



A Herodotean Moment in Euripides' *Medea*

Adriana Brook
Lawrence University

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Δαρείου μὲν νυν ἡ γνώμη ἦν Σκύθας ἐωυτῷ διδόναι σφέας τε αὐτοὺς καὶ γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ, εἰκάζων τῆδε, ὡς μῦς μὲν ἐν γῆ γίνεται καρπὸν τὸν αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπῳ σιτεόμενος, βάτραχος δὲ ἐν ὕδατι, ὄρνις δὲ μάλιστα ἔοικε ἵπῳ, τοὺς δὲ ὀϊστοὺς ὡς τὴν ἐωυτῶν ἀλκὴν παραδιδούσι. Αὕτη μὲν Δαρείῳ ἀπεδέδεκτο ἡ γνώμη, συνεστήκεε δὲ ταύτη τῇ γνώμῃ ἡ Γωβρύεω, τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐνὸς τῶν τὸν μάγον κατελόντων, εἰκάζοντος τὰ δῶρα λέγειν· “ Ἦν μὴ ὄρνιθες γενόμενοι ἀναπτῆσθε ἐς τὸν οὐρανόν, ᾧ Πέρσαι, ἢ μύες γενόμενοι κατὰ τῆς γῆς καταδύητε, ἢ βάτραχοι γενόμενοι ἐς τὰς λίμνας ἐσπηδήσητε, οὐκ ἀπονοστήσετε ὀπίσω ὑπὸ τῶνδε τῶν τοξευμάτων βαλλόμενοι.”
(Hdt. IV.132)

Darius expressed the view that the Scythians were giving him earth and water and intended to surrender: mice, he reasoned, live on the ground and eat the same food as men; frogs live in water; birds are much like horses; and the arrows symbolized the Scythian power, which they were giving into his hands. Gobryas, however (one of the seven conspirators who put down the Magus), by no means agreed with him, but interpreted the gifts as saying: “Unless you Persians turn into birds and fly up into the air, or into mice and burrow under ground, or into frogs and jump into the lakes, you will never get home again, but stay here in this country, only to be shot by the Scythian arrows.”

(Trans. here and throughout by de Selincourt)

ὀρθῶς μοι δοκῆει Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι, νόμον
πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι

(Hdt. III.38)

Pindar, in my opinion, was right when he called
custom ‘king of all.’

δεῖ γάρ νιν ἥτοι γῆς γε κρυφθῆναι κάτω
ἢ πτηνὸν ἄραι σῶμ' ἐς αἰθέρος βάθος,
εἰ μὴ τυράννων δώμασιν δώσει δίκην.
πέποιθ' ἀποκτείνασα κοιράνους χθονὸς
ἀθῶιος αὐτὴ τῶνδε φεύξεσθαι δόμων;
(Eur. *Med.* 1296-1300)

She will have to hide herself beneath the earth or
soar aloft to heaven if she is not going to give
satisfaction to the royal house. Does she think that
having killed the land's ruling family she will
escape from this house unscathed?
(Trans. here and throughout by Kovacs)

Ἦν μὴ ὄρνιθες γενόμενοι ἀναπτῆσθε ἐς τὸν οὐρανόν, ὧ Πέρσαι, ἢ μύες γενόμενοι κατὰ τῆς γῆς καταδύητε, ἢ βάτραχοι γενόμενοι ἐς τὰς λίμνας ἐσπηδήσητε, οὐκ ἀπονοστήσετε ὀπίσω ὑπὸ τῶνδε τῶν τοξευμάτων βαλλόμενοι. (Hdt.)

δεῖ γάρ νιν ἦτοι γῆς γε κρυφθῆναι κάτω ἢ πτηνὸν ἄραι σῶμ' ἐς αἰθέρος βάθος, εἰ μὴ τυράννων δώμασιν δώσει δίκη. πέποιθ' ἀποκτείνασα κοιράνους χθονὸς ἀθῶιος αὐτὴ τῶνδε φεύξεσθαι δόμων; (Eur.)

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives
Jason		X		X
Darius		X		X
Medea	X		X	
Idanthyrus	X		X	

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives
Jason		X		X
Darius		X		X
Medea	X		X	
Idanthyrus	X		X	

ὡς τρίς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα / στῆναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἅπαξ
(250-52)

*I would rather stand three times with a shield in battle than give birth once.

τάλαιν', ὡς ἄρ' ἦσθα πέτρος ἢ σίδαρος. (1279-80)

*Hard-hearted wretch, you are, it seems, a stone or a piece of iron!

