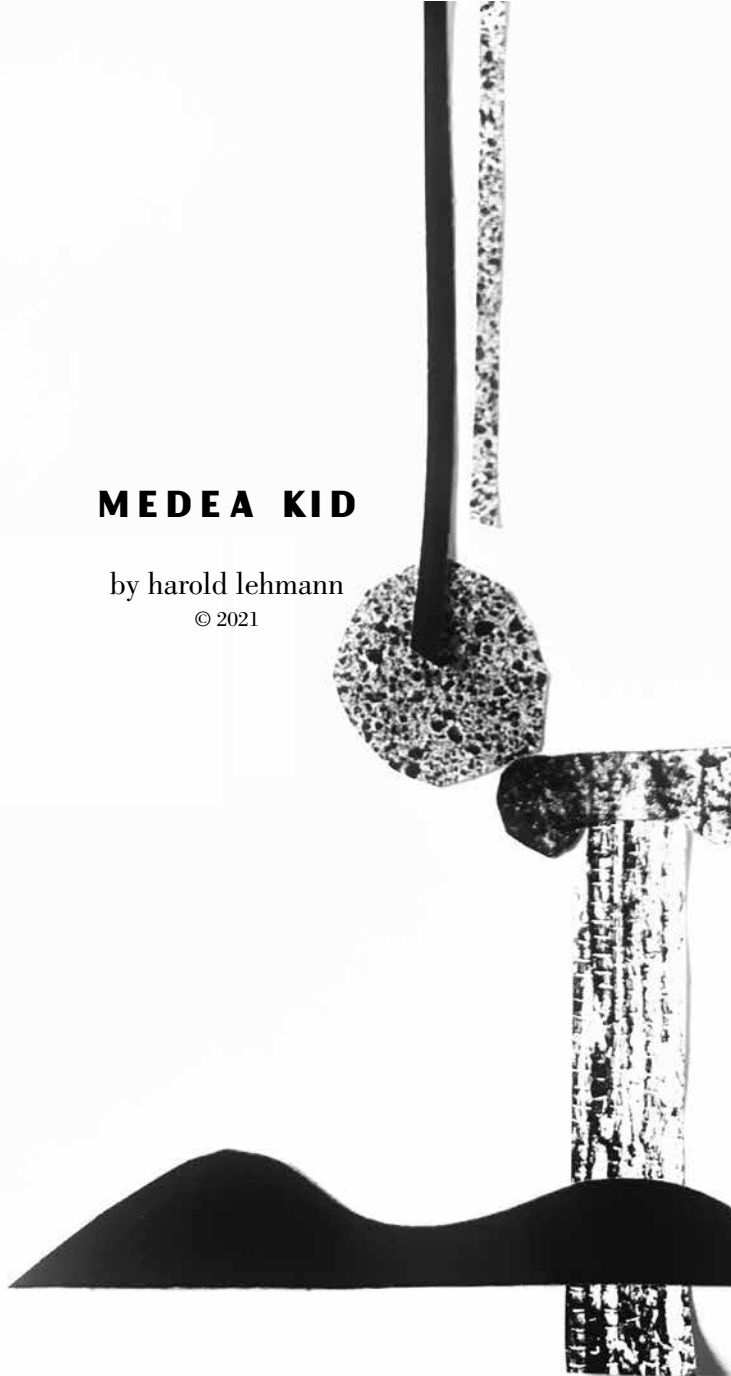



# MEDEA KID

by harold lehmann

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*dedicated to Sasha A*

my pain's a fair price to take away your smile,  
Medea by Euripedes



**start**

i read about the plays in ancient greece  
they had this special crane  
called The Mechane

it lifted up the actors playing gods into the sky

Medea was the first non-god  
to ride in this crane

>

when this whole thing started  
i was living on campus  
i didn't have a name back then

i still don't have a name but you can call me Os  
or Osmium

it's the densest material in the whole universe  
i need weight to exist

somebody gave me a letter  
i never got mail  
i was so excited

i ran to my secret spot  
tore open the envelope  
and read these words



*My Dear Son*

*sorry i murdered you  
please forgive me  
and come see me sometime  
so we can talk about it*

