

## Euripides. *Medea*.

Translated by Diane Arnson Svarlien. Introduction and Notes by Robin Mitchell-Boyask. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008.

When we saw that your two boys had come  
together with their father to the bride's house,  
all of us—we servants who have felt  
the pain of your misfortunes—were delighted;

the talk was that you'd settled your differences,  
you and your husband. We embraced the boys,  
kissing their hands, their golden hair. And I,  
overjoyed as I was, accompanied  
the children to the women's quarters. She—

the mistress we now honor in your place—  
before she caught sight of your pair of boys  
was gazing eagerly at Jason. Then  
she saw the children, and she covered up  
her eyes, as if the sight disgusted her,  
and turned her pale cheek aside. Your husband

tried to cool down the girl's bad temper,  
saying, „Don't be hateful toward your loved ones!  
Please, calm your spirit, turn your head this way,  
and love those whom your husband loves. Receive  
these gifts, and ask your father, for my sake,  
not to send these children into exile.“

Well, when she saw the fine things, she gave in  
to everything the man said. They had barely  
set foot outside the door—your children and  
their father—when she took the intricate  
embroidered robe and wrapped it round her body,  
and set the golden crown upon her curls,  
and smiled at her bright image—her lifeless double—  
in a mirror, as she arranged her hair.

She rose, and with a delicate step her lovely  
white feet traversed the quarters. She rejoiced

beyond all measure in the gifts. Quite often  
she extended her ankle, admiring the effect.  
What happened next was terrible to see.

Her skin changed color, and her legs were shaking;  
she reeled sideways, and she would have fallen  
straight to the ground if she hadn't collapsed in her chair.  
Then one of her servants, an old woman,  
thinking that the girl must be possessed  
by Pan or by some other god, cried out—  
a shriek of awe and reverence—but when  
she saw the white foam at her mouth, her eyes  
popping out, the blood drained from her face,  
she changed her cry to one of bitter mourning.

A maid ran off to get the princess' father;  
another went to tell the bride's new husband  
of her disaster. Everywhere the sound  
of running footsteps echoed through the house.  
And then, in less time than it takes a sprinter  
to cover one leg of a stadium race,  
the girl, whose eyes had been shut tight, awoke,  
poor thing, and she let out a terrible groan,  
for she was being assaulted on two fronts:

the golden garland resting on her head  
sent forth a marvelous stream of all-consuming  
fire, and the delicate robe, the gift  
your children brought, was starting to corrode  
the white flesh of that most unfortunate girl.

She jumped up, with flames all over her,  
shaking her hair, tossing her head around,  
trying to throw the crown off. But the gold  
gripped tight, and every movement of her hair  
caused the fire to blaze out twice as much.

Defeated by disaster, she fell down  
onto the ground, unrecognizable  
to anyone but a father. She had lost  
the look her eyes had once had, and her face

had lost its beauty. Blood was dripping down,  
mixed with fire, from the top of her head  
and from her bones the flesh was peeling back  
like resin, shorn by unseen jaws of poison,  
terrible to see. We all were frightened

to touch the corpse. We'd seen what had just happened.  
But her poor father took us by surprise:  
he ran into the room and threw himself—  
not knowing any better—on her corpse.

He moaned, and wrapped her in his arms, and kissed her,  
crying, „Oh, my poor unhappy child,  
what god dishonors you? What god destroys you?  
Who has taken you away from me,  
an old man who has one foot in the grave?  
Let me die with you, child.” When he was done

with his lament, he tried to straighten up  
his aged body, but the delicate robe  
clung to him as ivy clings to laurel,  
and then a terrible wrestling match began.  
He tried to flex his knee; she pulled him back.  
If he used force, he tore the aged flesh  
off of his bones. He finally gave up,  
unlucky man; his soul slipped away  
when he could fight no longer. There they lie,

two corpses, a daughter and her aged father,  
side by side, a disaster that longs for tears.  
About your situation, I am silent.  
You realize what penalty awaits you.  
About our mortal lives, I feel the way  
I've often felt before: we are mere shadows.