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives	Foreign	Domestic
Jason		X		X		X
Darius		X		X	X	
Medea	X		X		X	
Idanthyrus	X		X			X

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives	Foreign	Domestic
Jason		X		X		X
Darius		X		X	X	
Medea	X		X		X	
Idanthyrus	X		X			X

μείζω γε μέντοι τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας
εἵληφας ἢ δέδωκας, ὡς ἐγὼ φράσω.
πρῶτον μὲν Ἑλλάδ' ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονὸς
γαῖαν κατοικεῖς καὶ δίκην ἐπίστασαι
νόμοις τε χρῆσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριν·
πάντες δέ σ' ἤισθοντ' οὕσαν Ἑλληνες σοφὴν
καὶ δόξαν ἔσχες· εἰ δὲ γῆς ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις
ὄροισιν ὤκεις, οὐκ ἂν ἦν λόγος σέθεν. (534-41)

In return for saving me you got more than you gave, as I shall make clear. First, you now live among Greeks and not barbarians, and you understand justice and the rule of law, with no concession to force. All the Greeks have learned that you are clever, and you have won renown. But if you lived at the world's edge, there would be not talk of you.

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives	Foreign	Domestic	Escape	Victory
Jason		X		X		X		
Darius		X		X	X		X	
Medea	X		X		X		X	X
Idanthysus	X		X			X		X

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives	Foreign	Domestic	Escape	Victory
Jason		X		X		X		
Darius		X		X	X		X	
Medea	X		X		X		X	X
Idanthysus	X		X			X		X

Ἦν μὴ ὄρνιθες γενόμενοι ἀναπτῆσθε ἐς τὸν οὐρανόν, ὧ Πέρσαι,
ἢ μύες γενόμενοι κατὰ τῆς γῆς καταδύητε, ἢ βάτραχοι γενόμενοι
ἐς τὰς λίμνας ἐσπηδήσητε, οὐκ ἀπονοστήσετε ὀπίσω ὑπὸ τῶνδε
τῶν τοξευμάτων βαλλόμενοι

δεῖ γάρ νιν ἦτοι γῆς γε κρυφθῆναι κάτω
ἢ πτηνὸν ἄραι σῶμ' ἐς αἰθέρος βάθος,
εἰ μὴ τυράννων δώμασιν δώσει δίκην.
πέποιθ' ἀποκτείνασα κοιράνους χθονὸς
ἄθῳιος αὐτῆ τῶνδε φεύξεσθαι δόμων;

	Hard	Soft	Gives	Receives	Foreign	Domestic	Escape	Victory
Jason		X		X		X		
Darius		X		X	X		X	
Medea	X		X		X		X	X
Idanthysus	X		X			X		X

χειρὶ δ' οὐ ψάυσεις ποτέ·
τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς
Ἥλιος πατήρ
δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἔρυμα
πολεμίας χερός. (1320-22)

Your hand can never touch me:
such is the chariot Helios, my
grandfather, has given me to
ward off a hostile hand.



“Unless you Persians turn into birds and fly up into the air, or into mice and burrow under ground, or into frogs and jump into the lakes, you will never get home again, but stay here in this country, only to be shot by the Scythian arrows.”

She will have to hide herself beneath the earth or soar aloft to heaven if she is not going to give satisfaction to the royal house.

Medea: οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν / τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ' Ἰάσονος
γάμοις, / γεγῶσαν ἐσθλοῦ πατρὸς Ἥλιου τ' ἄπο.

*You must not suffer mockery from this Sisyphean marriage of Jason, you who are sprung from a noble father and **have Helios for your grandsire**. (Eur. *Med.* 404-6)

Medea: ὦ Ζεῦ Δίκη τε Ζηνὸς Ἥλιου τε φῶς, \ νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν
ἐχθρῶν, φίλαι.

*O Zeus and Zeus's justice, **O light of the sun**, now my friends, I shall be victorious over my foes (Eur. *Med.* 764-65)

Medea: εὐδαιμονήσει δ' οὐχ ἓν ἀλλὰ μυρία, / ἀνδρός τ' ἀρίστου σοῦ
τυχοῦσ' ὀμευνέτου \ κεκτημένη τε κόσμον ὃν ποθ' Ἥλιος \ πατρὸς
πατὴρ δίδωσιν ἐκγόνοισιν οἷς.

*She will not have one happiness but countless, getting in you and excellent husband to share her bed and **possessing finery which my grandfather Helios gave to his descendants**. (Eur. *Med.* 952-55)

εἴ σ' ἢ ἴπιουσα λαμπὰς ὄψεται θεοῦ / καὶ παῖδας
ἐντὸς τῆσδε τερμόνων χθονός, / θανῆι. (352-54)

Creon: If **tomorrow's sun** sees you and your children within the borders of this land, you will be put to death. (Eur. *Med.* 352-54)

κράτιστα τὴν εὐθεΐαν, ἧι πεφύκαμεν / σοφοὶ
μάλιστα, φαρμάκοις αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν. / *** / οὐ γὰρ μὰ
τὴν δέσποιναν ἣν ἐγὼ σέβω / μάλιστα πάντων καὶ
ξυνεργὸν εἰλόμην, / Ἑκάτην, μυχοῖς ναίουσαν
ἐστίας ἐμῆς, / χαίρων τις αὐτῶν τοῦμὸν ἀλγυνεῖ
κέαρ.