*Love Mom- Medea*

what?

there were tears on my face  
i fell backwards

i kept falling  
for it seemed then  
the earth  
or wherever i was  
dis-appeared

was i still on campus?

i heard somebody ask

“Hey - You Okay?”

i tried to answer  
but i couldn't

i came to in the Nurse's Office  
The Nurse was all business  
she shook her head and explained

“you are de- hydrated  
and need to rest”

i heard myself answer Ok

i did not mention the letter

for when people talk about time  
what are they saying?

*that everything moves in time  
but still...*

you see it's all about circumstances  
the time it takes for a cut to heal  
or explain a terrible mistake

situations stretch like rubber bands  
you have to be careful where you step  
and then *SNAP*

i heard Medea recommended  
to Love Your Fate  
no matter what  
but im getting ahead of myself

these bodies leap out in front of us  
and all we can do is run to keep up

after i blacked out  
and came to  
they sent me back to the residence

the others were staring at me  
nobody said a word

*What Are You Assholes Looking At?*

that's what i would've said  
but i didn't speak

i didn't dare

i wasn't going to let anybody know my true thoughts

i asked myself then  
is this place a graveyard  
is everybody here Dead?

they called it **the campus-**  
so was it a school

and if so what were we studying?

i heard the words  
*sorry i murdered you*

and i passed out  
again

>

what happens  
when time snaps its jaws on you

what 's your next move

>

*do not ever tell people what you actually think*

the one place i felt safe  
was the kitchen  
i always ate  
even when i wasn't hungry

and i never was  
so that was a clue

the cook had these goofy eyes and a wide smile

i loved him  
or at least could we could talk  
we were close

*what was his name?*

the cook told me stories about his life  
before the kitchen  
he had a motorcycle and  
roared around everywhere  
without limits

i wanted to live like that  
you know  
reckless and out of time

my head hurt from too much thinking

it was the letter's fault  
i never thought before  
time never weighed upon me

i was a regular fool with the others

we played cards  
we smoked  
we took walks  
we played video games  
we stared into space  
we were always bored  
but so what



“they” kept us busy

for now

i was obsessed with the space outside the gate  
i wondered to myself

the people out there  
probably face all kinds of problems and chaos

but

what if it makes em more alive  
or at least feel that way?

behind the gate  
we were preoccupied and dull

suspicious moved in on me  
and hypnotized by such thoughts  
i went to see the cook

he was a true goofball  
cracking jokes and cracking eggs

it was insanely hot in that kitchen  
a happy hell

with the cook laughing  
he was a friendly devil

floating through steam  
broken plates  
and silverware encrusted with sauce

i guess the dead ate constantly

the cook did seem more real than the others

“ HiYa Pal!”

he flipped an omelette  
and gave me one of his true goofball looks

i held up the letter from Medea  
“ what can you tell me about this?”  
i demanded in a voice that was too whiny and too serious

he dropped his giant spoon  
grabbed me by the collar  
and shook me

“why are you showing this to me?”

“ i don’t know- sorry “

“be out by the dumpsters in 15 minutes!”  
he commanded

his look was so mean  
i thought i ruined everything  
but i followed his words

i went out  
paced in circles  
turned back  
and crept behind the kitchen

i sat on one of the dumpsters  
the sky was so heavy  
i could barely breathe

i knew my situation was about to shift  
the way you sense weather about to change

i lit a cigarette  
attempting to be casual  
and fell back inside the dumpster

the cook walked out  
and dumped 3 bags of garbage on me

“don’t move, stay where you are”  
he whispered

“i brought you something to read”

he tossed a book down to me  
*The True Story of Medea*

“Read it and Weep”  
he laughed

so there i was  
drowning in garbage

my head spinning  
and a new thought came to me

if this situation is a movie  
i can’t keep up

the frames are moving too fast

*amor fati*  
*Love Your Fate-*  
*for it is garbage and it stinks hahahah*

is that how the philosophers might speak to us now?

