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PREFACE

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The accumulated literature of centuries of ancient Roman life, even after the loss of more works than have survived, is still so large that, were we to attempt to cover the whole field, the space allotted to this volume would suffice for only the most superficial mention of the extant authors. The writer has therefore chosen to present to his readers the field of poetry only, and to narrow the scope of his work still further by the selection of certain important and representative phases of poetry, namely, the dramatic, satiric, and epic.

These different phases of the Roman poetic product will be presented in the order named, although it is by no means certain which class of poetry was first developed at Rome. It is more than likely that satire and comedy had a common origin in the rude and unrecorded literary product of ancient Italy. Ennius, indeed, prior to whose time the extant fragments are exceedingly meager, produced both drama, satire, and epic. And the same is true, though to a more limited extent, of other writers of the same early period.

Each of these phases of poetry is treated separately in this volume, according to its chronological development. We shall, therefore, traverse the field three times by three parallel paths: from Andronicus to Seneca, from Ennius to Juvenal, and from Nævius to Vergil.

F. J. Miller

Chicago.

STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF ITALY

PART I

THE DRAMA

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> "Whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own features, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

1. THE BEGINNINGS OF ROMAN LITERATURE AND OLD ROMAN TRAGEDY

When Greece was at the height of her glory, and Greek literature was in its flower; when Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, all within two brilliant generations, were holding the polite world under the magic spell of their dramatic art, their rough and almost unknown Roman neighbors were just emerging from tradition into history. There the atmosphere was altogether one of struggle. The king-ruled Romans, long oppressed, had at last swept away that crumbling kingdom, and established upon its ruins the young republic; the unconsidered masses, still oppressed, were just heaving themselves up into legal recognition, and had already obtained their tribunes, and a little later the boon of a published law—the famous Law of the Twelve Tables, the first Roman code.

Three years before this, and in preparation for it, a committee of three Roman statesmen, the so-called triumvirs, had gone to Athens to study the laws of Solon.

This visit was made in 454 BC Æschylus had died two years before; Sophocles had become famous, and Euripides had just brought out his first play. As those three Romans sat in the theater at Athens, beneath the open sky, surrounded by the cultured and pleasure-loving Greeks, as they listened to the impassioned lines of the popular favorite, unable to understand except for the actor's art—what a contrast was presented between these two nations which had as yet never crossed each other's paths, but which were destined to come together at last in mutual conquest. The grounds and prophecy of this conquest were even now present. The Roman triumvirs came to learn Greek law, and they learned it so well that they became lawgivers not alone for Greece but for all the world; the triumvirs felt that day the charm of Greek art, and this was but a premonition of that charm which fell more masterfully upon Rome in later years, and took her literature and all kindred arts completely captive.

Still from that day, for centuries to come, the Romans had sterner business than the cultivation of the arts of peace. They had themselves and Italy to conquer; they had a still unshaped state to establish; they had their ambitions, growing as their power increased, to gratify; they had jealous neighbors in Greece, Africa, and Gaul to curb. In such rough, troubled soil as this, literature could not take root and flourish. They were not, it is true, without the beginnings of native literature. Their religious worship inspired rude hymns to their gods; their generals, coming home, inscribed the records of their victory in rough Saturnian verse on commemorative tablets; there were ballads at banquets, and dirges at funerals. Also the natural mimicry of the Italian peasantry had no doubt for ages indulged itself in uncouth performances of a dramatic nature, which developed later into those mimes and farces, the forerunners of native Roman comedy and the old Medley-Satura. Yet in these centuries Rome knew no letters

worthy of the name save the laws on which she built her state; no arts save the arts of war.

But in her course of Italian conquest, she had finally come into conflict with those Greek colonists who had long since been taking peaceful possession of Italy along the southeastern border. These Græco-Roman struggles in Italy, which arose in consequence, culminated in the fall of Tarentum, BC 272; and with this victory the conquest of the Italian peninsula was complete.

