

ἐκπίπτω vs. ἐκβάλλομαι IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*

(Eur. *Med.* 450, 458, 461, 712 : 512).

That ἐκπίπτω serves from Homer onward as passive of ἐκβάλλω¹ in its various meanings seems to be generally accepted;² it is pointed out that the intransitive active verb is construed like the passive verb for which it is substituted³, while the similarity of meaning which makes the substitution possible is usually taken for granted.⁴

And yet, as ἐκπίπτω did not entirely replace — or, perhaps, obstruct the development of⁵ — ἐκβάλλομαι, there may be a difference of meaning between them.⁶ If such a difference in fact exists it ought to be detectable by the comparison of the two verbs when they happen to be used by the same author in the same work with regard to the same

¹ This is the case of the composite verb only; Homer has (aor. and pf.) passiva of βάλλω.

² See, e.g., Dover ad ἐκπίπτω in Thuc. 6.95.2, and LSJ s.vv. ἐκβάλλω and ἐκπίπτω, plus the *Supplement* for the latter.

³ K.-G. p. 98,5 (§373.5): “An der Stelle passiver Verba werden zuweilen intransitive Activa gebraucht, indem sie ganz wie Passiva construiert werden.”

⁴ *ibid.*: “Diese Activa...werden...ganz gewöhnlich...statt der Passivform von Verben...gebraucht.”

⁵ E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* II, after dealing on pp. 223–4 with the antitheseis Act.: Pass. and Act.: Med. (+Pass) states on p. 224: “Doch bestand von jeher der Typus griech. ἐκβάλλειν: ἐκπίπτειν”. — LSJ do not mention passiva of ἐκβάλλω before the middle of the 5th cent.; see, however, *Heracl.* B 42.

⁶ Schwyzer II p. 226 speaks of “eine mit dem Passiv...sachlich gleichwertige, doch *mildere* (my italics) Ausdrucksweise.” He adds neither explanation nor specification. See below note 21.

event. This is the case in the *Medea* of Euripides,⁷ where the exile of Medea from Corinth is described by both verbs.⁸

Three times in the course of his first speech on stage (446–464), which is his first encounter with Medea after Creon announced her banishment from Corinth to her face (271ff.), does Jason refer to it as an event soon to take place.⁹ He is evidently uneasy and while stressing, on the one hand, her responsibility for what is going to happen,¹⁰ he, on the other hand, declares himself to be both innocent of her plight¹¹ and acting for her benefit.¹² In this context it seems worth noting that in all Jason's references to Medea's impending exile any explicit mention of the active agent of this exile is artfully evaded,¹³ and that he consistently uses the verb ἐκπίπτειν to describe the envisaged event.

⁷ Probably the earliest instance, and certainly a rare one, at least in what is extant of 5th cent. Greek literature. Euripides has both verbs also in *Electra* (289, 412, 1004:541) and *Ion* (48:811), but describing different events. This seems to be the case also with Herodotus, Antiphon, Aristophanes and Sophocles (but for *OC*; for which see below notes 16 and 17). In Aeschylus, Pindar and Thucydides there are no passive forms of ἐκβάλλω.

⁸ ἐκπίπτειν 450, 458, 461, 712; ἐκβάλλεσθαι 512. The agent is not mentioned with either, which seems to call for notice as it is in connection with the introduction, by means of preposition, of the "Agents" that both K.-G. (see above notes 3 and 4) and Schwyzer (see above note 6) state that intransitive activa serve instead of passiva. But, as a matter of fact, the agent is very seldom mentioned in passive sentences; see O. Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar* (London 1924) 168.

⁹ 450, 458, 461. — He refers to it twice more in the same speech (454, 462), but there it is viewed as a state, φυγή, not as an action.

¹⁰ 450, 453–4, 457–8: her banishment is a punishment for her verbal invective against the royal house.

¹¹ 451–2: It is not what she said against him for which she is punished.

¹² 456: He tried — unsuccessfully: ἀφῆρουν. impf. — to assuage the wrath of the king and to annul the banishment. 459ff.: now that she and the children are leaving, he offers to supply her with money and connections so as to make the exile easier for them.