the cook whispered down to me

“there’s only one way outta here now  
thru the **garbage**  
stay hidden  
read that book  
cover to cover  
and don’t you dare move

the truck will pick you up  
and carry you out  
beyond the gate

so be cool  
whoever you are”

>

>

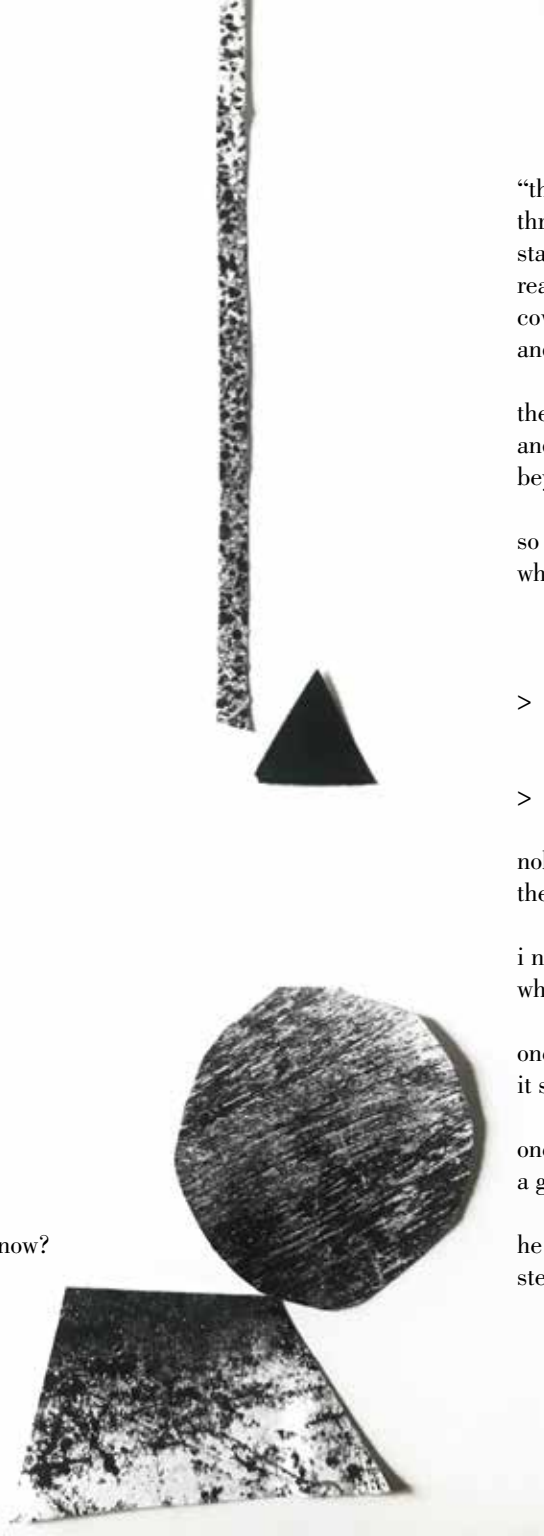
nobody ever said we were dead  
they just said we were on *campus*

i never questioned the situation  
why would i?

one time we were kicking a ball around  
it smacked the gate

one of the guards flew out  
a giant with no neck

he moved so fast  
steam shooting out his ears





“who do you think you are?”  
he sneered

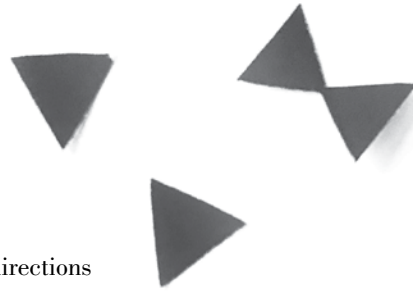
“never approach this gate  
avoid this gate at all costs  
this gate exists to protect you”

