the necessary formality of the hero's opening speech. Bernard Knox is surely right, however, when he insists that this magnificent speech, while of course winning the women over to her side, has the deeper dramatic function of offering Medea's explanation for the violence of her outraged feelings. Nothing can excuse her murdering her sons to punish their father, but in this

speech Euripides allows her to give some rational account of the feelings that are to drive her to infanticide.

She starts by telling her listeners that she wants to die—‘Jason was my whole life’: more literally, ‘Knowing him was everything for me—my husband—who has turned out the worst of men’ (lines 228—9). She then goes on as follows:

Surely, of all creatures that have life and will, we women  
Are the most wretched. When, for an extravagant sum,  
We have bought a husband, we must then accept him as  
Possessor of our body.

Having paid a dowry or at least made something like the sacrifice of her own family and home to ‘buy’ a man, the woman then finds that she has to take him as master of her body, *despotes somatos* as the Greek says at this point. And then she has to learn new ways:

Still more, a foreign woman, coming among new laws,  
New customs, needs the skill of magic, to find out  
What her home could not teach her, how to treat the man  
Whose bed she shares. And if in this exacting toil  
We are successful, and our husband does not struggle  
Under the marriage yoke, our life is enviable.

Medea underlines her foreignness again, stressing her isolation from her own people and thus her greater need for her husband’s loyalty:

If a man grows tired  
Of the company at home, he can go out, and find  
A cure for tediousness. We wives are forced to look  
To one man only. And, they tell us, we at home  
Live free from danger, they go out to battle: fools!  
I’d rather stand three times in the front line than bear  
One child.

Composed though they were by a man in the middle of the fifth century B.C., these lines, tinged with irony and entirely free of self-pity, surely voice the feelings of generation after generation of women down to our own time. A man is free to go out, to turn to some friend or comrade (masculine terms both: Medea is not complaining of his seeking other women); ‘but we have to look to one person alone’ (line 247). The social conditions which isolate women and greatly narrow their intellectual and emotional relationships have changed very little in more than two thousand years, in most parts of the world. Medea’s frustration here totally contradicts the family nanny’s vision of a happy marriage. It is precisely because she has sacrificed the possibility of greater intellectual and emotional experience in order to make her life with Jason that Medea feels so deeply angry at his betraying her. It is, as the play goes on to show, precisely because she is such an *intelligent* woman that she is going to end in infanticide. If she had not given up so much, or willingly accepted such

restrictions on herself as wife and mother, her protest against her disloyal husband would not have taken such a savage form.

Creon now appears, the local chieftain, father of Jason's new wife, a blustering man of the decision-making class. Briskly he orders Medea to leave the town, taking her children with her into exile. When she quite reasonably asks for a reason he can say only that he is afraid of what she might do to his daughter—'You're a clever woman'. Words connected with *sophia*, cleverness, great intellectual capacity, come in almost every other line in this scene, as Medea laments the climate of suspicion that surrounds clever women. Creon tells her that he feels much safer with a woman, or for that matter a man, who is easily provoked and quickly enraged, *oxythumos*, to someone who is slow to speak and *sophos* (lines 319–20). It is as if a clever man is bad enough but a clever woman an unbearable threat. Ironically enough, of course, Medea's rage will be all the more destructive because of her capacity to argue with herself and to perceive what will most hurt her husband. Now she appeals for one more day in Corinth, to make arrangements for going into exile, and Creon's original determination to have her out at once is easily subverted. Medea has no difficulty in manipulating him—in her own word, she 'fawned' on him (line 368), and his paternal vanity, when she appeals to it, makes him yield.

When Creon leaves the stage Medea takes the Chorus of local women into her confidence, telling them that she wants to kill him, his daughter, and her faithless husband. They voice their approbation. Inspired by her 'manly' resolution, so to speak, and sharing her contempt for her husband's 'feminine' fickleness, they challenge these stereotypes that are as dominant today as they ever were. Faithlessness is no longer the supposed prerogative of women; women too are going to display the valour of heroes. The whole social order will go into reverse:

The very rivers are running upstream,  
the right order of everything is reversed—  
it is *men* now who deal in treachery ...