This event meant much for the development of Italian literature; it meant new impulse and opportunity—the impulse of close and quickening contact with Greek thought, and the opportunity afforded by the internal calm consequent upon the completed subjugation of Italy. Joined with these two influences was a third which came with the end of the first Punic War, a generation afterward. Rome has now taken her first fateful step toward world empire; she has leaped across Sicily and set victorious foot in Africa; has successfully met her first great foreign enemy. The national pride and exaltation consequent upon this triumph gave favorable atmosphere and encouragement for those impulses which had already been stirred.

The first Punic War was ended in 241 BC In the following year the first effects of the Hellenic influence upon Roman literature were witnessed, and the first literary work in the Latin language of which we have definite record was produced at Rome. This was by Livius Andronicus, a Greek from Tarentum, who was brought to Rome as a captive upon the fall of that city. He came as the slave of M. Livius Salinator, who employed him as a tutor for his sons in Latin and Greek, and afterward set him free to follow the same profession independently. That he might have a Latin text from which to teach that language, he himself translated into the Roman tongue the *Odyssey* of Homer and some plays of the Greek tragedians—the first professor of Latin on

record! These same translations, strangely enough, remained school text-books in Rome for centuries.

His first public work, to which we have referred above, was the production of a play; but whether tragedy or comedy we do not know. It was at any rate, without doubt, a translation into the crude, unpolished, and heavy Latin of his time, from some Greek original. His tragedies, of which only forty-one lines of fragments, representing nine plays, have come down to us, are all on Greek subjects, and are probably only translations or bald imitations of the Greek originals.

The example set by Andronicus was followed by four Romans of marked ability, whose life and work form a continuous chain of literary activity from Nævius, who was but a little younger than Andronicus, and who brought out his first play in 235 BC; through Ennius, who first established tragedy upon a firm foundation in Rome; through Pacuvius, the nephew of Ennius and his worthy successor, to the death of Accius in (about) 94 BC, who was the last and greatest of the old Roman tragedians.

As to the themes of these early tragedies, a few of them were upon subjects taken from Roman history. Tragedies of this class were called *fabulæ prætextæ*, because the actors wore the native Roman dress. When we think of the great value which these plays would have to-day, not only from a literary but also from a historical point of view, we cannot but regret keenly their almost utter loss. In the vast majority of cases, however, the old Roman tragedy was upon subjects taken from the traditional Greek cycles of stories, and was closely modeled after the Greek tragedies themselves. Æschylus and Sophocles were imitated to some extent, but Euripides was the favorite.

While these tragedies were Greek in subject and form, it is not at all necessary to suppose that they were servile imitations or translations merely of the Greek originals. The

Romans did undoubtedly impress their national spirit upon that which they borrowed, in tragedy just as in all things else. Indeed, the great genius of Rome consisted partly in this—her wonderful power to absorb and assimilate material from every nation with which she came in contact. Rome might borrow, but what she had borrowed she made her own completely, for better or for worse. The resulting differences between Greek literature and a Hellenized Roman literature would naturally be the differences between the Greek and Roman type of mind. Where the Greek was naturally religious and contemplative, the Roman was practical and didactic. He was grave and intense, fond of exalted ethical effects, appeals to national pride; and above all, insisted that nothing should offend that exaggerated sense of both personal and national dignity which characterized the Roman everywhere.

All these characteristics made the Romanized Greek tragedies immensely popular; but, strangely enough, this did not develop a truly national Roman tragedy, as was the case, for instance, with epic and lyric literature. We have already seen how meager was the production of the *fabulæ prætextæ*. With the rich national traditions and history to inspire this, we can account for the failure to develop a native Roman tragedy only upon the assumption that the Roman lacked the gift of dramatic invention, at least to the extent of originating and developing great dramatic plots and characters, which form the essential elements of tragic drama.

We shall not weary the reader with quotations from the extant fragments of old Roman tragedy, fragments which, isolated as they are, can prove next to nothing as to the development of the plot or the other essential characteristics of a drama. A play is not like an animal: it cannot be reconstructed from a single fragment. It will be profitable, however, to dwell upon a few of these fragments,

in order to get some idea of the nature and contents of all that is left of an extensive literature.

