

Richard E Brown

The Torment of Medea

A Monodrama for Soprano and Orchestra

Prologue

Since his arrival at Corinth, Jason the Argonaut has made such a favorable impression on King Creon that he has been offered the hand of the King's daughter, Princess Glauce, but only on the condition that his wife, Medea, and his two small sons go into exile. Jason has accepted the offer and Medea has pretended acquiescence, but secretly plots a twofold vengeance. First, she will send poisoned gifts to the princess, hoping that before she discovers the treachery and dies, Glauce will be so pleased that she will allow the boys to remain with their father. Then Medea will kill the boys to complete her revenge on Jason.

The plot has proceeded according to plan, but as the time to kill her sons draws near, Medea's love for her children rises in conflict with her determination to sacrifice them. Her tormented monologue to the uncomprehending boys expresses the battle violently raging within her.

Libretto

From the **Medea** of Euripides

English translation by Philip Vellacott

© 1963 Philip Vellacott - Penguin Books

Used by permission of the Society of Authors

on behalf of the Estate of Philip Vellacott

Oh, children, children! You have a city, and a home;
and when we have parted, there you both will stay forever,
you motherless, I miserable, miserable.

And I must go to exile in another land, before I have had my joy of you,
before I have seen you growing up, becoming prosperous.
I shall never see your brides, adorn your bridal beds, and hold the torches high.

All was for nothing, then - these years of rearing you;
my care, my aching weariness, and the wild pains when you were born.

Oh, yes, I once built many hopes on you;
imagined, pitifully, that you would care for my old age;
and would yourselves wrap my dead body for burial.
How people would envy me my sons!

That sweet, sad thought has faded now.
Parted from you, my life will be all pain and anguish.
You will not look at your mother any more with these dear eyes.
You will have moved into a different sphere of life.

Dear sons, why are you staring at me so?
You smile at me, your last smile: why? why?
Why? Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?
Their young bright faces; I can't, I can't do it.

I'll take them away from Corinth.
Why should I hurt them to make their father suffer,
when I shall suffer twice as much myself?

When I shall suffer twice as much myself;
I won't think of it again. I won't think of it again...

What is the matter with me?
Are my enemies to laugh at me? Laugh at me!
What a coward I am!
What a coward, even tempting my own resolution with soft talk.
What is the matter with me? My hand shall not weaken!

My hand? Oh, oh, my heart, don't, don't do it! Don't do it!
Oh, miserable heart, let them be. Oh, miserable heart, spare your children.
Let them be; spare your children! Oh, miserable heart, don't do it!
We'll all live together safely in Athens, and they will make you happy.

No! No! No!... By all the fiends of hate in hell's depths,
by all the fiends of hate in hell's depths, no!
I'll not leave sons of mine to be the victims of my enemies' rage!
No, never!

Come, children. Give me your hand, dear son. Yours too.
Now we must say goodbye. Now we must say goodbye.
Oh, darling hand, and darling mouth; your noble childlike face and body!
How sweet to hold you! How sweet to hold you!
And children's skin is soft, and their breath, their breath pure.

Go! Go away! I can't look at you any longer. My pain is more than I can bear!

I understand the horror of what I am going to do, but anger...
Anger, the spring of all life's horror, anger masters my resolve!