Such is the lesson of Jason's faithlessness—but then:

Mythology will go into reverse,  
honour will be predicated of *women*—  
*women* will no longer be the theme of malicious tales ...

Then the ode continues:

Male poets of past ages, with their ballads  
Of faithless women, shall go out of fashion;  
For Phoebus, Prince of Music,  
Never bestowed the lyric inspiration  
Through female understanding—  
Or we'd find themes for poems,  
We'd counter with our epics against man.

Oh, Time is old; and in his store of tales  
Men figure no less famous  
Or infamous than women.

The whole passage gives rise to a multiplicity of translations, so dense is the Greek, but the essential point is singularly clear: while there had been a few famous women poets (Sappho of Lesbos for one), Greek mythology and literature were composed by men, and certain male prejudices and stereotypes show up at almost every turn. Medea's story is to be a turning-point, so the Chorus hopes.

A woman too is capable of making a heroic sacrifice in order to reaffirm the dispensation of justice and right. It turns out that she will have to sacrifice her own children: we are going to be left in no doubt about what this costs Medea. The three men with whom she is confronted in the course of the play are all in one way or another her masters. Each appears on stage, bouncing with male authority, confidently issuing regal edicts which will all turn to ashes. Creon has already been persuaded by her arguments to go against his fears and let her stay one more day in the town: a fatal concession. The man would have done better to trust his instincts, as a woman, according to the stereotype, would have done; but he listens to Medea's reasons. Jason now bounces on stage, her ex-husband, loftily moralizing in a speech of almost unbelievable psychological truth, brilliantly translated by Philip Vellacott:

I have often noticed—this is not the first occasion—  
What fatal results follow from ungoverned rage.  
You could have stayed in Corinth, still lived in this house,  
If you had quietly accepted the decisions  
Of those in power. Instead, you talked like a fool, and now  
You are banished. Well, your angry words don't upset *me*;  
Go on as long as you like reciting Jason's crimes.  
But after your abuse of the King and the princess  
Think yourself lucky to be let off with banishment.  
I have tried all the time to calm them down; but you  
Would not give up your ridiculous tirades against  
The royal family. So, you're banished. However, I  
Will not desert a friend. I have carefully considered  
Your problem, and come now, in spite of everything,  
To see that you and the children are not sent away  
With an empty purse, or unprovided ... You no doubt  
Hate me: but I could never bear ill-will to you.

How many wives (one wonders), as a marriage is breaking up, have listened to something like this unbearably plausible rigmarole of patronizing rebuke, self-righteous disdain, and offers of 'friendship' or anyway of *money*? Here is a man being as reasonable as any man could

be, in these unhappy circumstances. It is just a pity that the woman cannot show equal reasonableness and accept that the marriage is over.

Medea responds with a lengthy speech which is a dignified blend of passion and reason, starting with these lines:

You filthy coward! —if I knew any worse name  
For such unmanliness I'd use it—so, you've come!  
You, my worst enemy, come to me! Oh, it's not courage,  
This looking friends in the face after betraying them.  
It is not even audacity; it's a disease,  
The worst a man can have, pure shamelessness. However,  
It is as well you came; to say what I have to say  
Will ease my heart; to hear it said will make you wince.

Courage, daring, and the like, are of course the characteristically manly virtues, but here Euripides allows Medea to redefine unmanliness, *anandria*, in terms of shamelessness, *anaideia*, 'lack of respect, especially for some other person'. Such lack of conscience in personal dealings, Medea says, is the worst disease that can afflict human beings, *anthropoi* (line 471): proper analysis may refute this but there appears to be careful differentiation throughout the text of the play between *aner* (man), *brotos* and *thnetos* (mortal), and *anthropos* (human being), although even the best translations obscure this by rendering them all as 'man' or 'men'.

Medea goes on to rehearse the history of their marriage, reminding him how—'showing much love and little wisdom'—she had left everything to go with him, conceding that she might have understood his faithless conduct in certain circumstances—'If you had still been childless I could have pardoned you for hankering after this new marriage' (a thought that makes us tremble when we remember how she will realize what will hurt him most)—and ending thus:

O Zeus! Why have you given us clear signs to tell  
True gold from counterfeit; but when we need to know  
Bad *men* from good, the flesh bears no revealing mark?

