

Commentary on Euripides' *Medea* lines 1065-1084

Medea lines 1065-1084

1065 καὶ δὴ 'πὶ κρατὶ στέφανος, ἐν πέπλοισι
δὲ

νύμφη τύραννος ὀλλυται, σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ.

ἀλλ', εἴμι γὰρ δὴ τλημονεστάτην ὁδὸν

καὶ τούσδε πέμψω τλημονεστέραν ἔτι,

παῖδας προσειπεῖν βούλομαι· δότ', ὦ τέκνα,

1070 δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιὰν χέρα.

ὦ φιλότατη χεῖρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα καὶ
σχῆμα

καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενὲς τέκνων,

εὐδαιμονοῖτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ· τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε

πατὴρ ἀφείλετ'. ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή,

1075 ὦ μαλθακὸς χρός πνεῦμά θ' ἥδιστον
τέκνων.

χωρεῖτε χωρεῖτ'· οὐκέτ' εἰμὶ προσβλέπειν

οἷα τε ἔπρὸς ὑμᾶς† ἀλλὰ νικᾶμαι κακοῖς.

καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά,

θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,

1080 ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

πολλάκις ἤδη διὰ λεπτοτέρων

μύθων ἔμολον καὶ πρὸς ἀμίλλας

ἤλθον μείζους ἢ χρὴ γενεὰν

θῆλυν ἐρευνᾶν¹

Translation

And now, with the crown on her head, the
royal bride

is dying in her veil, I know it well.

But, for as I am at the most miserable path

and I am about to send them to an even more
wretched one,

I wish to speak to my children; give, my
children,

give your right hand to your mother to kiss.

Oh, dearest hand, dearest mouth and bearing
and kind face of my children,

I wish you happiness but in another world; for
those here

were taken away by your father. Oh, the sweet
touch,

oh, the soft skin and the most pleasant spirit of
the children.

Begone begone; I am no longer able to look
at you but I am overpowered by my distress.

And indeed, although I understand the evil
things I will undertake,

wrath is stronger than my plans,

wrath that is responsible for the greatest evils
for the mortals.

I have already often gone into more delicate
speeches and have come near greater

conflicts than it is appropriate for a woman to
inquire after;

¹ Loeb's version of the original text was used for
this commentary. Loeb, 380-2.

Summary

The passage is the ending of perhaps *Medea*'s most intense and powerful monologue regarding her devastating decision to kill her own children in order to take revenge on Jason, as well as the unbearable pain this action will cause her. It is an interesting segment as it emphasizes the contrasting emotions of wrath and despair that Medea struggles with, which are described in a quite dramatic way with the use of ambiguous phrases and sensory vocabulary. The passage ends with the first few lines of the chorus which further highlight the vindictiveness of Medea and the hideous nature of her decision, which is quite opposing to the nurturing and tender nature of a mother.

Commentary analysis

This segment of *Medea* begins with an interesting sentence, which takes up the space of the first two lines and accentuates the contrast between the image of a bride preparing for her wedding and her upcoming death due to the poison in her garments, as well as Medea's admittance that she is well aware of what is happening. This construction is fitting to the narrative as there are the prepositional phrases “πὶ κρατὶ στέφανος” and “ἐν πέπλοισι” in the beginning of line 1065, followed by the phrase “τύραννος ὄλλυται” near the end of the clause. The word “τύραννος” is used as an adjective accompanying the verb and granting the meaning of enduring agonizing torture. The verb “ὄλλυται” in line 1066 is in the present tense and it indicates an action that is taking place as Medea is speaking, which adds to the vigour and immediacy of a monologue performance. The use of the present tense also intensifies the tragic situation and Medea's pathos. Another detail to comment on is the balance of those two lines when it comes to their structure and the pairs they form. The phrase “πὶ κρατὶ στέφανος”, regarding the placement of the crown and the phrase “ἐν πέπλοισι δὲ νύμφη”, which implies the bride wearing her veil. The particle “δὲ” is the connecting link of the two phrases.

Additionally, the phrase “σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ” is strategically placed at the very end of the clause, marking the personal pronoun “ἐγώ” as the final word in the line, to further emphasise how Medea's internal thoughts are laid out in the monologue and how she is responsible for the poisoning. It is also notable that in the phrase “σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ”, the endings of “σάφ(α)” and “οἶδ(α)” have been left out to sound smoother in an oral performance.

The words “εἰμι...δὴ” at the beginning of line 1067 are of importance as “δὴ” is temporal and is about an act that takes place in the present, clearly indicating how Medea has made up her mind.² Moreover, there is repetition of the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective “τλήμων”, to add emphasis to the narrative and suggest that even if Medea is in the worst possible situation, her children are about to get into an even more wretched one. The latter is also emphasised by the particle “ἔτι”, which adds to the intensity of the situation. The two adjectives have been placed in close proximity and the two lines are of similar syntactical structure so that one can truly understand just how intricate her situation is, as well as parallel both their wretched fates. Throughout the passage there is wide-ranging use of adjectives in all degrees to enrich the speech and make it more pleasant to the ear while adding to the rhetorical

² Steadman (2015), 72.

element, such as “φιλτάτη” and “φίλτατον” (line 1071), “ἥδιστον” (line 1075), “κρείσσων” (line 1079), “μεγίστων” (line 1080), “λεπτοτέρων” (line 1081) and “μείζους” (line 1083).

