

EAE 0422 A	
Code Sujet	EHP
Sujet Jury	
Sujet Candidat	
Page	1 / 6

Document A

Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Vintage books, London, 1995. (1994) pp 343-345.

5 Pelagia suspected the imminent collapse of a thousand pretty dreams. She remembered the confidential advice of her aunt: 'For a woman to obtain success, she is obliged either to weep, to nag, or to sulk. She must be prepared to do this for years, because she is the disposable property of the men of the family, and men, like rocks, take a long time to wear down.' Pelagia tried to weep, but was physically prevented by a mounting sense of panic. She stood up suddenly, and just as abruptly sat down again. She foresaw an abyss opening at her feet and an army of Turks, in the form of her father, preparing to push her over the precipice. His dry dissection of her heart seemed already to have banished the magic from her imagination. But Dr Iannis squeezed her hand, repenting already of his rude humour, and inspired to compassion by no more than the undeniable fact that it was another beautiful day. He rotated the end of his forefinger in one extremity of his moustache, and detachedly observed his daughter's attempts to produce a tear. He commenced a lengthy monologue:

10 'It's a fact of life that the honour of a family derives from the conduct of its women. I don't know why this is, and possibly matters are different elsewhere. But we live here, and I note the fact scientifically in the same way that I observe that there is snow on Mt Aenos in January and that we have no rivers.

15 'It's not that I don't like the captain. Of course he is a little mad, which is quite simply explained by the fact that he is Italian, but he is not so mad as to be completely risible. In fact I like him very much, and the fact that he plays the mandolin like an angel makes up in great measure for him being a foreigner.' At this point the doctor wondered whether or not it would be constructive to reveal his suspicion that the captain suffered from haemorrhoids; the revelation of physical imperfections and infirmities was often a powerful antidote to love. Out of respect for Pelagia, he decided against it. One should not, after all, place dogshit in Aphrodite's bed. He continued:

20 'But you must remember that you are betrothed to Mandras. You do remember that, don't you? Technically the captain is an enemy. Can you conceive the torment that would be inflicted upon you by others when they judge that you have renounced the love of a patriotic Greek, in favour of an invader, an oppressor? You will be called a collaborator, a Fascist's whore, and a thousand things besides. People will throw stones at you and spit, you know that, don't you? You would have to move away to Italy if you wanted to stay with him, because here you might not be safe. Are you ready to leave this island and this people? What do you know of life over there? Do you think that Italians know how to make meat pie and have churches dedicated to St Gerasimos? No, they do not.

30 'And another thing. Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal

Code Sujet	EHP
Page	2 / 6

35 passion, it is not the desire to mate every second minute of the day, it is not lying awake at night
imagining that he is kissing every cranny of your body. No, don't blush, I am telling you some truths.
That is just being " in love", which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love
has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had
40 roots that grew towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossom had fallen from
our branches we found that we were one tree and not two. But sometimes the petals fall away and
the roots have not entwined. Imagine giving up your home and your people, only to discover after six
months, a year, three years, that the trees have had no roots and have fallen over. Imagine the
desolation. Imagine the imprisonment.' I say to you that to marry the captain is impossible until our
45 homeland is liberated. One can only forgive a sin after the sinner has finished committing it, because
we cannot allow ourselves to condone it whilst it is still being perpetrated. I admit this possibility,
indeed I would be happy with it. Perhaps you do not love Mandras any more. Perhaps there is an
equation to be balanced, with love on one side and dishonour on the other. No one knows where
Mandras is. He may not be amongst the living. 'But this means that you have a love that will be
50 indefinitely delayed. Pelagia, you know as well as I do that love delayed is lust augmented. No, don't
look at me like that. I am not ignorant or stupid, and I was not born yesterday.'

Code Sujet	EHP
Page	3 / 6

Document B

Margaret Atwood, *On Medea*. Random House. 1998.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0498/wolf/essay.html>

5 Of all the seductive, sinister and transgressive women who have haunted the Western imagination, none has a reputation more lurid than Medea's. Judith, Salome, Jezebel, Delilah, Lady Macbeth – these murdered or betrayed grown men, but Medea's crimes are yet more chilling: credited with having slaughtered her younger brother, she is also said to have sacrificed her own two children out of revenge for rejected love.

10 The Greek myth – so old it is spoken of as ancient by Homer – has many variations, but it goes roughly as follows. Aeson, king of Iolcus in Thessaly, had his throne usurped by his half brother Pelias. Aeson's son Jason was saved, and sent away to be educated by the centaur Cheiron. Grown to manhood, he arrived at the court of Pelias to claim his birthright, but Pelias said he would surrender the throne only on condition that Jason bring back the Golden Fleece from Colchis – a demand which was thought to be the equivalent of a death sentence, as Colchis, situated at the extreme end of the Black Sea, was thought to be unreachable.

15 The Golden Fleece was the skin of the flying ram which had rescued Jason's ancestors, Phrixos and Helle, from threatened murder at the hands of their stepmother. Arrived safely at Colchis, Phrixos in gratitude sacrificed the ram and hung its fleece up in the temple of the war god Ares. Jason had either to refuse the quest and give up all hope of the throne, or accept it and endanger his life. He chose the latter course, and summoned fifty heroes from all over Greece to his aid. These were the Argonauts – named after their ship – who after many perils and adventures arrived at last at Colchis, a "barbarian" kingdom with strange customs – where, for instance, men's bodies were not buried, but suspended in sacks from trees. There Jason demanded the Golden Fleece as his by inheritance.