More literally, the god has given human beings (*anthropoi*) signs to tell real from fool's gold, but there is no natural mark on the body that reveals the evil in men (*andres*).

Jason graciously concedes that love once made her save his life—but by doing so she did herself a good turn. It meant, for one thing, that she got to Greece and entered history:

Allow me, in the first place, to point out  
That you left a barbarous land to become a resident  
Of Hellas; here you have known justice; you have lived  
In a society where force yields place to law.  
Moreover, here your gifts are widely recognized,  
You are famous; if you still lived at the ends of the earth  
Your name would never be spoken.

The impudence of Jason's attempt to rationalize his decision culminates in telling her that his new marriage, being with the local princess, was not the result of passion but entirely in Medea's interests and in those of their sons:

It was not, as you resentfully assume, that I  
Found your attractions wearisome, and was smitten with  
Desire for a new wife; nor did I specially want  
To raise a numerous family—the sons we have  
Are enough, I'm satisfied; but I wanted to ensure  
First—and most important—that we should live well  
And not be poor ...

He almost persuades us that he was indeed thinking of the benefits that his sons at least would have with his new status as the king's son-in-law. The importance he attaches to having sons will fatally focus Medea's attention on how most deeply to avenge the wrongs he has done her by deserting her. His attitude to marriage, and to women, comes out in his closing lines:

Was such a plan, then, wicked? Even you would approve  
If you could govern your sex-jealousy. But you women  
Have reached a state where, if all's well with your sex-life,  
You've everything you wish for; but when *that* goes wrong,  
At once all that is best and noblest turns to gall.  
If only children could be got some other way,  
Without the female sex! If women didn't exist,  
Human life would be rid of all its miseries.

Deserting his wife now turns out to have been a *plan*, for everyone's benefit, which she would understand if she were not 'chafed or scraped by bed' (line 568), as he says with graphic brutality. *She* is the one dominated by sex—*he* has been thinking only of improving the family status.

There follows a scene, painful in its verisimilitude, in which husband and wife accuse each other increasingly bitterly, and which ends with his shrugging his shoulders that she will not let him help financially while she shouts after him:

Go! You are consumed with craving for  
Your newly-won bride. Go, enjoy her!

For that 'Go, enjoy her!' the Greek has simply: *nymphheu*'—for which a more colourful and earthy translation suggests itself....

The third man in the story now appears—Aegeus, king of Athens. Medea and he are old acquaintances. He tells her that he has just come from visiting the holy sanctuary at Delphi, where he has been praying that he and his wife should have children. The importance of sons to a man is thus underlined once again. Medea explains that she is forced to find a new home. She claims to have drugs that will deal with his sterility



(it seems to be *his* problem, his wife is never blamed), and they agree that she will move to Athens in due course. She has to get herself there without involving him—he does not want to offend his friends in Corinth by appearing to connive at her departure. He solemnly promises her asylum, but we know by now how fraught her leaving Corinth is going to be.

Alone again with the local women, Medea now tells them her plan. She is going to ‘soft talk’ Jason, telling him that he is right after all. She will get him to take their sons to visit the princess, to make her a gift of fine clothes which, as soon as she tries them on, will catch fire and burn her to death. Then, the worst bit, she will kill her sons:

He shall never see alive again

The sons he had from me. From his new bride he never  
Shall breed a son; she by my poison, wretched girl,  
Must die a hideous death. Let no one think of me  
As humble or weak or passive; let them understand  
I am of a different kind: dangerous to my enemies,  
Loyal to my friends. To such a life glory belongs.

*This* woman is not content to display the ‘feminine’ characteristics: she is ‘a different kind’—ruthless to her foes, gracious to her friends—as a *man* is supposed always to be. She is going to be a heroic figure, whose life will be famous—unlike all the women who have passively submitted to oblivion.