Medea: Best to proceed by the direct route, in which
I am the most skilled, and kill them with **poison** . . .
By the goddess I worship most of all, my chosen
helper, **Hecate**, who dwells in the inner chamber of
my house, none of them shall pain my heart and
smile at it! (Eur. *Med.* 384-85, 395-98)

Chorus: ἄιες, ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ Γᾶ καὶ φῶς, / ἀχὰν οἴαν ἅ δύστανος / μέλπει νύμφα;

*Did you hear, O Zeus and **earth** and **light of the sun**, what a wail the miserable woman utters? (Eur. *Med.* 148-50)

Medea: ὄμνου πέδον Γῆς πατέρα θ' Ἥλιον πατρός / τοῦμοῦ θεῶν τε συντιθεῖς ἅπαν γένος.

*Swear by the **plain of Earth**, **by Helios, my grandfather**, and by the whole race of gods all together. (Eur. *Med.* 746-47)

Aegeus: ὄμνουμι Γαῖαν φῶς τε λαμπρὸν Ἥλιου / θεοῦς τε πάντα ἐμμενεῖν ἅ σου κλύω.

*I swear **by Earth**, **by the holy light of Helios**, and by all the gods that I will do as I have heard from your lips. (Eur. *Med.* 752-53)

Chorus: ἰὸ Γᾶ τε καὶ παμφαῆς / ἀκτὶς Ἄλιου,
κατίδεντ' ἴδετε τὰν / ὀλομένην γυναῖκα, πρὶν
φοινίαν / τέκνοις προσβαλεῖν χέρ' αὐτοκτόνον·

O earth, O ray of the Sun that lightens all, turn
your gaze, O turn it to this ruinous woman before
she lays her bloody murderous hands upon her
children! (Eur. *Med.* 1251-54)

Jason: δεῖ γάρ νιν ἥτοι γῆς γε κρυφθῆναι κάτω / ἢ
πτηνὸν ἄραι σῶμ' ἐς αἰθέρος βάθος, / εἰ μὴ
τυράννων δώμασιν δώσει δίκην.

*She will have to **hide herself beneath the earth**
or **soar aloft to heaven** if she is not going to give
satisfaction to the royal house. Eur. *Med.*
1296-97)

Jason: καὶ ταῦτα δράσασ' ἥλιόν τε προσβλέπεις /
καὶ γαῖαν, ἔργον τλᾶσα δυσσεβέστατον;

*Having done this can you look **on the sun** and
the earth, when you are guilty of a most
abominable deed? (Eur. *Med.* 1327-28)

“Unless you Persians turn into birds and fly up into the air, or into mice and burrow under ground, or into frogs and jump into the lakes, you will never get home again, but stay here in this country, only to be shot by the Scythian arrows.” (Herodotus)

She will have to hide herself beneath the earth or soar aloft to heaven if she is not going to give satisfaction to the royal house. (Euripides)

Chorus: ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι παγαί, / καὶ δίκαια καὶ πάντα πάλιν στρέφεται.

*Backward to their sources flow the streams of holy rivers, and the order of all things is reversed. (Eur. *Med.* 410-11)

Medea: σὺ δ', ὥσπερ εἰκός, κατθανῆι κακὸς κακῶς, / Ἄργοῦς κάρη σὸν λειψάνωι πεπληγμένος, / πικρὰς τελευτὰς τῶν ἐμῶν γάμων ἰδών.

*But you, as is fitting, shall die the miserable death of a coward, struck on the head by a piece of the Argo, having seen the bitter result of your marriage to me. (Eur. *Med.* 1386-88)

Chorus: Ἐρεχθεΐδαι τὸ παλαιὸν ὄλβιοι / καὶ θεῶν παῖδες μακάρων, ἱερᾶς /
χώρας ἀπορθήτου τ' ἄπο .

*From ancient times the sons of Erechtheus have been favored; they are children of the blessed gods **sprung from a holy land** never pillaged by the enemy. (Eur. *Med.* 824-26).

Chorus: τοῦ καλλινάου τ' ἐπὶ Κηφισοῦ ῥοαῖς / τὰν Κύπριν κλήζουσιν
ἀφυσσαμέναν / χώρας καταπνεῦσαι μετρίας ἀνέμων / ἡδυπνόους αὔρας·

*Men celebrate in song how Aphrodite, filling her pail at **the streams of the fair-flowing Cephisus**, **blew down upon the land temperate and sweet breezes**. (Eur. *Med.* 835-40).

Chorus: πῶς οὖν ἱερῶν ποταμῶν / ἢ πόλις ἢ φίλων / πόμπιμός σε χώρα / τὰν
παιδολέτειραν ἔξει, / τὰν οὐχ ὀσίαν μέταυλον;

*How then shall **this city of holy rivers** or this land that escorts its gods in procession lodge you, the killer of your children, stained with their blood, in the company of her citizens? (Eur. *Med.* 846-50).



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