

Euripides' *Medea*, 214-266: "The Indignity of Womankind"

Women of Corinth, here I am, out of the house, so that you don't blame me. For I, better than anyone, know that many mortals are arrogant, some in private and some in public, while others silently garner ill repute for their indifference. There is no justice in the eyes of mortals, my friends: they hate another person as soon as they see them, without truly understanding the other's soul, even though the stranger has done nothing wrong. Therefore, a foreigner, such as I, must make themselves pleasing to the city. After all, I can't stand any stubborn person who, without knowing, offends their fellow citizens.

But oh, this blow has indeed been unexpected, falling upon me and utterly destroying my soul. I might as well be dead. I've given up the joy of life, my friends – oh, how I wish I were dead! My whole existence was bound up with Jason, my husband, who has proved himself to be the most despicable of all men.

Of all living creatures who have a mind, we women are by far the most wretched. First, we must spend a ridiculous amount of money to buy a husband, a master of our bodies. Then, as if that wasn't bad enough, we must suffer even more, for the greatest struggle for us women is not in the buying but in the choosing: either to take an honorable or a disgraceful man as husband. Divorce brings only ill repute, yet women cannot refuse a husband either. A newly married woman, coming into the unfamiliar customs of her husband's home, must be like a prophet, divining how best to deal with this man. If the wife works hard and manages to figure her husband out, he might stay without force, and this is considered to be an enviable life. But if the wife can't figure him out, if the marriage fails and the husband leaves, the woman will yearn for death as her only escape. What kind of existence is this? If a man is vexed with his family, he can soothe his heart by going out and spending time with some friend or old companion, yet us

women must invest ourselves entirely in one person, depend completely on one soul. Where can we turn when we are vexed, when we are wronged? How might we soothe our heartache?

Those men, they say that we live safe and comfortable lives, quietly tending the home while they risk their lives fighting with spears, but let me tell you this: I would rather stand among the shields in battles three times over than have to give birth once. The real pain, my friends, is not in dying, but in having to bring new life into this miserable world.

But oh, pay no attention to me, for our stories are not the same. You have a city, your family home, the advantage of life, and the companionship of friends. What do I have? I am lonely, separated from my city, insulted by my husband, floating adrift with no mother, brother, or relation in which I can seek refuge. Ah, what it must be like to belong!

Medea 214-266

Μήδεια

Κορίνθιαι γυναῖκες, ἐξῆλθον δόμων
μή μοί τι μέμψησθ'· οἶδα γὰρ πολλοὺς βροτῶν (215)

σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας, τοὺς μὲν ὀμμάτων ἄπο,
τοὺς δ' ἐν θυραίοις· οἱ δ' ἀφ' ἡσύχου ποδὸς
δύσκειαν ἐκτήσαντο καὶ ῥαθυμίαν.
δίκη γὰρ οὐκ ἔνεστ' ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς βροτῶν,
ὅστις πρὶν ἀνδρὸς σπλάγχχνον ἐκμαθεῖν σαφῶς (220)
στυγεῖ δεδορκῶς, οὐδὲν ἡδικημένος.

χρὴ δὲ ξένον μὲν κάρτα προσχωρεῖν πόλει·
οὐδ' ἀστὸν ἦνεσ' ὅστις αὐθάδης γεγῶς
πικρὸς πολίταις ἐστὶν ἀμαθίας ὕπο.
ἐμοὶ δ' ἄελπτον πρᾶγμα προσπεσὸν τόδε (225)

ψυχὴν διέφθαρκ'· οἴχομαι δὲ καὶ βίου
χάριν μεθεῖσα κατθανεῖν χρήζω, φίλοι.
ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ἦν μοι πάντα, γιγνώσκω καλῶς,
κάκιστος ἀνδρῶν ἐκβέβηχ' οὐμὸς πόσις.
πάντων δ' ὅσ' ἔστ' ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει (230)
γυναϊκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν·

ᾧς πρῶτα μὲν δεῖ χρημάτων ὑπερβολῆ
πόσιν πρίασθαι, δεσπότην τε σώματος
[λαβεῖν· κακοῦ γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔτ' ἄλγιον κακόν].
κὰν τῷδ' ἀγὼν μέγιστος, ἢ κακὸν λαβεῖν (235)

ἢ χρηστόν· οὐ γὰρ εὐκλεεῖς ἀπαλλαγαι
γυναιξὶν οὐδ' οἷόν τ' ἀνήνασθαι πόσιν.
ἐς καινὰ δ' ἦθη καὶ νόμους ἀφιγμένην
δεῖ μάντιν εἶναι, μὴ μαθοῦσαν οἴκοθεν,
ὅπως ἄριστα χρήσεται ξυνευνέτη. (240)

κὰν μὲν τάδ' ἡμῖν ἐκπονουμέναισιν εὖ
πόσις ζυνοικῆ μὴ βία φέρων ζυγόν,
ζηλωτὸς αἰών: εἰ δὲ μή, θανεῖν χρεών.
ἀνήρ δ', ὅταν τοῖς ἔνδον ἄχθηται ζυνών,
ἔξω μολῶν ἔπαυσε καρδίαν ἄσης

(245)

[ἢ πρὸς φίλον τιν' ἢ πρὸς ἥλικα τραπεῖς]:
ἡμῖν δ' ἀνάγκη πρὸς μίαν ψυχὴν βλέπειν.
λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὡς ἀκίνδυνον βίον
ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους, οἱ δὲ μάρνανται δορί,
κακῶς φρονοῦντες: ὡς τρὶς ἂν παρ' ἀσπίδα
στιῆναι θέλοιμ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ τεκεῖν ἄπαξ.
ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς πρὸς σὲ κάμ' ἦκει λόγος:
σοὶ μὲν πόλις θ' ἦδ' ἐστὶ καὶ πατρὸς δόμοι
βίου τ' ὄνησις καὶ φίλων συνουσία,

(250)

ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὔσ' ὑβρίζομαι
πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελησμένη,
οὐ μητέρ', οὐκ ἀδελφόν, οὐχὶ συγγενῆ
μεθορμίσασθαι τῆσδ' ἔχουσα συμφορᾶς.

(255)

τοσοῦτον οὖν σου τυγχάνειν βουλήσομαι,
ἦν μοι πόρος τις μηχανή τ' ἐξευρεθῆ
πόσιν δίκην τῶνδ' ἀντιτείσασθαι κακῶν
[τὸν δόντα τ' αὐτῷ θυγατέρ' ἢ τ' ἐγήματο],

(260)

σιγᾶν. γυνὴ γὰρ τᾶλλα μὲν φόβου πλέα
κακὴ τ' ἐς ἀλκὴν καὶ σίδηρον εἰσορᾶν:
ὅταν δ' ἐς εὐνήν ἠδικημένη κυρῆ,
οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλη φρὴν μαιφονωτέρα.

(265)