¹³ Not only is it nowhere stated who decreed her banishment, but even the connection between the events which led to the decree and the making of the decree has to be supplied by the audience:

450: "λόγων ματαίων οὐνεκ": it will be assumed that the λόγοι μάταιοι were hers, and that they were directed against the κρείσσονες of 449, who, as a result, will somehow stand behind the ἐκπεσῆ χθονός.

453ff.: "ζημιουμένη": presumably because of ἀ...έστι σοι λελεγμένα, and, it will be inferred, by those ἐς οὓς ἐστὶ σοι λελεγμένα.

458 (456–8): similar to 450 (argument in "Ringkomposition").

Jason uses ἐκπίπτειν. Medea, in her reply, uses ἐκβάλλεσθαι (512).¹⁴ Why the passive was preferred may, perhaps, be learned from *Med.* 704ff.: “..ἐξελαύνομαι χθονός” says Medea to Aegeus. “πρὸς τοῦ;” is his immediate reaction. It seems that where a passive is used, an agent, even when not mentioned, is likely to be inferred. If somebody ἐξελαύνεται, somebody else ἐξελαύνει him. In the same way, if somebody ἐκβάλλεται, somebody else ἐκβάλλει him, and Medea’s preference of the passive in 512 introduces, by implication, the agent the mention of whom was so carefully evaded by Jason. Why Jason did not want to have Creon mentioned in this context,¹⁵ while Medea as it were dragged him into it by this implication here, might also be inferred from the comparison with 704ff.: “Κρέων μ’ ἐλαύνει φυγάδα” says Medea in reply to Aegeus’ “πρὸς τοῦ;”, whereupon Aegeus retorts: “ἐῴ δ’ Ἰάσων;” Evidently Jason was expected to interfere effectively on her behalf, so much so that the very mention of her being driven (or thrown) out is an accusation not against him who drives (or throws) her out (Creon owed her nothing) but against Jason who let it happen. No wonder also that Jason uses ἐκπίπτειν to describe Medea’s leaving Corinth: with the intransitive verb the action and the responsibility for it are hers, and hers only.¹⁶

That indeed the passive of ἐκβάλλω is here preferred over the intransitive ἐκπίπτω with the intention to implicate the not-mentioned agent¹⁷ seems to be supported by 712: Medea appeals to Aegeus to take

¹⁴ As the perfect of ἐκπίπτω is found in Euripides (fg. 522,3), the employment of the different verbs should not be considered as necessitated by the different verbal aspects or tenses, although the three cases of Jason’s ἐκπίπτειν are (ind.)fut. and (coni.)aor., while Medea’s ἐκβάλλεσθαι is a perfect. — See also note 18.

¹⁵ Creon himself had no such scruples; see 272–6 with its outspoken “..κούκ ἄπειμι...πρὶν ἂν σε γαίας τερμόνων ἔξω βάλω.”

¹⁶ It should also be borne in mind that the wide range of ἐκπίπτω as intransitive counterpart of ἐκβάλλω includes “leave of one’s free will”: cf. *S.O.C.* 766 with 770.

¹⁷ And also to present the event as an act of violence of which the passive subject is the victim. This seems to be the implied accusation against the non-mentioned agent in the other cases where Euripides uses passive forms of cf., e.g. *El.* 289, 412, 1004 (against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus), *Ba.* 1313, 1366 (against Dionysus). *Ion* 1496 is comparable to *Medea* inasmuch as the implied accused is not the direct agent (Creon in the *Medea*, Creousa in the *Ion*) but the one who ought to have prevented the action (Jason in the *Medea*, Apollo in the *Ion*). — Cf. also Soph. *OC* 1257 (this seems to be the only other work of the period where the same event is described by both verbs under discussion; see notes 7 and 16).