The Chorus, agreeing up till now that she should kill Jason and his princess, are horrified at her plan to kill her sons: ‘This is the way to hurt my husband most deeply’, she replies; when they say that it will also be the extremity of suffering for her that a woman could bear, she concedes the point: ‘So be it—all words are wasted in the meantime’ (line 819). At least that is the obvious translation of that final phrase—*perissoi pantes oun meso logoi* in the Greek. It is as if she is saying that all words are superfluous between now and when she carries out her plan—nothing anyone says can stop her. But Charles Segal suggests a deeper sense<sup>2</sup>. Literally translated: ‘All the words in the middle are excessive’. The ‘middle ground’, that is to say, has been occupied by words that are all ‘immoderate’: excess reigns where the mean ordinarily lies. At the point where Medea would kill her own children she exceeds ‘the laws of human life’, as the Chorus says (line 812), and, passing beyond the limits of civilized behaviour, she also abandons the mediation of ordinary language. She is now beyond all reason, one might say.

The play gathers momentum. Jason returns, Medea abases herself, calls the children, and easily persuades him to take them, innocently carrying her lethal gifts, to visit his new wife. They reappear by themselves, their mission accomplished, and Medea weeps at what she is resolved to do. She draws back—‘Why should I hurt *them*, to make their

father suffer, when I shall suffer twice as much myself'? In a tremendous speech, fondling them all the time, she argues with herself, but finally, as she says, *thumos*, passion, overrules *bouleumata*, rational considerations and reasonable thoughts (line 1079)—she is going to act, so to speak, against her better judgment. Euripides is the first dramatist to make the conflict inside an individual central in a play. There is no adequate translation for *thumos*: as Alan Elliott notes *in hoc loco*, it includes the whole range of emotions which have to do with self-esteem. Socrates, then aged just under forty, might well have been present at the first performance of the *Medea*: anyway, the problem which was to exercise him greatly, and which continues to attract much philosophical attention under Aristotle's label of *akrasia* (incontinence, weakness of will, doing what one knows to be wrong), received one of its earliest expressions in *Medea*'s speech. In this amazing argument with herself passion and reason fight for supremacy: *Medea* plainly identifies herself with her *bouleumata*, while her *thumos* becomes another self whom she addresses in the second person. Again she is being forced beyond even her own reason.<sup>3</sup>

A messenger appears and recites the dreadful story of how Jason's princess, prinking herself in her new clothes, was consumed by them. *Medea*, telling herself that her sons will surely be punished by death in any case now, steels herself, leaves the stage, and we soon hear the screams of the children as she kills them. Jason appears, horrified at the murder of his princess but desperate to save his sons before his father-in-law's family kill them in revenge for their mother's crime. The Chorus tell him that *Medea* has killed them, he runs to get her—but she appears, high above the stage, quite out of reach, sitting in a chariot drawn by dragons, with the bodies of the boys beside her. 'I've reached your heart', she says to him, as he screams with grief. 'You suffer too', he replies: 'my loss is yours no less'. 'It is true', she shouts back: 'But my pain's a fair price, to take away your smile'. 'Did you really think it right to kill them', he asks her, 'just because of what goes on in bed?' (line 1367). And she answers, in words that measure the immense gap between her and her husband: 'Do you think that is a small suffering for a woman?' (line 1368). She had nothing else. Being a woman, she had sacrificed everything for her marriage: her parents, her native land. She had done dreadful things to further her husband's career. All her vital energies (*thumos* again, really) as well as her imagination and intelligence (*bouleumata* again) had been devoted to her husband and sons. Everything creative about her had gone into that marriage—and with the collapse of the marriage she becomes utterly destructive. Jason appeals to her to let him have the bodies to mourn over them and to bury them, but she refuses. She is going to bury them on the holy mountain sacred to *Hera*, the goddess representative of women, especially as wives, and

protectress of marriage. In one final desperately moving cry Jason begs her to let him at least touch their 'soft skin' (line 1403)—but now the chariot is bearing her away out of sight. As he becomes a totally vulnerable human being, yearning only to hold his dead children in his arms, Medea has gone beyond humanity altogether.