i looked down  
muttered i was sorry  
picked up the ball  
and backed away

i never went near the gate again  
though it was in my mind constantly

fear and curiosity pull you in opposite directions  
this can make your brain shake

it was all the letter's fault



### **in the dumpster**

underneath the garbage  
i read about Medea  
there was little else to do

i learned that Medea was a powerful princess

she fell in love with this sailor named Jason  
helped him to steal this golden fleece

a fleece is not a sweater

she gave up everything  
home friends family

all to be with this dude  
a fantasy romance  
or maybe the will of the gods  
who can say

but Jason had his own ideas  
he took off with this other chick  
chasing wealth sex and power

at that point Medea lost it  
spitting blood and curses

she lured their kids back into their house  
and stabbed em to death

then flew up into the sky in a magical chariot

her grandpa was the sun so they say  
it was one hell of an exit

so what's the message

that Medea in the book  
was the same who wrote me the letter?

mom kills kids  
and becomes instantaneous celebrity

what did that make me  
nameless blameless invisible?

i wanted to believe in the cook  
my one true friend in the entire world  
or so i imagined

and something kicked on in me then like a motor  
maybe the smell

stink of booze banana peels and rotten meat  
i experienced all of it  
and thought of Medea

she could be my symbol  
i would follow her into life  
inside the truck

this nasty motoring womb  
a fantasy without proof  
but it was all mine

the truck rumbled on

i heard voices  
were we near the gate?

soon i would be different  
with new thoughts

12



and a new body  
maybe

and the truck shook

okay i admit it  
sometimes i create faerie tales  
a bad habit  
but hard to break  
it's a way to deal

i imagined i was swallowed by a giant

not my idea-  
i saw this painting once by the artist Goya

*Saturn Devouring his Son*  
*Saturno devorando a su hijo*

a blurry figure  
a naked giant munching on a smaller naked body  
like a chicken wing

i found out it was the god saturn or cronos  
god of wealth and war

anyway  
what was up with these stories of parents behaving badly?  
the gods loved smashing people's lives  
it was their favorite past time

i had too much to think about

i kept asking myself  
why are you doing this?

you could be back at the campus

13

playing video games

but now this was in motion  
for what?

i kept my voice low  
in case anybody was listening

i didn't have a name  
but i invented one

*os or osmium the densest material in the whole universe*

the cook gave me this book  
and right or wrong

i was going to use it as a map

to find my way to Medea  
i needed to land somewhere

it was lonely in there  
not a new feeling

i just never noticed before

but the stink of garbage was better than the campus  
a black hole

so what  
is it a crime now to be lonely?  
before i was around people all the time  
and i didn't know a single name

i fell out now in search of Medea  
who murdered me maybe

a math problem i could not solve  
and the more i read the stranger i felt

the character of the Nurse was the only one  
who understood what was happening

she seemed to know where things were headed

this made sense as Nurses are skilled  
they need to deal with every possible situation

maybe i could locate this Nurse  
ask her what to do-

but how?

you can't just walk into a hospital  
and demand to see The Nurse

it was time to leave the garbage truck  
i couldn't stand the smell anymore

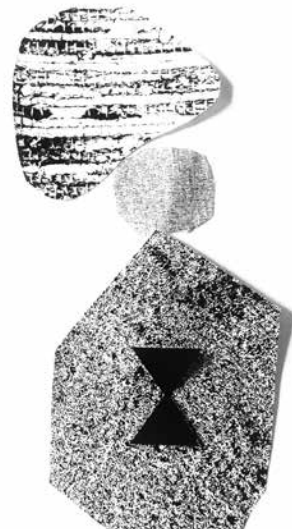
maybe i was becoming more alive?

i crawled out from behind the trash and looked out  
we were rolling down this empty road  
tall spooky trees on either side

i didn't think  
i jumped

a carcass and a movement of time  
and in order to keep up with everything

i moved faster than ever i did before  
but somehow



i was still too slow

>>

he heard water  
and stumbled down below the trees  
tried to wash off the muck in a stream

he thought

“well you escaped the campus  
congratulations  
so what’s your next move?”