The end of line 1069, marks a change in the way Medea expresses herself and there is extensive use of the rhetoric effect of repetition in the beginning of sentences, as well as the use of the vocative case and the imperative mood, to enhance those conflicting emotions that Medea is dealing with, to increase the tragic effect during performance and signal the change of audience, which is now her children. They serve as an aesthetic feature of the text and an notable detail. Thus, there is the repetition of the verb “δότε”, which is in the imperative mood and in the beginning of the clause, adding hastiness to her speech. Similarly, the same technique is used in line 1076 with the repetition of the imperative verb “χωρεῖτ(ε)”, which is missing the last vowel probably for performance related reasons. Another aspect of the text is how the use of vocative is implemented on a triadic scheme to create a climactic effect with the phrases “ὦ φιλτάτη χεῖρ”, “ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή” and “ὦ μαλθακὸς χρῶς”, which are all noun-adjective pairs that make the text more vivid and intense, while adding a poetic element to it, and enhancing the tragic character of Medea.

In line 1069, the use of vocative is used as Medea addresses her children as “ὦ τέκνα”, and that is used in the following lines too. This is a very noteworthy and dramatic element of her speech as well as making the syntax more adorned. In lines 1071-1073 it is important to note the word order as the verb “εὐδαιμονοῖτον”, which is an optative of wish,³ is located near the end of the clause, and is followed by a phrase that seems rather unfitting with the rest of the sentence. The particle “ἐκεῖ” indicates the afterlife, and it directly contrasts the phrase “τὰ δ’ ἐνθάδε” which indicates the world of the living. Its placement could be an indication of a change in the tone of the speaker.

In the passage there are a few structures with infinitives, such as “παῖδας προσειπεῖν” (line 1069), “ἀσπάσασθαι χέρα” (line 1070) and “προσβλέπειν” (line 1071). An interesting one to comment on is “ἀσπάσασθαι”, which seems to imply a certain purpose within the clause and to justify the action of offering the hand to the mother. In addition, there is the use of the indicative infinitive “προσβλέπειν” in the present tense and the negative particle “οὐκέτι” along with the verb “εἰμι”, to stress the speaker’s inability to look at her children. Furthermore, the use of prepositions, including “ἐν” and “πῖ” (line 1065) and “πρὸς” (line 1077) add a more realistic effect in the descriptions within the text.

Another quite complex area of the passage is the use of the words “θυμὸς” and “βουλευμάτων”, in line 1079, which seem to make translation of those lines more intricate.⁴ Consequently the verb “ἐστί” is missing from the clause as it should be added next to “θυμὸς”. Similarly, towards the end of the passage there is the clause “ὅσπερ...βροτοῖς”, which is missing the verb “ἐστί”, to construct the phrase “αἷτιος ἐστί”.

In the passage cases are used to indicate specific aspects in a more concise manner. Some of those are “τέκνων” (genitive of possession), “κακοῖς” (dative of means) and “βουλευμάτων” (genitive of comparison).

The verb “ἔμολον”, which is the second aorist of the verb “βλώσκω” is used to narrate events of the past. The change in the tense indicates that this is no longer the voice of Medea speaking

³ Steadman (2015), 72.

⁴ Seidensticker (1990), 98-9 in regard to the incorporation of the words “θυμὸς” and “βουλευμάτων” to the text.

but the Chorus, who is narrating this part of the tragedy. Similarly, the verb “ἤλθον” is also in the second aorist and is used as such for the very same reasons.

Finally, towards the end of the passage there is the formation "μείζους...ἔρευνᾶν" and the use of the particle “ἢ” emphasizes the excessiveness of a woman investigating certain matters. It is a rather complex sentence to translate as the word “γενεᾶν” seems not to fit in smoothly in a possible translation and there is also the impersonal syntax of “χρῆ” involved.

Word count: 1486

Bibliography

Euripides, *Medea*. In *Digital Loeb Classical Library*. <https://doi.org/10.4159/dlcl.euripides-medea.1994>.

Seidensticker, B. (1990). Euripides, *Medea* 1056-80, an Interpolation? In M. Griffith & D. J. Mastronarde (Eds.), *Cabinet of the Muses* (pp. 89–102). Scholars Press.
<https://escholarship.org/content/qt6m16g774/qt6m16g774.pdf?t=lnqtsl>

Steadman, G. D. (2015). *Euripides' Medea Greek Text with Facing Vocabulary and Commentary*. Geoffrey Steadman.
<https://geoffreysteadman.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/medea18jan20w.pdf>