20 Aeëtes, King of Colchis, set more impossible conditions: Jason must harness two fire-breathing brazen-footed bulls, defeat the earth-born warriors that would spring up after he had sown a field with serpents' teeth, and slay the deadly dragon that guarded the Fleece. Jason was ready to admit defeat when he was seen by Princess Medea, daughter of Aeëtes, granddaughter of Helios the sun god, priestess of the Triple Goddess of the Underworld, and a powerful sorceress renowned for her ability to heal as well as to destroy. Overcome by love for Jason, she used her occult knowledge to help him surmount the various obstacles and to obtain the Fleece, in return for which Jason swore by all the gods to remain true to her forever. Together with the Argonauts, the two lovers set sail by night; but once the alarm was raised, King Aeëtes and the Colchians followed them.

25 Here traditions differ. Some say Jason killed Medea's younger brother Apsyrtus with a spear as he stood in a pursuing ship; others, that Medea herself murdered the boy, dismembered him, and scattered the pieces in the ocean. The grieving Aeëtes had to collect them and was thus

Code Sujet	EHP
Page	4 / 6

35 delayed, and so the Argonauts escaped. In any case, the two needed to be purified for the death of Apsyrtus, and went to the island of the enchantress Circe, Medea's aunt and a daughter of Helios. After several more escapades – Medea, for instance, did away with the usurping King Pelias by tricking his own daughters into killing him, thus making Jason's own kingdom an even unhealthier place for him to be – the two, now lawfully man and wife, were welcomed at Corinth by its King, Creon.

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45 It's at this point that the story turns from romantic adventure to tragedy. For Jason, forgetting both his debt of gratitude and his vows to all the gods, forsook his loyalty to Medea. Some say he was swayed by the insinuations of Creon – why live with such a dangerous woman, so much wiser and more powerful than yourself? – others, that he was overcome by a new love; others, that he was impelled by ambition; but in any case he decided to repudiate Medea, and to marry Creon's daughter Glauce, thus becoming the heir to Corinth. Medea herself was to be banished from the city.

50 Medea, torn by conflicting emotions – sorrow for lost love, wounded pride, rage, jealousy, hatred – concocted a horrible revenge. Pretending to accept Jason's decision and to wish for peace between them, she sent a bridal gift to Glauce – a beautiful but poisonous dress, which, when the rays of the sun hit it, burst into flame, whereupon Glauce in agony threw herself into a well. Some say that the people of Corinth then stoned Medea's children to death; others, that she herself killed them, either to save them from a worse fate or to pay Jason back for his treachery. She then disappeared from Corinth, some say in a chariot drawn by dragons. Jason himself, abandoned by the gods whom he had forsworn, became a wandering vagabond and was at last crushed by the prow of his own rotting ship.

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60 This story has been retold time and again over the past two and a half millennia. It has been used as the source for poems, plays, paintings, prose fiction, and operas, of which last there are twenty-four at least. Each artist has chosen among the variant traditions, and some have made their own changes and additions. For instance, we owe the slain children – two, not fourteen, as earlier versions had it – to the oddly sympathetic play by the Greek tragedian Euripides; and the many operas in which Medea sets fire to the temple of Hera and burns herself to death borrow this fiery finish from the seventeenth-century French dramatist Corneille. The poet Ovid is most interested in the eye-of-newt dimension, and spends much time on moonlit sorcery; the Roman dramatist Seneca goes in for unbridled rhetoric and gore. William Morris, in his narrative poem *The Life and Death of Jason*, gives us a blushing, trembling, Pre-Raphaelite maiden, reduced to a weepy pulp by Jason's infidelity, and a blonde into the bargain; Charles Kingsley, he of *Water Babies* fame, tries for a muscular-Christian interpretation – keep away from the bad women, lads, especially dark-haired witches! Each author has redone Medea in the light of his or her own age and its concerns; and so does Christa Wolf.

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75 Her attack is head-on and original. Others before her have condemned Medea's main crimes -- fratricide, infanticide, and the murder of the bride-elect Glauce by toxic frock -- or viewed them as partially understandable under the circumstances, but Christa Wolf's Medea flatly denies that she committed any of these crimes at all. Drawing on the insights of modern anthropology, Wolf sets *Medea* in a period in which the old goddess-centered religions are being

Code Sujet	EHP
Page	5 / 6

80 overwhelmed by new patriarchal god-ruled ones, in which kings are flouting the rights of queens, and in which former customs -- including human sacrifice and the yearly dismemberment of the king in a fertility ritual -- are falling into obsolescence, although they still have enough true believers to be resurrected by various rulers for their own purposes, most often the solidification of power. The murder and dismemberment of Apsyrtus, then, are seen to have a kinship with, for instance, the death of Orpheus, torn to pieces by Maenads at the Spring Festival; and Medea's betrayal of her father Aeëtes, and the aid she gives to Jason, are not ascribed, as usual, to an overwhelming passion caused by a shaft from naughty Cupid's golden bow, but to her secret knowledge of her father's role in the murder of his own son and
85 dynastic rival.

In Wolf's version, Jason is beloved, true, but later: this Medea is no helpless slave of sexual passion. At first Jason is largely the means to an end -- Medea's escape from blood-smeared Colchis in search of a higher and more humane civilization. Jason's betrayal of her is also Corinth's betrayal of her idealistic quest, and her contempt for his behavior is the contempt of
90 the disillusioned nineteenth-century colonial arriving in Paris or London to find that the imperial promises of a nobler life ring hollow.

But *Medea* is neither an anthropological retelling of myth in the style of Mary Renault, nor a simpleminded story of men-versus-women, of a sensuous moon-and-earth religion versus a cold and abstract sky theology. It is a study of power, and of the operations of power, and of
95 the behavior of human beings under pressure when power squeezes them tight.

Code Sujet	EHP
Page	6 / 6

Document C

Poster, 1943. Artist unknown.

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