are you alive now  
or even half-alive?”

this idea of being a ghost  
it made decisions feel less complicated

after all  
what do ghosts have to do in this world

assuming you’re a ghost with a grievance  
you go and haunt people all day long  
he did not feel such anger

mostly he was confused  
and only required answers about Medea-

were they actually related  
and if so - what then?

he wasn’t going back to the campus  
not now



and the space between the trees opened up  
the wind  
the sound of water

he lay back  
clothes sinking into the mud  
light melting between branches

there was birdsong  
and he drifted...

>>

“well are you dead?”

he opened his eyes and saw green boots

“oh - guess not, so how the hell did you get here?”

he saw the old woman’s face-

“aww dang you’re ripe- i can smell you from here”

“are you a Nurse?” he asked

“What? NO- i WAS but not no more.

Who the hell are you and why are you on my property?  
Buddy here sniffed you out- though not difficult bein you smell like  
ass”

she gestured to the medium-sized dog next to her

the dog gave him a look  
sarcastic

as if he was in on the joke

“what kind of mischief you mixed up in kid?”

she seemed to find the situation humorous  
as if she possessed additional information

as if she was playing a role and might head backstage  
for a costume change

she was tough and imposing like an old bird  
the dog watching him with cold eyes

“i’m sorry- i must’ve fallen asleep...”

“where are you from?”

“the campus...”

“oh a STUDENT- well that makes sense-  
so what happened- you party too hard  
and wander out into the wilderness?”

“i don’t know”

he did not want to argue with the old woman or explain details  
he assumed a pose of ignorance

after all  
it felt good talking to someone else besides the cook

he saw in her eyes  
mockery and kindness  
it was reassuring

he wasn’t a ghost  
she was speaking to him without crying

or shaking

she looked him over again and shrugged

“alright cmon- let’s see if we can get you cleaned up  
and back to where you need to go”

he followed her and Buddy to a dented blue truck  
Buddy hopped in the back without hesitation

“you ride back there with Buddy- I don’t want you stinkin up the  
cab”

the truck rolled over a dirt track  
his head ached

he took deep breaths of the morning air  
like a cure

Buddy watched him with that sarcastic look

as if the dog knew all about him  
but chose not to speak

they rolled up to a ramshackle house  
she did not ask his name or give hers

“stand over there so we can get you cleaned up”

he stood on a stone slab and she sprayed him down with a hose

>>

for now being alive was all that mattered  
she brought him fresh clothes

“these belonged to my husband  
i don’t believe you’re the same size  
but still  
they will do for now”

she and Buddy set him up on a cot in the shed next to the house  
surrounded by tools and junk  
it was comfortable enough

they watched as he finished a meal of grilled cheese and tomato soup

“you never go inside my house got it?”

he nodded

at times, it seemed the old woman was speaking Buddy’s thoughts  
the dog kept giving him this look

he was about to snap and ask the dog,  
“what the hell is your problem?”

but he didn’t want to seem rude

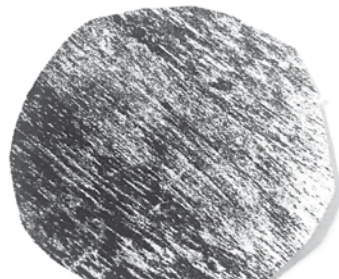
was it paranoid to assume a dog was giving you a look?  
before  
he always found dogs to be straightforward in their opinions

why was this dog so different?  
he decided to calm himself and assess the situation further

he tried to sleep

squirming around in the cot  
it was the beginning of something

a new association



he needed to gather more details about Medea and her location  
he sensed the old woman knew a lot more than she let on

he reminded himself not to be reckless  
“be patient Os”

it wasn’t easy  
you receive a letter that says “sorry i murdered you”

what was the appropriate reaction?

anger  
sadness  
the telltale loneliness

it rushed out like water and drowned over him

he jumped out of bed  
wrapped himself in a wool blanket

and walked up to the old lady’s house

he took one long breath and knocked

she came out in her bathrobe  
hair in all directions  
staring down at him from the door

“What’s yr problem- Can’t you sleep?”