There is a very dramatic fragment of the *Alexander* or *Paris* of Ennius. It represents Cassandra, in prophetic raving, predicting the destruction which her brother Paris is to bring upon his fatherland. It is said that Hecuba, queen of Troy, before the birth of Paris, dreamed that she had brought forth a firebrand. Remembering this, Cassandra cries out at sight of her brother:

> Here it is; here, the torch, wrapped in fire and blood. Many years it hath lain hid; help, citizens, and extinguish it. For now, on the great sea, a swift fleet is gathering. It hurries along a host of calamities. They come: a fierce host lines the shores with sail-winged ships.
>
> Sellar.

Several of the fragments show a certain measure of descriptive power and poetic imagination in these early tragedians. The following passage from the *Argonautæ* of Accius shows this to a marked degree. It is a description of the first ship, *Argo*, as she goes plowing through the sea. It is supposed to be spoken by a rustic who from the shore is watching the vessel's progress. It should be remembered that the great boat is as strange a sight to him as were the ships of Columbus to the natives of newly discovered America. Hence the strange and seemingly strained metaphors.

> The mighty mass glides on,
> Like some loud-panting monster of the deep;
> Back roll the waves, in eddying masses whirled.
> It rushes on, besprinkling all the sea

With flying spray like backward streaming breath;
As when one sees the cloud-rack whirled along,
Or some huge mass of rock reft off and driven
By furious winds, or seething whirlpools, high
Upbeaten by the ever-rushing waves;
Or else when Ocean crashes on the shore,
Or Triton, from the caverns of the sea,
Far down beneath the swelling waters' depths,
A rocky mass to upper heaven uprears.

Miller.

Sellar, in speaking of the feeling for natural beauty, says of Accius: "The fragments of Accius afford the first hint of that enjoyment of natural beauty which enters largely into a later age"; and quotes the following passage from the *Oenomaus* as "perhaps the first instance in Latin poetry of a descriptive passage which gives any hint of the pleasure derived from contemplating the common aspects of nature":

> By chance before the dawn, harbinger of burning rays, when the husbandmen bring forth the oxen from their rest into the fields, that they may break the red, dew-sprinkled soil with the plough, and turn up the clods from the soft soil.

When we read this delightful passage, and then turn to the exquisite and fuller pictures of natural beauty which Lucretius and Vergil have left us, we shall agree that Accius was himself indeed the "harbinger of burning rays."

2. LATER ROMAN TRAGEDY AND SENECA

Tragedy long continued to flourish after Accius, but its vitality was gone. Such men as Pollio, Varius, and Ovid in the Augustan period, and Maternus, Pomponius Secundus, and

Lucan in the first century AD, amused themselves by writing tragedies, and even produced some commendable work. Varius, who was the personal friend of Vergil and Horace, was perhaps the most gifted of these. He wrote a tragedy on *Thyestes* which was presented as part of the public rejoicings after the battle of Actium. Of this play Quintilian said that it would stand comparison with any Greek tragedy. Ovid also wrote a tragedy on *Medea*, which was highly praised by Roman critics. Maternus wrote tragedies on *Medea* and *Thyestes*, as well as *prætextæ* on *Domitius* and *Cato*. Of all these nothing remains but the barest fragments. But it is certain that the efforts of these later tragedians were for the most part of a dilettante sort, and that their plays were purely literary (see, however, the case of Varius), intended for dramatic reading and declamation, rather than for presentation upon the stage.

Of this sort also were the ten tragedies commonly attributed to L. Annæus Seneca, the philosopher, who is better known as the author of numerous philosophical essays. He lived in the time of Nero, and was, indeed, the tutor of that emperor. Of these ten plays, nine are modeled after the Greek, and one, the *Octavia*, which is undoubtedly not Seneca's, is a *prætexta*, in which Seneca himself appears.

These plays are of especial interest to us, aside from their intrinsic value, for the triple reason that they are the sole representatives of Roman tragedy preserved entire, that they reflect the literary complexion of the artificial age in which they were produced, and that they had so large an influence in shaping the early English drama. They are, in fact, the stepping-stone between ancient and modern, Greek and English, drama.