Medea, at the end, is no longer just a woman whose husband has betrayed her. Her individual humanity has been taken over by something quasi-divine: 'some kind of irresistible power, something deeply rooted in the human situation, as dangerous as it is universal', as Bernard Knox says. The woman who murdered her own sons to punish her faithless husband gets off scot free, and even with the blessing of the gods who sent the chariot to rescue her. The scandal of this, by fifth-century B.C. standards as well as by our own, can be endured only if we recognize the dangerous sacrifice that women then and now so often have had to make to sustain their marriages. When her marriage collapses Medea's energy becomes 'a *theos*, relentless, merciless force, the unspeakable violence of the oppressed and betrayed, which, because it has been so long pent up, carries everything before it to destruction, even if it destroys also what it loves most'.

In these words Knox beautifully captures the central theme of the play: Medea, the ex-wife, whose first words are 'If only I were dead!' (line 107), has herself finally died, in the excess of killing her sons to punish her faithless husband. She has turned into the ruthless impersonal force which is all that remains of human energy and passion when the fidelities of civilized life fail.

As I write this, there is a young woman, herself an immigrant, estranged from her husband, awaiting trial in London on the charge of murdering her daughter. Recently there was a moving letter in one of the daily newspapers from a young man who was being denied access to his young children by their mother. It must not be difficult to find a thousand ordinary everyday situations in which the range of feelings that Euripides explores in the *Medea* is represented in one way or another.

What, then, about the Japanese *Medea*? It turned out, after a windy day, to be a still and not unseasonably cool evening, although Hurricane Charley was lashing the country, from the Scottish borders southwards. The courtyard of the Old College, with its neo-Classical architecture, proved a superb setting for the Toho Company's awesome performance. This was certainly a play about male chauvinism, murderous revenge, and a deserted woman in an alien world. Influenced by the Kabuki style, the huge Chorus of veiled figures swept and circled across the vast stage, violently strumming mandolin-like instruments. Medea herself was played consummately by Mikijiro Hira, who enacted a range of emotions that did full justice to the central theme of the play. To speak of 'female impersonator' in connection with such acting would be grotesque (of

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course all the parts were played by men). It will not be possible to take a short cut through the Old College quadrangle without remembering his ascent of the steps of Playfair's museum block to kill the children. Indeed, the site was a discovery; it will surely host many Festival events in years to come. In the final scene Medea appears in her chariot on the rooftop, swung there by an unseen crane. In every way this was undoubtedly an extraordinary performance. But inability to understand what was being said greatly reduced the psychological complexity of the play. Much of its depth of insight into the deserted woman's feelings comes in the pithy exchanges that I have tried to point out here. According to Michael Billington in the programme, there have already been two versions of the *Medea* in Britain this year. At Theatr Clwyd, Eileen Atkins played Medea as a white witch in a black African autocracy, while, at the Lyric Hammersmith, Madhur Jeffrey played her 'as a quietly ferocious Asian at large in a world of Kings Road Greekery'. Mikijiro Hira certainly played the part in a way that nobody who saw him will easily forget. But I should like to see the *Medea* set in the relatively confined space of some prosperous middle-class suburb, such as North Oxford: Jason could be a Glaswegian, his story to Medea might be that he is marrying the college principal's daughter so that the boys can get a public school education. It is easy to see how the family would want her out of the neighbourhood. The final struggle between them might still be over the children. Of course she could not be allowed to murder them, at least not literally; but it should not be too hard to show her taking them from him *psychologically*. So long as Medea is represented as a highly intelligent woman who has sacrificed her independence for her marriage she will always disturb an audience, the women as well as the men, in a society in which women are still terrifyingly oppressed.

- 1 Euripides: *Medea and Other Plays*, translated and with an introduction by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books 1963; *Medea*, edited by Alan Elliott, Oxford University Press, 1969; Bernard M.W. Knox, 'The *Medea* of Euripides', *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977), pp. 193—225.
- 2 Charles E. Segal, 'Tragedy, corporeality, and the texture of language: matricide in the three Electra plays', *The Classical World* 79 (1985), pp. 7—23.
- 3 Eilhard Schlessinger, *Hermes* 94 (1966), pp. 26—53.