Buddy was right next to her watching, but did not growl

“i’m so sorry to disturb i ...”

“ what do you want?”

“i’m not sure  
you are so kind and it’s late  
but you never told me your name”

“no i didn’t”

“you mentioned something before  
it’s embarrassing to ask  
but i have to know  
for my own reasons...”

“what?”

“you mentioned that you were a nurse...”

“that was a long time ago”

“ but i mean could you-  
do you know somebody named Medea  
or her location?”

he held up the book

“i got a letter from a person named Medea  
i need to know who she is  
and why she wrote me this letter...”

she looked at him sideways and broke off laughing

“can you believe it Buddy  
he’s really out of his mind

freaking out in the dark  
bout some story he read in a book”

Buddy the Dog just watched  
she kept laughing

slammed the door  
he could still hear her inside

“these fools  
they don’t even realize  
what they don’t know...”

he stood frozen  
staring at the door

then shook himself  
and wandered back to the garage

and closed his eyes

>

the next morning the air was bright and crisp

he rubbed his face and settled on a tree stump to wake himself up

the old lady bounded out of the house  
dressed in a fancy hunting outfit with vest boots hat and equipment

she looked exhilarated

she and Buddy brought him breakfast and watched him eat  
there was no mention of the previous evening

he sat on the tree stump and ate his food as they watched

“Buddy and i have some business today”

When she said the word “business” she held up a rifle and tossed it

with other equipment into the back of the truck.

“We need you to stay here and clean up the yard okay?”

“sure”

she did not mention the night before

his head jumped from current circumstances  
making stories and connections

was this the start of a new life with the old lady and Buddy?  
and if so  
how long would that last?

she supplied him with various tools and equipment  
a rake a shovel gloves and garbage bags

he got to work clearing up the junk in the yard  
weird how they just stood there watching him

but Os attempted to ignore them and focus

then it seemed like Buddy decided all was okay  
the dog barked  
jumped in the back of the truck with the equipment

the old lady climbed behind the wheel and called out

“this yard better be spotless- and stay out of my house got it?”

she tapped the horn again and they rolled off

why did she say that?  
like a challenge

as if she was daring him to enter the house

while they were away on business...

Os decided to put it out of his mind and focus on the work

he liked the cleanup work- it felt good to be accomplishing  
to be useful however he could

but the warning about the house followed him around  
pulling on him like a magnet

and stories kept building in his mind

his own body  
not in time and space,  
watching himself like a movie

this was the beginning of a bad pattern

Os listened for the truck and heard nothing  
so he took a breath and moved up towards the house

the door was open  
he passed inside

through a musty hallway  
into a big living room  
crowded with heavy furniture junk and knickknacks

he was on the hunt  
not sure for what  
another force pulling on him

but also common sense

*get out of here Os  
the old lady will be back any second  
she's got weapons you dummy*



and he saw something by the telephone  
the old style with a wheel to dial the numbers

there was a pad of paper,  
and scrawled in red ink  
were the words

*Hotel Medea, Room 17, 1000 Kolchis Rd.*

he tore the paper off  
shoved it in his pocket  
and moved to the door  
kind of dizzy

he stepped outside  
the old lady was there  
she swung a shovel and  
whacked him in the gut

“what’s the matter Fool  
can’t you follow instructions?”

he fell back on the porch  
the wind knocked out of him

he saw Buddy on the ground  
a smirk in the canine eyes

Os became furious  
a rage like fire swept over him  
he jumped up  
shifted his weight

and tore the shovel from her old lady hands  
she crashed backwards into some plants

“LIAR!” he stalked forward holding up the shovel

“ you know stuff you aren’t saying  
about Medea  
tell me the truth about this hotel  
or i smash in your brains!”

she cried out  
“ don’t kill me - i don’t know anything  
it’s all just rumors  
that’s all”

Os jabbed her in the ribs with the shovel  
there was a force working on him now  
turning him into somebody else

“what is this scheme  
you think it’s funny to play around with me  
who else is involved?”