As to their style, even a cursory reading reveals their extreme declamatory nature, the delight of the author in the horrible and weird, the pains he has taken to select from the

Greek sources the most harrowing of all the tales as the foundation of his tragedies, the boldness with which he has broken over the time-honored rule that deeds of blood should not be done upon the stage, and his fondness for abstruse mythological allusions. Add to these features the dreary prolixity with which the author spoils many of his descriptive passages, protracting them often into veritable catalogues of places and things, also his frequent exaggerations and repetitions, and we have the chief defects of these tragedies.

And yet they have equally marked excellences. They abound in brilliant epigrams, graphic descriptions, touching pathos, magnificent passion, subtile analysis of character and motive. But when all is said, it must be admitted that the plays, faults and virtues included, are highly rhetorical and artificial, such alone as that artificial age would be expected to produce.

Such as they were, and perhaps because they were what they were, the tragedies of Seneca, rather than the Greek plays, were the model for Italian, French, and early English tragedy. The first and obvious reason for this no doubt is the fact that the Middle Age of Europe was an age of Latin rather than of Greek scholarship, so far as popular scholarship was concerned. And this made Seneca rather than Euripides available. But it is also probable that his style and spirit appealed strongly to those later-day imitators. So great, indeed, was the popularity of Seneca's tragedies in the early Elizabethan age, that he might be said to have monopolized the attention of writers of that time. He was a favorite with the schools as a classical text-book, as old Roger Ascham testifies; and his works were translated entire into English then for the first time by five English scholars, and collected into a single volume in 1581 by Thomas Newton, one of the translators.

In addition to the version of 1581, the tragedies of Seneca were again translated into English by Glover in 1761. Since that date no English version was attempted until the present writer a few years ago undertook the task again, and produced a metrical version of three of these plays.

We have selected the tragedy of *Medea* for presentation to the readers of this volume as an illustration of the Senecan tragedy, and (alas for the fate of so many noble works!) of the entire field of Roman tragedy. It follows Euripides in general development of the plot; but if the reader will take the trouble to compare the two plays, he will find that the imitation is by no means close.

Although the play is confined in time to the final day of catastrophe at Corinth, the background is the whole romantic story of the Argonauts: how Jason and his hero-comrades, at the instigation of Pelias, the usurping king of Thessalian Iolchos, undertook the first voyage in quest of the golden fleece; how after many adventures these first sailors reached the kingdom of Æëtes, who jealously guarded the fleece, since upon its possession depended his own kingship; how the three deadly labors were imposed upon Jason before the fleece could be won; how, smitten by love of him, the beautiful, barbaric Medea, daughter of the king, by the help of her magic, aided Jason in all his labors and accompanied him in his flight; how, to retard her father's pursuit, she slew her brother and scattered his mangled remains in the path as she fled; how again, for love of Jason, she restored his father to youth, and tricked Pelias' own daughters into slaying their aged sire; how, for this act, Medea and her husband were exiled from Thessaly and went and dwelt in Corinth; how, for ten happy years, she lived with her husband and two sons in this alien land, her wild past almost forgotten, her magic untouched. But now Jason has been gradually won away from his wife, and is about to

wed Creüsa, the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. The wedding festivities have already begun, when the play opens and reveals Medea invoking all the powers of heaven and hell in punishment of her false lord.

Into her frenzied and dreadful imprecations breaks the sound of sweet voices from without of a chorus of Corinthian women, chanting the epithalamium for the nuptials of Jason and Creüsa.

Hearing this cruel song in praise of her rival and of her false husband, Medea goes into a wilder passion of rage. Medea's old nurse tries to soothe her mistress and recall her to her right mind by wise saws and prudent philosophy. But the flood of passion will not be checked.

Nurse.

Be silent now, I pray thee, and thy plaints confine
To secret woe. The man who heavy blows can bear
In silence, biding still his time with patient soul,
Full oft his vengeance gains. 'Tis hidden wrath that harms;
But hate proclaimed oft loses half its power to harm.

Medea.

But small the grief is that can counsel take and hide
Its head; great ills lie not in hiding, but must rush
Abroad and work their will.

Nurse.

O cease this mad complaint,
My mistress; scarce can friendly silence help thee now.