pity on her (711), not to view her in her plight inactively (712) but to act for her benefit (713). Her plight is her banishment, and in order to describe herself in this plight of hers she uses ἐκπίπτειν.¹⁸ The intransitive verb in this context, so shortly after her statement “ἐξελαύνομαι χθονός” (704) and her explanation “Κρέων μ’ελαύνει” (704) seems, *prima facie*, strangely tame. Not so when one sees where it leads: Had she used the passive of ἐκβάλλω, she would, by implication, have introduced Creon as the agent causing her to leave, and Aegeus would have been expected to act against Creon in order to prevent her banishment. But what she wants from Aegeus is not to help her stay in Corinth but to receive her in his country and home (713).¹⁹ Therefore now, unlike to 512, she uses ἐκπίπτω:²⁰ If a person ἐκβάλλεται and

¹⁸ 712: “καὶ μὴ μ’ ἔρημον ἐκπεσοῦσαν εἰσίδης”. As Euripides has also the aor.pass.part. of ἐκβάλλω (*El.289*: ἐκβληθεὶς δόμων), the choice of the verb is clearly deliberate. — See also note 14.

¹⁹ This is of vital importance for her; cf. 713 with 386ff.

²⁰ Note the effective differentiation between “synonymous” verbs depicting Medea’s exile: Creon uses (276) ἔξω βάλλειν, throw out (see note 15). Medea uses (for her exile from Corinth) ἐκβάλλειν only in connection with her revenge on Creon, as it were enframing with it the whole plan from its initial shaping (373: “ἔξδὸν αὐτῷ τὰμ’ ἐλεῖν βουλευματα / γῆς ἐκβαλόντι, τήνδ’ ἀφῆκεν ἡμέραν / μείναι μ’. ἐν ἧ τρεῖς τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν νεκροὺς / θῆσω”) until after its execution (1357: “οὐδ’...Κρέων ἀνατεῖ τῆσδέ μ’ ἐκβαλεῖν χθονός”). In her immediate reply to Creon she refers to what he called “throw out” by ἀποστέλλειν, send away (281: “..γῆς ἀποστέλλεις;”) as if by evading its true name the cruel truth could still be averted (she uses ἀποστέλλειν again in 934, to Jason, in her hypocritical speech of reconciliation, intent to present herself as understanding that her exile is beneficial even for herself). When she sees that Creon is adamant she employs ἐξελαύνειν, expel (326). (ἐξ)ελαύνειν seems to be the *terminus technicus*; it is the verb which first introduced the theme of exile (by the pedagogue, 70); Medea uses it again when she tells Aegeus what is done to her (706). This verb appears not to carry any special connotations when active, as also φεύγειν which may be its intransitive counterpart (e.g. 338, 341, 346, 512, 604, 785, etc.). But the passive of (ἐξ)ελαύνειν seems to introduce the agent by implication, as in 704 (cf. 705–6) and, it would seem, in 438 where it is used by the chorus in a stasimon (“φυγὰς...χώρας... ἐλαύνη”. In its context, between “τὰς ἀνάνδρου κοίτας ὀλέσασα λέκτρον” and “βέβακε δ’ ὄρκων πίστις” this passive seems not only to describe Medea’s destitution but also to blame Jason for it); it is not used elsewhere in this play.

Translations tend to blur these fine distinctions. Much is lost when, e.g. (Rex Warner’s translation; R.W. believed in sticking as closely as possible to the original; see the description of his methods in his introduction to “Medea”) Medea’s two active ἐκβάλλειν of 373 and 1357, which take up Creon’s declaration of 272–6, are translated by two different verbs, which differ also from that employed for the translation of Creon’s ἔξω βάλλειν of 276; no less is lost when Creon’s blunt active there is turned into an agentless passive.

somebody wants to help him, he will act against the one who ἐκβάλλει him. But if a person ἐκπίπτει and somebody wants to help him, he will support the one who ἐκπίπτει.

It would thus seem that the difference between the basic meanings of the intransitive ἐκπίπτω and the passive of ἐκβάλλω is a difference in kind²¹ and that Euripides made subtle use of it in order to present the same action in different lights, either happening as it were by itself, or brought about by an implied external agent, according to the various needs of the changing dramatic situation.

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²¹ And not in degrees of mildness. See note 6.