“nobody  
you mentioned that name  
Medea  
i heard about a hotel  
so i dug up the address  
i was going to tell you  
i swear....  
but Buddy told me not to”

“why are you still telling lies  
i bet you never worked as a nurse either”

“Buddy you lazy mutt- HELP ME!”

but Buddy just sat back and watched them scrap  
his canine eyes cold

Os threw down the shovel  
she blinked and cried

he held out the paper  
shook it in her face

“Where is this Hotel Medea? where is Kolchis?”

but she no longer spoke  
dumb and blind  
blinking up at the sky

Os thought to himself  
this story’s made me evil already  
Medea from the outside in  
working on me  
casting spells

i smash this old woman to the ground  
i can’t stop

he ran inside  
grabbed a pillow and a blanket

he carefully placed the pillow under her fragile skull  
and draped the blanket over her body

this location was over

Os climbed into the truck  
all the equipment was still there including the rifle

he started up the motor

Buddy just watched

>

in the story of Medea

*if only*  
was the first line

if only

that we may second-guess ourselves back in time  
scratch out words and regret

*if only*

who are these voices  
haunting us

making impossible demands  
placing bets on what we do

**a mistake**

mistakes follow their own logic

he knew well  
that not every door is an opportunity

that needing to move is a virus  
while time seeps in from the outside

suddenly the meaning of things  
is obscured by too many words

nature has its own agenda

are you good with that Os?

a letter drops in your lap  
you fall in some garbage  
make your getaway

now where to?

he did not know  
and with nothing to compare to

memories wiped clean

he was numb  
and ruthless

in the old stories they told you how to behave  
but now the gods were distant voices  
to be ignored or dis- obeyed

he gripped the wheel  
and yelled out the window

“what do you want me to do with this letter?”

he wasn't expecting an answer

>>

going up into the hills  
in the dented blue truck  
the terrain mean and boring

from rocks to road to sky

he searched the glovebox  
with his free hand

there was a map and a wad of cash  
he attempted to identify his location

he crumpled up the map  
and tossed it out the window

discipline was not a part of this story  
and anyway  
it was too late to learn that trick

pictures flashed in his head  
Os tried to erase each one

a picture is not a map  
a map is not a location

you are in danger  
before the campus  
and now?

with no established routine

just words on paper

panic cut into him

in the story of Medea  
a group of women called the chorus  
follow her around

warning about the future

they act sympathetic  
but it's just a tactic

to get close  
and learn her motives

why?

are they jealous

we despise people who  
try to understand

we survive by recording

Medea was exotic

Jason's fantasy  
until he decided to “straighten out”

we invite disruption  
then act surprised

maybe we are bored

tragedy is instruction  
and entertainment

screw these old timers and their advice  
we wanna live

as if they know better

dragging shadows  
and bad memories

meanwhile reality  
twists in on itself

>>

up ahead was a gas station  
a busted shack with one pump

Os thought to himself  
Ok  
it's worth a shot

at least to get directions  
or a snack

he swerved the truck sideways  
parked  
and hopped out

there were two identical weirdos sitting there

one looked Happy  
and one looked Sad

they spoke in unison which was pretty odd



HappySad said,

“HEY that truck looks familiar,  
where’d you get it from?”

Os looked at them a second  
and then he said

“it’s mine-  
my truck”

he forced a smile

“well that truck looks like Thena’s truck  
she’s got a blue truck just like that one”

the two weirdos moved their heads in unison  
speaking with bugged out eyes

“only her dog Buddy’s always in the back  
hope that ain’t Thena’s truck

that would be Baaaaad”

“it’s my truck,” he repeated again  
trying to make a smile again

then Os changed the subject

“ i have a question...”

“shoot”

“im looking for this place...  
the Hotel Medea  
ever heard of it?”