Medea.

But Fortune fears the brave, the faint of heart o'erwhelms.

Nurse.

Then valor be approved, if for it still there's room.

Medea.

But it must always be that valor finds its place.

Nurse.

No star of hope points out the way from these our woes.

Medea.

The man who hopes for naught at least has naught to fear.

Nurse.

The Colchians are thy foes; thy husband's vows have failed;
Of all thy vast possessions not a jot is left.

Medea.

Yet I am left. There's left both sea and land and fire
And sword and gods and hurtling thunderbolts.

Nurse.

The king must be revered.

Medea.

My father was a king.

Nurse.

Dost thou not fear?

Medea.

Not though the earth produced the foe.

Nurse.

Thou'lt perish.

Medea.

So I wish it.

Nurse.

Flee!

Medea.

I'm done with flight.
Why should Medea flee?

Nurse.

Thy children!

Medea.

Whose, thou know'st.

Nurse.

And dost thou still delay?

Medea.

I go, but vengeance first.

Nurse.

Th' avenger will pursue.

Medea.

Perchance I'll stop his course.

Nurse.

Nay, hold thy words and cease thy threats, O foolish one.
Thy temper curb; 'tis well to yield to fate's decrees.

Medea.

Though fate may strip me of my all, myself am left.
But who flings wide the royal palace doors? Behold,
'Tis Creon's self, exalted high in Grecian sway.

[*Medea retires to the back of the stage.*

Creon.

[*As he enters.*] Medea, baleful daughter of the Colchian king,
Has not yet taken her hateful presence from our realm.
On mischief is she bent; well known her treacherous power.
For who escapes her? Who may pass his days in peace?
This cursed pestilence at once would I have stayed
By force of arms: but Jason's prayers prevailed. She still
May live, but let her free my borders from the fear
Her presence genders, and her safety gain by flight.
[*He sees Medea approaching.*]

But lo, she comes with fierce and threatening mien to seek
An audience with us.
Slaves! defend us from her touch
And pestilential presence! Bid her silence keep,
And learn at length obedience to the king's
Commands.

[*To Medea.*] Go, speed thy flight, thou thing of evil, fell
And monstrous!

Medea.

What the crime, my lord, or what the guilt
That merits exile?

Creon.

Let the guiltless question thus.

Medea.

If now thou judgest, hear me; if thou reign'st,
command.

Creon.

The king's command thou must obey, nor question
aught.

Medea.

Unrighteous kingdoms never long endure.

Creon.

Go, bear

Thy plaints to Colchis.

Medea.

Yea, but let him take me hence

Who brought me to thy shores.

Creon.

Too late thy prayer, for fixed

Is my decree.

Medea.

Who sits in judgment and denies

His ear to either suitor, though his judgment right

Appear, is still himself unrighteous.

Creon.

Didst *thou* lend

Thine ear to Pelias, ere thou judgedst him to death?
—

But come, I'll give thee grace to plead thy goodly
cause.

Medea.

How hard the task to turn the soul from wrath, when once
To wrath inclined; how 'tis the creed of sceptered kings
To swerve not from the proposed course they once have taken,
Full well I know, for I have tasted royalty.
For, though by present storms of ill I'm overwhelmed,
An exile, suppliant, lone, forsaken, all undone,
I once in happier times a royal princess shone,
And traced my proud descent from heavenly Phoebus' self.
Then princes humbly sought my hand in wedlock, mine,
Who now must sue.—
O changeful Fortune, thou my throne
Hast reft away, and given me exile in its stead.
Trust not in kingly realms, since fickle chance may strew
Their treasures to the winds. Lo *this* is regal, this
The work of kings, which time nor change cannot undo:
To succor the afflicted, to provide at need
A trusty refuge for the suppliant. This alone
I brought of all my Colchian treasure, this renown,
This very flower of fame—that by my arts I saved
The bulwark of the Greeks, the offspring of the gods.
My princely gift to Greece is Orpheus, that sweet bard,
Who can the trees in willing bondage draw, and melt
The crag's hard heart. Mine too are Boreas' winged sons,
And Leda's heaven-born progeny, and Lynceus, he
Whose glance can pierce the distant view; yea, all the Greeks,

Save Jason; for I mention not the king of kings,
The leader of the leaders: he is mine alone,
My labor's recompense. The rest I give to you.
Nay, come, O king, arraign me, and rehearse my crimes.
But stay! for I'll confess them all. The only crime
Of which I stand accused is this—the *Argo* saved.
Suppose my maiden scruples had opposed the deed;
Suppose my filial piety had stayed my hand:
Then had the mighty chieftains fall'n, and in their fate
All Greece had been o'erwhelmed; then this thy son-in-law
Had felt the bull's consuming breath, and perished there.
Nay, nay, let Fortune when she will my doom decree;
I glory still that kings have owed their lives to me.
But what reward I reap for all my glorious deeds
Is in thy hands. Convict me, if thou wilt, of sin,
But give him back for whom I sinned. O Creon, see,
I own that I am guilty. This much thou didst know,
When first I clasped thy knees, a humble suppliant,
And sought the shelter of thy royal clemency.
Some little corner of thy kingdom now I ask
In which to hide my grief. If I must flee again,
O let some nook remote within thy broad domain
Be found for me!

Creon claims to have been merciful in having shielded Jason and Medea all these years from the just resentment of the king of Thessaly. Jason's cause would be easy enough to defend, for he has been innocent of guilt; but it is impossible longer to shield Medea, who has committed so many bloody deeds in the past, and is capable of doing the like again.

Creon.

Then go thou hence and purge our kingdom of its
stain;
Bear with thee in thy flight thy fatal poisons; free
The state from fear; abiding in some other land,
Outwear the patience of the gods.

Medea.

Thou bidst me flee?
Then give me back my bark in which to flee. Restore
The partner of my flight. Why should I flee alone?
I came not thus. Or if avenging war thou fear'st,
Then banish both the culprits; why distinguish me
From Jason? 'Twas for him old Pelias was o'ercome;
For him the flight, the plunder of my father's realm,
My sire forsaken and my infant brother slain,
And all the guilt that love suggests; 'twas all for him.
Deep-dyed in sin am I, but on my guilty soul
The sin of profit lieth not.

Creon.

Why seek delay
By speech? Too long thou tarriest.

Medea.

I go, but grant
This last request: let not the mother's fall o'erwhelm
her hapless babes.

Creon.

Then go in peace; for I to them
A father's place will fill, and take them to my breast.

Medea.

Now by the fair hopes born upon this wedding day,
And by thy hopes of lasting sovereignty secure

From changeful fate's assault, I pray thee grant from flight
A respite brief, while I upon my children's lips
A mother's kiss imprint, perchance the last.

Creon.

A time
Thou seek'st for treachery.

Medea.

What fraud can be devised
In one short hour?

Creon.

To those on mischief bent, be sure,
The briefest time is fraught with mischief's fatal power.

Medea.

Dost thou refuse me, then, one little space for tears?

Creon.

Though deep-ingrafted fear would fain resist thy plea,
A single day I'll give thee ere my sentence holds.

Medea.

Too gracious thou. But let my respite further shrink,
And I'll depart content.

Creon.

Thy life shall surely pay
The forfeit if to-morrow's sun beholds thee still
In Corinth.
But the voice of Hymen calls away
To solemnize the rites of this his festal day.

Creon goes out toward his palace. Medea remains gazing darkly after him for a few moments, and then takes her way in the opposite direction.

The chorus sings in reminiscent strain of the old days before the *Argo's* voyage, the simple innocent life of the golden age when each man was content to dwell within the horizon of his birth; the impious rash voyage of the Argonauts, their dreadful experiences in consequence, their wild adventure's prize of fatal gold and more fatal Colchian sorceress; their dark forebodings of the consequences in after years, when the sea shall be a highway, and all hidden places of the world laid bare. Medea comes rushing in bent upon using for vengeance the day which Creon has granted her. The nurse tries in vain to restrain her.

Nurse.

My foster daughter, whither speedest thou abroad?
O stay, I pray thee, and restrain thy passion's force.

But Medea hastens by without answering or noticing her. The nurse, looking after her, reflects in deep distress:

As some wild bacchanal, whose fury's raging fire
The god inflames, now roams distraught on Pindus' snows,
And now on lofty Nysa's rugged slopes; so she
Now here, now there, with frenzied step is hurried on,
Her face revealing every mark of stricken woe,
With flushing cheek and sighs deep drawn, wild cries
and tears,
And laughter worse than tears. In her a medley strange
Of doubts and fears is seen, and overtopping wrath,
Bewailings, bitter groans of anguish.—Whither tends

This overburdened soul? What mean her frenzied
threats?
When will the foaming wave of fury spend itself?
No common crime, I fear, no easy deed of ill
She meditates. Herself she will outvie. For well
I recognize the wonted marks of rage. Some deed
Is threatening, wild, profane and hideous. Behold,
Her face betrays her madness. O ye gods, may
these
Our fears prove vain forebodings!

Our own imaginations and our fears keep pace with those of the devoted nurse, and we listen in fearful silence while Medea, communing with her tortured soul, reveals the depth of suffering and hate into which she has been plunged.

Medea.

For thy hate, poor soul,
Dost thou a measure seek? Let it be deep as love.
And shall I tamely view the wedding torches' glare?
And shall this day go uneventful by, this day
So hardly won, so grudgingly bestowed? Nay, nay;
While, poised upon her heights, the central earth
shall
bear
The heavens up; while seasons run their endless
round,
And sands unnumbered lie; while days and nights
and sun
And stars in due procession pass; while round the
pole
The ocean-fearing bears revolve, and tumbling
streams
Flow downward to the sea: my grief shall never
cease
To seek revenge, and shall forever grow. What rage

Of savage beast can equal mine? What Scylla
famed?
What sea-engulfing pool? What burning Ætna placed
On impious Titan's heaving breast? No torrent
stream,
Nor storm-tossed sea, nor breath of flame fanned by
the gale,
Can check or equal my wild storm of rage. My will
Is set on limitless revenge!

But this wild rage can lead nowhere. She struggles to calm her terrible passion to still more terrible reason and resolve.

Will Jason say
He feared the power of Creon and Acastus' wrath?—
True love is proof against the fear of man. But grant
He was compelled to yield, and pledged his hand in
fear:
He might at least have sought his wife with one last
word
Of comfort and farewell. But this, though brave in
heart,
He feared to do. The cruel terms of banishment
Could Creon's son-in-law not soften? No. One day
Alone was given for last farewell to both my babes.
But time's short space I'll not bewail; though brief in
hours,
In consequence it stretches out eternally.
This day shall see a deed that ne'er shall be forgot.
—
But now I'll go and pray the gods, and move high
heaven
But I shall work my will!

As Medea hastens from the scene, Jason himself enters; and now we hear from his own lips the fatal dilemma in which he finds himself. Regard for his marriage vows, love for his children, and fear of death at the hands of Creon—all are at variance and must be faced. It is the usual tragedy of fate.

Jason.

O heartless fate, if frowns or smiles bedeck thy
brow!
How often are thy cures far worse than the disease
They seek to cure! If, now, I wish to keep the troth
I plighted to my lawful bride, my life must pay
The forfeit; if I shrink from death, my guilty soul
Must perjured be. I fear no power that man can
wield,
But in my heart paternal love unmans me quite;
For well I know that in my death my children's fate
Is sealed. O sacred Justice, if in heaven thou
dwell'st,
Be witness now that for my children's sake I act.
Nay, sure am I that even she, Medea's self,
Though fierce she is of soul, and brooking no
restraint,
Will see her children's good outweighing all her
wrongs.
With this good argument my purpose now is fixed,
In humble wise to brave her wrath.
[*Re-enter Medea.*] But lo! at sight
Of me her fury flames anew! Hate, like a shield,
She bears, and in her face is pictured all her woe.

But Medea's passion has for the moment spent itself. She is now no sorceress, no mad woman breathing out dreadful threatenings; but only the forsaken wife, indignant, indeed, but pathetic in her appeals for sympathy and help from him